

Jingletown Original Quotes

2889 Ford Street Community

The year was 1982. I had finished graduate school and moved to the Bay Area where my friend Michael Stewart and I started a construction business, Works and Work Artist and Builders. We shared a loft space in the Oakland Cannery building – those circumstances led to us developing the Ford Street building as live/work space for artists.

JMSP was formed with a shoe-string budget and we started converting 2889 Ford Street into artist live/work spaces. My main motive was that I needed a place to work on art, and I thought if I needed a space, other artists also needed space to work in.

The Ford Street building stored precision-made wood patterns and the first task was clearing these forms to make room for construction. We loaded dumpsters for weeks. The wood patterns now obsolete... It seemed criminal to just throw them away.

The development took time because we had barely enough funds to finish one floor containing three studios. After three years the building was completed and I had my dream loft space.

Stacey Mackey

Since the opening of Ford St Studios in 1984, I have witnessed the ebb and flow and growth of this community - and then our most sad departures. I always wanted to live/work there and be part of the gang. Finally in 2002, I lived in #32 for five glorious years (later to become the Gray Loft Gallery). There was nothing like it, nor ever will be. I miss the space but mostly the community of incredible people and artists!!!

Betty Jo Costanzo

"It has been and continues to be an invigorating synthesis of the Rive Gauche in Paris and Tales of the City of the Seventies."

Styrous

I've lived in the Ford Street building since 1983. I shared unit 11 with Amy Sollins and then moved into unit 31 on the third floor – a beautiful space thanks to Ake and Leslie!

I love living here. It is my world.

I live next door to Gray Loft Gallery. It has been inspiring to see how Jan has created such a beautiful and dynamic gallery as well as a meeting place for all of us!

Ruth Boerefyn

When thinking back over those special years living at the Ford Street Studios, there are many, many memories that define our lives together there: Impromptu gatherings on the deck with glasses of wine to watch the sunset and the bridge go up and down; sharing important moments in our lives- marriage's, babies being born, pets passing away; care free dance parties with Aretha Franklin booming, and Scandinavian holiday parties hosted by us resident Swedes and Norwegians, and our Stinky Fish extravaganza; and, of course, all of us working on our dreams to be true artist.

The camaraderie and fondness we have for each other has not diminished over the years. Sadly we have lost some our dearest Ford Street friends, but those wonderful years will always be with me.

Leslie Frierman Grunditz

In the early 1980s, I met Jerry Sisco at a Pro Arts opening. He was the main partner of JMSP who was developing artist studios on Ford Street. Jerry offered me a job to help renovate the building. At that time the building was full of foundry patterns and the neighborhood was all industrial. It would become the first artist complex in the neighborhood.

As we were completing the renovation in 1983, some of the first artists were moving in. Some are still here to this day whom I am still friends with. I moved in five years later into one of the units. Over the years, I have seen artists come and go and the neighborhood has changed greatly. But this building has always remained a special place for artists.

Josh Greenberg

After many years participating in Open Studios at Gray Loft Gallery, I was excited to learn there was an opening in the building and even more delighted to move into a building where so much creativity has been expressed! There is a feeling/energy in the studio and building that seems to reverberate with openness and curiosity. The community here is warm and welcoming.

Dorie Meister

In the mid-1980s, Jingtowntown and the area around the three bridges leading into Alameda from Oakland still felt pretty remote from downtown. The area had a soul that had developed over a long time, the mixture of light industry and residential felt very authentic and natural. 2889 Ford street was one of the first industrial buildings in Jingtowntown that was converted into art studios, and Leslie and I were extremely fortunate to get to rent a studio on the third floor. Well... it wasn't yet a studio, just open, raw warehouse space.

Returning to Oakland after four years in Sweden, we reconnected with good friends who had just secured the main lease of the old warehouse, and together with them we started working on converting a section of the big, open floor into our own studio, where we would live and work. Being involved in the construction phase this early allowed us to add some features which greatly improved the workspace, such as a skylight and wall heater. Watching our studio coming together inside this beautiful, old pattern warehouse gave us a tremendous sense of connectedness to the building. As we met the other artist living in the studios, we quickly realized we had stumbled into a truly unique and wonderful artist enclave, where all the tenants, without exception, became best friends, supporting each other in every possible way. The camaraderie, parties, impromptu art showings and discussions are some of the highlights of my life. Many of these studio cohorts are still our very best friends and we see each other regularly, even though we now live scattered throughout the Bay Area.

