



The San Francisco Cliff House

Mary Germain Hountalas, Sharon Silva

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The shifting fortunes of San Francisco's legendary Cliff House, from raucous seaside roadhouse to fanciful Victorian palace to world-renowned urban destination, are celebrated in this comprehensive illustrated history.

The story of San Francisco's Cliff House begins in 1863 with a modest white clapboard building perched on a rocky promontory overlooking the Pacific. Little more than three decades later, following a devastating fire, visionary millionaire Adolph Sutro oversaw construction of an imposing Victorian edifice on the same site. His 1896 "gingerbread palace" drew everyone to its doorstep, from working-class families to the city's social elite to three U.S. presidents. That grand structure withstood the great earthquake of 1906, but burned to the ground a year later. Sutro's oldest daughter, Emma Sutro Merritt, immediately set to work on a new Cliff House, which opened in 1909.

In the century since then, the Cliff House has survived a handful of destructive storms, two major earthquakes, three nearby fires, two closures, several facelifts, the swinging sixties, the not-so-swinging seventies, and the often grindingly slow decisions of government. Despite these and other challenges, today's Cliff House, now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, is enjoying a renaissance following a two-year, multimillion-dollar restoration. This lavishly illustrated volume chronicles the fortunes of the legendary landmark and the people associated with it—a colorful story that parallels both the history and the irrepressible spirit of the city of San Francisco.

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