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MAN BEHIND BARS

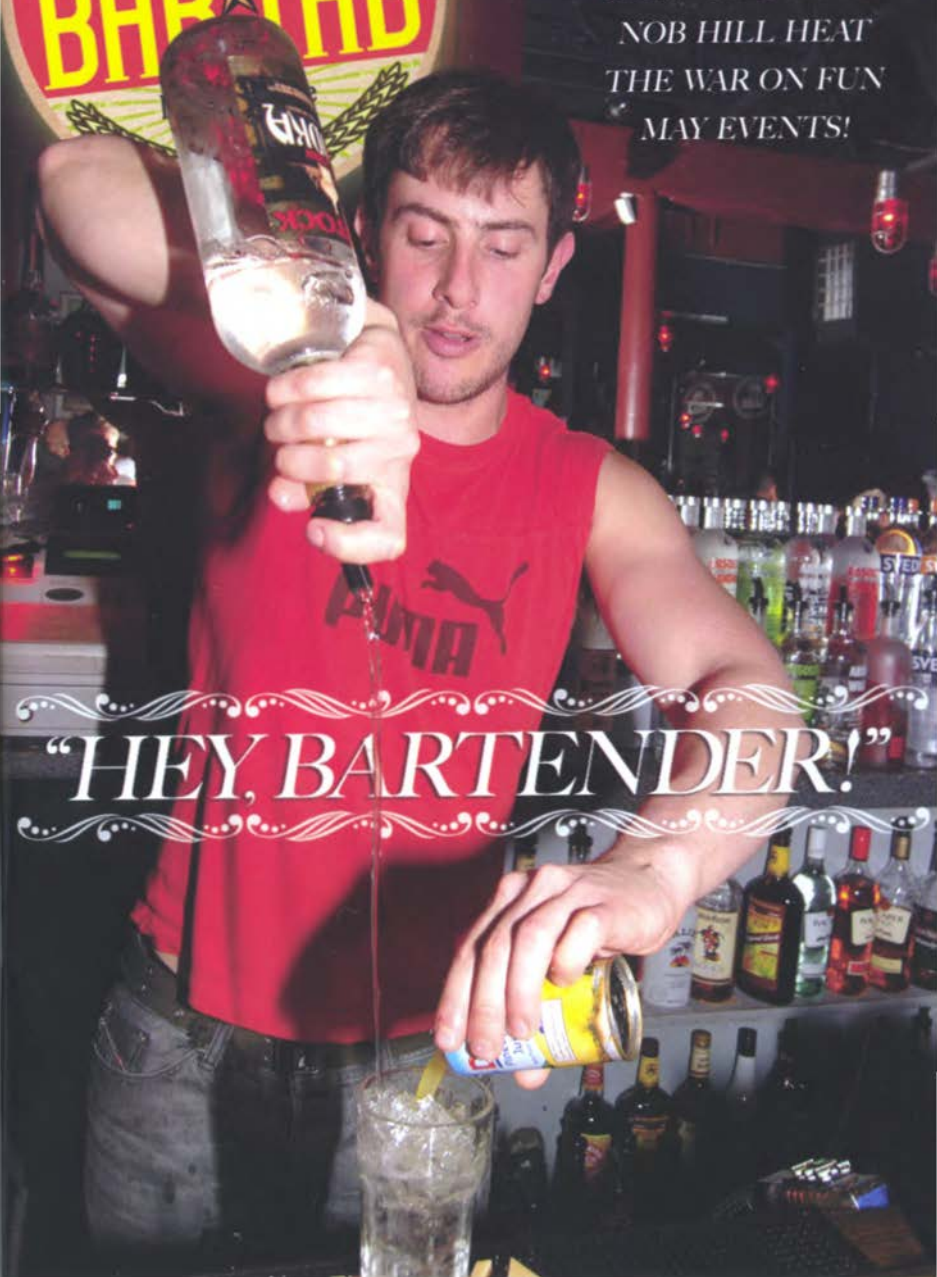
How to Get a Drink
(Without Being a Jerk)

GOIN' TO A GOGO

NOB HILL HEAT

THE WAR ON FUN

MAY EVENTS!



“HEY, BARTENDER!”



"HEY, BARTENDER!"

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On the Cover: Brad Liberti serves it up at 440.

Photo: Steven Underhill. See page 4.



