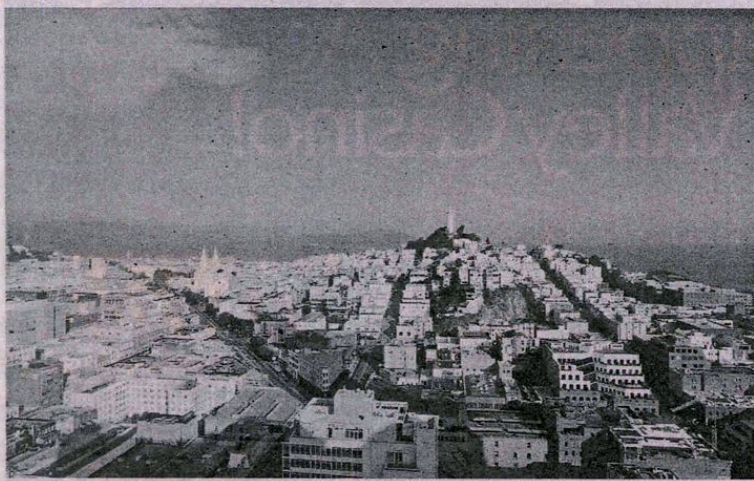


DATEBOOK

96Hours
WEEKEND ENTERTAINMENT SECTION INSIDE

Under covers



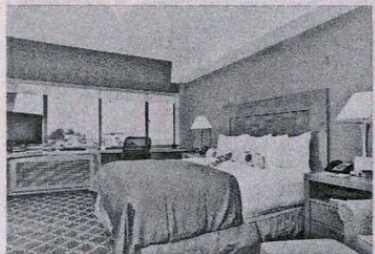
The bay can be seen from as low as the fifth floor but the best vistas of the city, such as Coit Tower and North Beach, above, are from the 10th floor and up. A typical room and bath, below.

CHINATOWN SLEEK

:: Hilton San Francisco Financial District :: The name may lure business travelers, but this 27-story pillar could just as easily have been called the Hilton Chinatown/North Beach to woo weekenders looking for an urban getaway. Perhaps the hotel, celebrating the first anniversary of its March 12 reopening, wanted to erase all ties to its former incarnation as the dowdier Holiday Inn Chinatown. Fortunately, its seven-month, \$40 million renovation paid off in style and substance, marrying a sleek Asian aesthetic with comfy beds and high-tech bells and whistles.

— Jeanne Cooper, 96hours@sfrchronicle.com

750 Kearny St. (at Washington), San Francisco. (415) 433-6600, www.sanfranciscohiltonhotel.com. 549 rooms (all wheelchair accessible, 30 ADA compliant). Doubles \$179 to \$269 (bay-view upgrade, \$40). Valet parking \$42. Online packages with spa treatments, breakfast, shopping discounts, parking or pet amenities available.



Comfort zone

Everything radiates newness, from the plumply made white, duvet-covered bed to the padded dark leather bench, tweedy armchair and ottoman set, and ample silver table and floor lamps. In maple: entry-hall wardrobe (with safe, iron, ironing board, extra pillow and blanket), wooden side tables with drawers and a wall-length desk, cleverly hiding the AC unit. Textured sage wallpaper adds an upscale boudoir touch.

Bath and beyond

The medium-size bath (roomy for one, cramped for two) continues the rich tone, with chocolate brown walls, brushed steel fixtures and a gleaming white tiled shower/tub. Crabtree & Evelyn La Source supply the shampoo, conditioner, lotion and soaps. Moderately thick white towels sit on a rack above the tub. Counter space seems roomy, in part because the hair dryer is hidden on a shelf below.

Geared up

In our "executive level" room (floors 23 and up), we had a 32-inch flat-panel TV; regular rooms have 27-inch Philips sets. Standard: Hilton's signature clock radio (which should be easy to use, but somehow isn't), two phones, free wireless high-speed Internet access (rooms and lobby). No mini fridge, but our Cuisinart coffeemaker (single or double serving) with tall Lavazza mugs looked snazzy on its maple and steel stand with matching ice bucket.

Grounds for approval

The small but stylish lobby, now with a glass-enclosed waiting area to ward off winds, is also home to a coffee bar, the modishly minimalist Tru spa, an open-walled hotel restaurant (called 750, serving California-Mediterranean cuisine) and snazzy lounge. The third-floor Chinese Cultural Center, open weekdays, offers museum-quality exhibits and a gift shop. When it's open, so is the hotel's pedestrian bridge to Portsmouth Square, Chinatown's gathering spot. The basic fitness room on the fifth floor squeezes in about a dozen machines.

In the vicinity

Chinatown? You're facing it, with Portsmouth Square, tiled Chinese roofs, colorful signs and flags visible from the elevator lobbies. Step outside and the Financial District is behind. To your right, North Beach. A few blocks to your left and a quick jaunt (about six blocks), leads to Union Square.

Good to know

The bay can be seen from as low as the fifth floor in "bay view" rooms, but floors 10 and up have the best vistas. Suites have 42-inch flat-panel TVs; regular rooms will upgrade to the 32-inch flat-panels by end of the year. Avoid paying \$42 for valet parking by leaving your car at home and walking from BART's Montgomery station or catching the No. 15 Muni. Dogs of the Bay package includes breakfast, dinner and treats for your pooch, plus a dog bed, water dish, walking map and chew toy.

Highs and lows

Even on the 23rd floor, some street noise drifted in at night, as did schoolyard sounds the next morning. Yet the two kinds of window shades created a cozy cavern when we craved dark, and the city view, when we didn't, was terrific. Given its prime locale, I can't imagine staying here on business without taking time to play.