The Gray Loft Gallery located on the third floor of the old warehouse is a very important addition to the history of the building, serving as a magnet which draws us all back together more frequently. Walking up the stairs, entering our neighbor's studio now housing the gallery, and seeing our friends surrounded by great art, brings back all those good memories and affirms that our path as artists is still wide open!

Thank you Gray Loft Gallery and all our other Ford Street studio friends!

Åke Grunditz

I moved into 2889 Ford Street after living in Ketchum/Sun Valley Idaho. I was looking for a city artist experience and Wow! Did I get it!

At that time this was the only warehouse that was being transformed into artist spaces in Jingtletown for working artists. Your artwork was reviewed in order to move in to ensure only artists were moving in.

The loft spaces were plumbed and had electricity but each artist sanded the rough dirt encrusted beams and floors, painted the floors, put in the frig and stove and kitchen counters. It was a tremendous amount of work and love to create a livable space. We lived there 2 years without heat. We only put in a heater when our daughter Sierra was due to be born. The area was mainly heavy industrial with a sprinkling of old Victorian houses with Latino families. Sundays the men and boys hung out on the streets polishing their cars and playing a mix a Latin tunes. Walking my little dog Schnoodles at night I saw the most amazing sights like molten metal being poured into huge vats.

The day we moved into the penthouse loft we were helped by the other artists living in the building. Stacy MacKay rigged up a pulley with a big old heavy wood box and we loaded our belongings out of Scott's '55 Chevy into this huge old wooden box and winched it up four floors. Paintings, Pots and pans and antique couches were hefted up to the general amusement of all the neighbors. That afternoon we were invited to a party at Leslie and Ake's loft and met the wonderful group Ford Street artists who would become some of our oldest and dearest friends. Living at the Ford Street building during that time was a glorious and life changing experience.

Lynn McGeever

Jingtletown to Me

I grew up not far from here. My parents had a friend who worked at the tomato cannery, but other than that, Jingtletown was unknown to us, cut off by bridges, water, and the freeway. That's what I love about it today. My studio allows me quiet space to work on all kinds of projects. It's bare bones, just one big room with wood floors and a high ceiling, but it is perfect for me. Having Gray Loft Gallery upstairs is a total luxury. Jan Watten has a long history in the building and has created a community for art and artists with her wonderful gallery shows and lively openings. Jan told me about the vacant studio in the building, which is now my home. A lot of landlords used the Ghost Ship fire as an excuse to close down artist's studios in order to rebuild for high rent tech start-ups. I had lost my live-work space of 24 years, above Merchant's at Jack London Square. It took me two years to find a new space, but my Jingtletown studio is the best I've ever had.

Sue Matthews

I lived at 2889 Fords Street from 1983 to 1988, and it was such a formative time for me. Life was just beginning! My partner and I were both artists, and decided to move to this space we'd heard about in Oakland as the rent seemed more affordable than the appallingly grim studio we had been renting in San Francisco, where the roof leaked so badly that one had to carry an umbrella to bed, Ford Street seemed such a step up, as each space had actual plumbing, with a proper bathroom and kitchen. Admittedly it wasn't easy to share a big open space with another artist with no separate sleeping quarters, as it could be tricky if one person had to stay up late to work and the other was trying to sleep so they could go to work the next day. But we were young and living the dream. I look back on that time as being bursting with creative energy, as yet unburdened by big adult responsibilities. I made friends for life in that building, and am so grateful to have that shared experience with this group of interesting and lively artists, and witness each other develop and grow through many decades.

Suzy Barnard

I moved into studio #32 in 1984 – fresh out of art school with eyes wide open and full of energy and enthusiasm as I settled into that spacious, light filled 1,400 square foot studio which I still have today as the home of Gray Loft Gallery. Built my dream darkroom with the help of Michael

Stewart (my partner at the time and one of the creators/contractors of our building) and embarked on some of the most creative and best years of my life.

Friendships, creativity, inspiration and that shared artistic experience continue to inspire me today.

Jan Watten