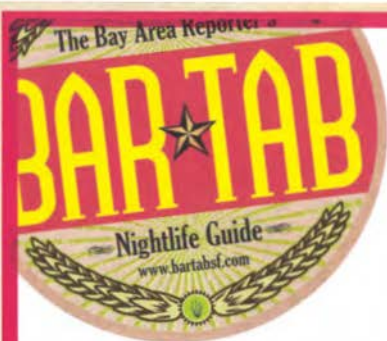
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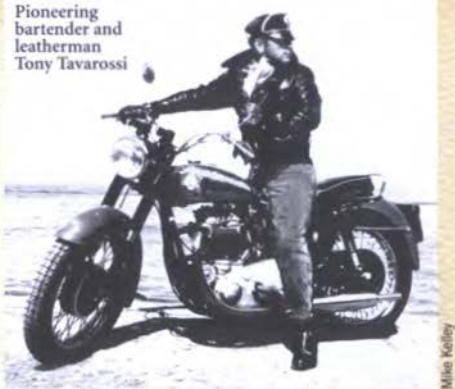
A favorite for both locals and visitors, SF Follies takes a wicked wink at SF's past, present and future. Meet the city's famous and not so famous personalities, politicians, celebs, kooks, and killers as they expose San Francisco's best and worst of times.

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Mike Kelley

STAR BARKEEP

• by Dr. Jack Fritscher

Born to be a bar star in the Mission District (1933), Tony Tavarossi came out at age twelve giving blow jobs under the tables in the curtained booths of the South China Café at 4133 18th Street and Castro. It was war's end: 1945. San Francisco surged with carousing soldiers and sailors. Cruising Embarcadero bars, teenager Tony became a one-man USO, learning a lesson on his knees about entertaining the troops.

Before turning 21, he worked bars in the 1950s Tenderloin absorbing management skills and attracting the attention of a Mafia guido who hired him in 1959 to fly to New York to see if that rapidly masculinizing bar scene might translate to San Francisco. Not "connected" because he was gay, Tony was nevertheless an Italian with "backing." In 1961, age 28, coding his name backwards, he became the "owner" of San Francisco's first dedicated leather bar, "Tony's Why Not?" In 1962, the SFPD closed the Ynot when Tony himself was entrapped in his own bar. That arrest, contributing to the founding of the Tavern Guild (1962), made him, like Jose Sarria, a popular local personality years before the rebellions at Compton's Cafeteria (1966) and Stonewall (1969).

San Francisco was awakening. North of Market Street, the neon Tenderloin was too policed. South of Market, the dark industrial area looked outlaw. So leather migrated from NoMa to SoMa. In 1963, Tony steered sex-tourist Chuck Arnett to the Tool Box where muralist Arnett became the star artist of Folsom even as Tony became a star serving on the creative crews of nearly every bar and bath house South of Market in the 1960s and 1970s. At the hippie-leather flat over the Stud bar near Fe-Be's, Arnett, with commune visitors like Tony, imported

the psychedelic drugs of the Haight-Ashbury to Folsom. Dispensing their party favors in bars, they introduced fisting as a purposed new sport.

For eleven years, we were friends and sex playmates. I adored Tony's allure. At a swarthy 5-5, 130 pounds, uncut, he was a bearded Sicilian Pan without limits. Living in a scrupulously clean apartment with a wild playroom on Central Avenue, he was a bottom specializing in "topping tops to renew them." That cover story "saved face" for his tricks and made him the most popular bartender in town. His tip jars overflowed.

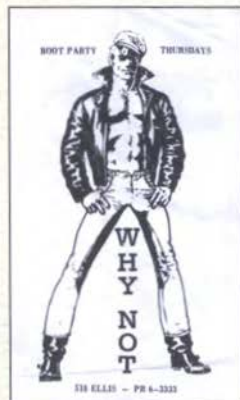
In 1981, the fabled Barracks baths burned down, epically slamming the Titanic 1970s to symbolic close. Tony had worked at the Barracks and its Red Star Saloon. Collapsing with shingles and shigella, he had been admitted to San Francisco General where I visited him in ICU. Unable to speak, he was alert. Because one Barracks manager had crossed him, I tried cheering him with the karma he loved: "The Barracks burned down yesterday. It's the end of an era."

Reaching for pencil and paper, he scrawled, "Good."

In the hall, I asked his doctor, "What's wrong with him?"

She said, "We don't know. We've never seen a patient so distressed."

No one had yet heard of AIDS. Tony Tavarossi died the next day, July 12, 1981. His funeral was enormous.★



Art: Chuck Arnett.
(after Tom of Finland)

Find more about Tony at
www.JackFritscher.com.

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of the award-winning history
Gay San Francisco.