

# *Leather & Sex*





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# MAD MEN<sup>2</sup>

• by Dr. Jack Fritscher

Before Stonewall, gay culture was a vanishing act, a demimonde life of bars you entered, never to be seen again. In 1970s San Francisco, bars morphed into gay USOs welcoming the thousands of sex refugees seeking sanctuary from the nationwide culture war. These community centers dotted the Folsom Street strip from the Round Up at 6th Street, west under the Central Freeway, and to the back of beyond at The Folsom Prison at 15th Street.

Bars were a place where when you went there, they had to take you in. Pushed by 1973's gay population explosion in San Francisco, the Folsom Prison bar debuted at 1898 Folsom Street as yet another hot leather catwalk for the recreational promiscuity of 1970s mad men. Sucking outlaw ambience from Johnny Cash's jukebox hit "Folsom Prison Blues," the bar was as famous for its fireplace comfort as the after-hours Covered Wagon Club at 12th and Folsom was famous for its glamorously filthy blue swimming pool. Linking its DNA heritage to first SoMa artist Chuck Arnett's murals at the Tool Box (1966), Folsom Prison hired muralist Noel Hernandez to iconize its walls.

Back in the magic window between the invention of penicillin and HIV, everyone had sex everywhere. The sex appeal of a gay bar was anything could happen with a diversity of men, minus any City Hall concerns about SoMa nightspots as dangerous public nuisances. Entering the wicked Folsom Prison,

you saw how the corny Vegas horseshoe cocktail bar worked for 360 degrees of cruising. Men fore-played around the fireplace before dodging behind overwrought iron prison bars to the back-room sex pit, or to the apartment upstairs where a six-pack purchased at the downstairs bar from Folsom's legendary bartender Tony Tavarossi gained you entrance to the all-night orgy. (For journalistic transparency: Tony Tavarossi and I were playmate lovers from 1971 to his death in 1981.)

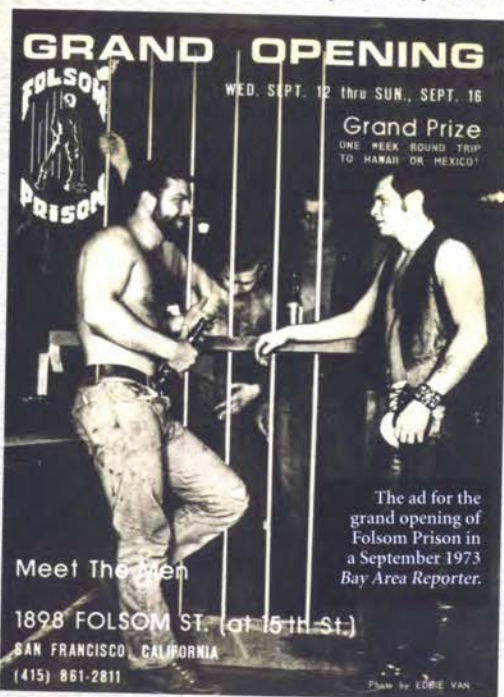
In 1975, I sentenced my friend, SoMa photographer Jim Stewart, to Folsom Prison to enjoy the prison fantasy. New in town, he recalls he was thrilled by the orgiastic sex, pot, and poppers, but went into cardiac arrest when Tony "...announced over the loudspeaker not 'last call,' but something about 'cops.' Cops? Cops! The music stopped! The lights came on! Was this part of the prison theme? I buttoned my fly

and tiptoed toward the front door to escape. I had never been in a bar raid. Where were the cops? Then the loudspeaker announced: 'Gentlemen, we have with us tonight Supervisor Quentin Kopp, who would like your vote.'

In *Drummer 12* (1977), I wrote this swan-song: "The Folsom Prison... has been torn down ...Closing night festivities included the ripping down of the famous prison bars over the big horseshoe-shaped bar, and dismantling the beloved fireplace, brick by brick. A lot of people went home the night of

January 2 with a lot of Folsom Prison souvenirs...."

(Editor's note: the former site of Folsom Prison is a parking lot across the street from Truck, at 1900 Folsom Street.) \*



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The ad for the grand opening of Folsom Prison in a September 1973 Bay Area Reporter.

Photo by EBBE VAN

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