



*Guest Senior Writer LLJ, Chicago IL:* I recently gazed at San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge from high up in two of the city's loftiest restaurants. They're the Top of the Mark at the Mark Hopkins Hotel and the Crown Room at the Fairmont Hotel.

The famed rooms are on the penthouse floors of vintage hotels at the crest of the city's high point, Nob Hill. During World War II and the Korean War, members of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps traditionally spent their last nights ashore in San Francisco at one of those restaurants before sailing to Pacific Ocean battles. Several movies have been made about the two hotels. Top of the Mark starred in "Kiss Them For Me" in 1957, starring Cary Grant as a Navy pilot in World War II. In the next year, James Stewart's "Vertigo" featured scenes at the Fairmont.

One element of the tradition was for the men to buy individual bottles of liquor and attach their names. Bartenders stored the bottles until the veterans returned from the wars to claim them. Some legends are that bottles still remain after many decades from those who never came back.

To this day the iconic restaurants continue to serve some of the best food and nostalgic moments in San Francisco. The Top of the Mark has welcomed diners for more than 75 years. It continues to be a favorite of travelers as well as locals. Elevators whisk patrons quickly to the 19th floor of the InterContinental Mark Hopkins.

Once seated in the Sky Lounge, they have unobstructed views through large picture windows of the Golden Gate Bridge. They can see many other famous San Francisco landmarks, including the entire city below Nob Hill, Golden Gate Park, Fisherman's Wharf and Alcatraz Island.

Because of its sophisticated atmosphere and continental food menus, the Top of the Mark has won many annual awards as best restaurant in the city by Playboy and Forbes magazines, as well as by gourmet critics.

The Fairmont Hotel's top-floor Crown Room adds an extra thrill for patrons with its clear-glass SkyLift elevator that climbs to the restaurant 29 floors up to the Fairmont Tower. It offers riders excellent day and night views of San Francisco.

Once inside the dining area, it's more spectacular through tall windows surrounding the room, with the Golden Gate Bridge sitting like a jewel in San Francisco Bay along with other of the city's familiar sights.

The Crown Room is more of an intimate musical cocktail lounge than full-service restaurant, although it offers an attractive dining menu of salads, sandwiches and appetizers. For a full meal, it's best to change tables and go through the doorway to the hotel's Laurel Court restaurant on the same top floor. The views aren't as sweeping, but the menu is one of the best in San Francisco.

Of course, there are many other great restaurants in the City by the Bay that offer views of the Golden Gate Bridge. However, for pure nostalgia and dining elegance, these two Nob Hill favorites are always worth the experience.