

ON THE COVER

Portrero Hill by Randall Stauss

Portions of the following are based on an interview with the artist on May 2, 2018.

Randall Stauss has been painting in Maui, Hawaii, for the past 6 months, focusing exclusively on watercolors, which he has not been able to do for many years. He and his wife Edith search out experiences that bring them into contact with local people, looking for moments that define the island from the Hawaiian point of view. For example, they attended a meeting where George Ariyoshi, the first governor of Japanese ancestry in the nation, spoke about family, community, hard work, and resolve to find good in others and do one's absolute best. This iconic figure changed his world through his life and his courage. Stauss is touched by Hawaiian history and the successful efforts on the part of those who live there to integrate past and present. He has also been touched by his relationship to San Francisco and his efforts to bring the past into focus with his paintings of old buildings and scenes that capture the ambiance of the city by the bay.

Stauss has been painting in and around San Francisco for much of his adult life. He has three primary connections to this memorable city. His earliest contact with San Francisco was in 1970 when he left his home city of Portland, Oregon, for an apprenticeship in sign painting. Typically artists need work that will support their art until the art can take over. It is not unusual for artists to apply their talent and skills to lettering and signage.

Stauss worked in a small sign shop in Chinatown and reported that he got better every day, working with specialists in all kinds of signs. After days of sign painting, he took night classes at the San Francisco Academy of Art. Stauss found his niche specializing in painting names and numbers on boats. He found work in the marinas around San Francisco; then, in 1980, he moved to Tahoe, where there are many restored, wooden boats. There, he painted the names in gold leaf on the sides and transoms of the "grand old ladies of the lake."

His second connection to San Francisco is his wife Edith, who was born and grew up there. From the sign painting that he did, traveling from one location to another, Stauss felt that he had really learned the nuances of the city. He would paint all day and return to show his work to Edith and her mother, who knew San Francisco well. They would recognize the location and tell him all about it, pointing out

the features in his paintings. Their memories provided him an interesting and deep perspective of the city.

Stauss talked about a third connection to the city—where the American Psychological Association is meeting in the summer of 2018. When Edith determined that she wanted to study to become a nurse, they moved from Tahoe for her to attend nursing school in Santa Rosa, just north of San Francisco. Following her training, she got a job in San Rafael, right across San Francisco Bay from San Francisco, where the couple now owns a home. The artist finds that he sells his San Francisco paintings in Tahoe and his Tahoe paintings in San Francisco.

Stauss prefers to paint the old buildings that look like relics from the past next to the new ones that continuously arise. He has found that he likes to paint construction sites better than the final product because, to him, they are a story in progress. The finished, often huge, buildings create shadows that he feels are not always beneficial to people. San Francisco's first suburb, Portrero Hill, pictured on the cover, is a quiet residential oasis that feels like a beach town even though it is in the heart of the city. Small, well-kept houses, trees, and gardens make this community an appealing place. The fog lifts quickly off the hill, creating many sunny days. The summit of the hill offers vistas that include Twin Peaks, Mount Davidson, and the Golden Gate Bridge. The twisty Lombard Street is well known, but Portrero Hill's Vermont Street is the "real deal" and was featured in two movies. The street in the image on the cover is one of the streets that goes from the summit straight to the Bay.

The original purpose of plein air art was to provide a reference for studio paintings—to get the light and color right—but since studio time was expensive, plein air work became the objective in itself. As studies for other paintings, these can be a bit rough, with thick paint, economical brush strokes, and not a lot of retouching. Known for his plein air painting, Stauss appreciates the views from atop the hills for which the city is famous. The best vantage points are often from the middle of the street—though the plethora of cars in San Francisco can make that a problem. He will set up his easel on the sidewalk and occasionally dash out to the middle of the street to catch a clearer view of the image.

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