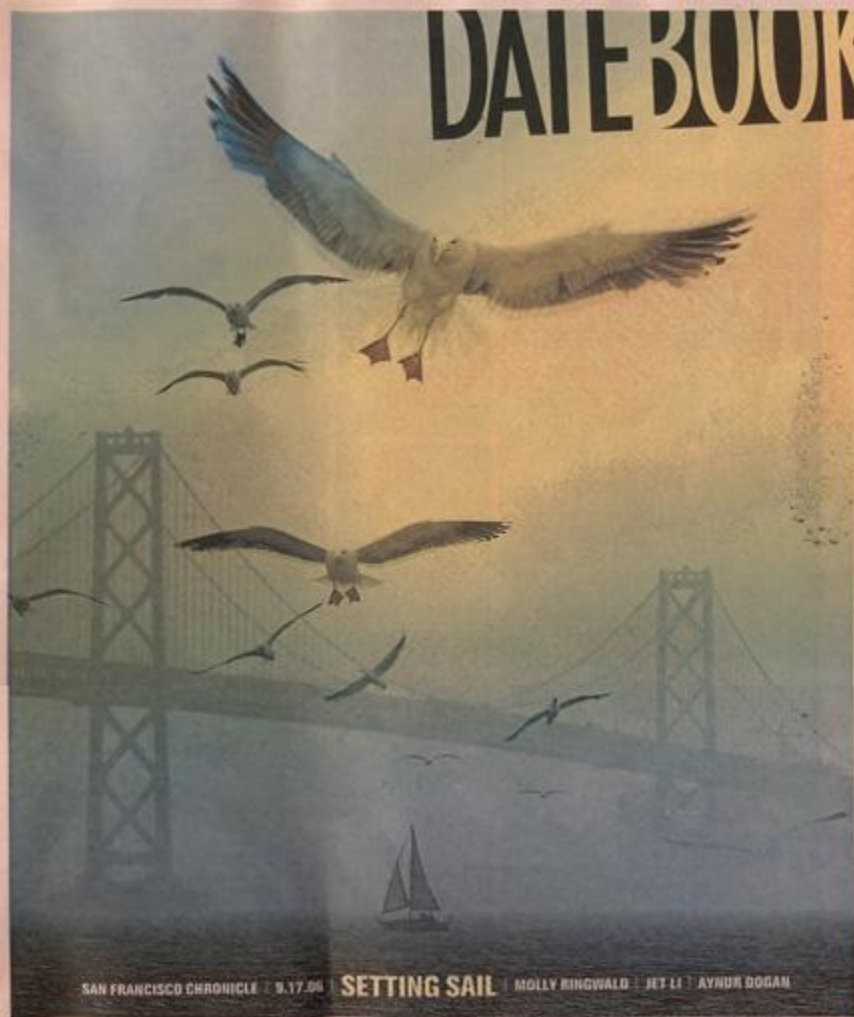


DATEBOOK



SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE | 9.17.06 | **SETTING SAIL** | MOLLY RINGWALD | JET LI | AYNUR DOGAN

AT PLAY ON THE BAY

BY DELFIN VIGIL

We stare at it practically every day.

Usually it's when we're in our cars on a freeway or a bridge — almost always while stuck in traffic. And no, when it comes to appreciating the beautiful bay as our public playground, commuting on a ferry doesn't count.

No kidding: At one point, the San Francisco Bay Area could have become the San Francisco River had a teacher and theatrical producer named John Reber gotten his way. In the 1940s, Reber proposed that the bay be dammed from Richmond to Marin and San Francisco to Oakland with highways and train tracks passing over, according to UC Berkeley archives. The Reber Plan promised to provide 20,000 extra acres of land-fill, leaving just two freshwater lakes for scenery. But while Reber's dream fortunately never materialized, how many of us would have noticed the difference?

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"DO YOU REALIZE THAT ONLY ABOUT 5 PERCENT OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN THE BAY AREA HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN ON THE BAY?"

Author Nat Franklin and member Gary Fair sailing the San Francisco Bay



Nat Franklin (left) and Gary Fair (right) sail the San Francisco Bay during an OCSC Wednesday night sail. Every Wednesday, OCSC sailing offers a few hours of sailing the bay followed by a party.

OCSC SAILING

"For some people it might as well be called the Bay Barrier because that's how they look at it," says Anthony Sandberg, who likes to mention the Bay Barrier to students at his Olympic Class Sailing Club in Berkeley as a reminder of what could have been. "Do you realize that only about five percent of people who live in the Bay Area have actually been on the bay?"

Those numbers are changing thanks to Sandberg, who co-founded the OCSC Sailing Club at the Berkeley Marina nearly 30 years ago. On the weekly Wednesday Night Sails, Sandberg and his OCSC instructors take upwards of 200 people on about 30 boats for sailing lessons on the bay. After a two-hour run or three just to the edge of Angel Island and back the students of all levels are treated to snacks and sometimes a big barbecue. And that's just on Wednesdays.

"Thirty years ago this was the Berkeley dump," says Sandberg, taking in a 30-degree glimpse of what is now a 6-acre sailing school with 10,000 square feet of classrooms, 75 employees and a \$5 million fleet of ships. "Back then it was nothing but shrubs, crated lumber and garbage. It also happened to be the best place in North America to have a sailing school."

Sandberg, 57, grew up in Hawaii and spent his first few decades on the planet in the water where he could be found either racing or delivering boats across the ocean. According to Sandberg, nobody beats Berkeley.

The combination of cold water from the Pacific mixed with heat from the valley creates a mile per hour differential that sucks sails in and out of the Berkeley Marina like a soda pop straw, says Sandberg.

"It's like a freeway of wind from west to east so that at the end of the day you get blown through the Golden Gate into the Bay and right back to OCSC in Berkeley," he says.

While the area is known for getting upwards of 18 to 25 knots of wind (considered a storm in many parts of the world), the hard part isn't teaching students to sail, but convincing them that they are safe.

"Typically, whenever there is a movie with sailing, the captain is a psychopath and a shark is trying to jump aboard," says Sandberg.

Also, the psychopath captain usually has lots of money to spend on sailing. But while OCSC students learn basic boating, cruising and crewmembers skills on quarter-million dollar yachts, a group of eight can split the rental and class cost for about \$25 each. A night of boating can cost more.

The economical and everyday-people approach is how OCSC is changing the face of sailing. Of the 1,000 club members about half are women. Morning classes at OCSC might be filled with a computer retreat from Apple or IBM, while the afternoon is booked for groups of inner city school kids or members of a women's shelter.

The common denominator is that all learn to sail, as evidenced by a group of students who signed up for classes at OCSC five years ago with no sailing experience and will be giving a slideshow of their recent sailing trip around the world.

"Once you slip into Topdeck, a T-shirt and pair of jeans you can't tell the difference from the bartender," says Sandberg. "And we have both." ■

OCSC SAILING: In addition to the Wednesday Night Sails open to all, the OCSC Sailing school in Berkeley offers several sailing classes and rental services for beginners and seasoned skippers. One Sposander Way, Berkeley Marina, Berkeley (510) 843-4200. www.ocsc.com

