

POTLATCH 18

potlatch n. [Chinook Jargon, fr. Nootka *patshatl*, giving.] 1. a ceremonial feast of the Indians of the northwest coast, marked by the host's lavish distribution of gifts. 2. Northwest: a social event of celebration. 3. Contemporary: a gathering devoted to the discussion, creation and appreciation of modern speculative fiction. 4. California: a place where readers and writers meet on common ground.

PROGRESS REPORT 003

WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRS

It's less than two months to go, and the con is coming together.

Potlatch is a small literary-oriented convention with a single track of panels, and it's fundamentally about books and conversations. Instead of a Guest of Honor, Potlatch traditionally has a Book of Honor. This year we have two: *Always Coming Home*, by Ursula K. Le Guin, and *Growing Up Weightless*, by John M. Ford. Don't worry, there won't be a quiz! But both books are worth reading – or rereading, if you haven't picked them up recently. They're very different books in many ways, similar in others, and it's interesting to think about them side by side. Each book is deeply rooted in a specific place – the Moon for *Growing Up Weightless*, Napa Valley for *Always Coming Home*. Each book uses unconventional narrative techniques, and both of them are partly about the ways in which a society is built on story and myths and art. Both have interesting things to say about the tension between belonging to your society and being an

outsider, and both are partly about the ways in which our technologies shape and are shaped by us.

We'll be exploring some of those questions in our panels, sometimes explicitly and sometimes as subtext. But Potlatch is brought to life by you, the convention's members. When you're not at the panels, or browsing the dealer's room, you can participate in Algonquins (informal and sometimes impromptu programming), or continue the conversation in the con suite and in the diverse collection of nearby restaurants (when's the last time you had Karnataka food?).

Potlatch 18 T-shirts, designed by the wonderful Freddie Baer, are now available for ordering. If you haven't ordered your shirt yet, we encourage you to do it soon. We'll have some shirts at the con, but unless you preorder we can't promise that your size will still be available. And if you haven't bought a banquet ticket, now's the time.

We're looking forward to seeing you at the con!

– Matt Austern and Steven Schwartz

ABOUT POTLATCH

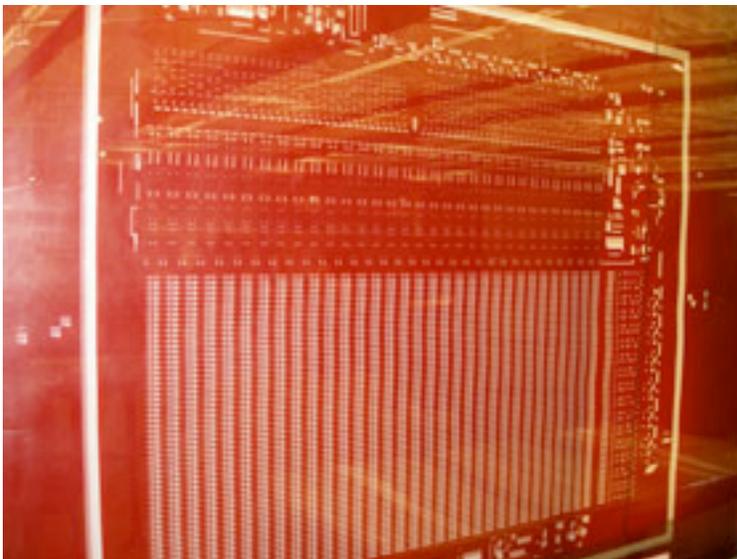
Potlatch is an all-volunteer, non-profit, literary convention for the readers and writers of speculative fiction. At Potlatch, people talk to each other and participate in panel discussions about reading and writing speculative fiction. You'll find conversations at programming events, in Algonquins, in writers workshops, in the consuite, in the halls, and in elevators.

Proceeds benefit Clarion West, an intensive six-week workshop for writers preparing for professional careers in science fiction and fantasy.

For more information, please visit www.potlatch-sf.org.

The deadline for pre-registration and for banquet tickets is February 14.

Join now, make us happy, and save!



FEBRUARY 27 – MARCH 1, 2009 @ THE DOMAIN HOTEL, SUNNYVALE, CALIFORNIA

THOUGHTS ON ALWAYS COMING HOME

Always Coming Home is one of the books everyone assumes I've read. Nope. I hadn't. So, to prepare for Potlatch 18 and come up with some programming ideas, I sat down to read its Books of Honor, *Always Coming Home* and *Growing Up Weightless*.

On reading *Always Coming Home*, my initial reaction was that I had to struggle to suspend my initial reaction, which was something like, "Why not just go read Jerome Rothenberg, or go to some original sources? Isn't this just more cultural appropriation, a ripoff of a few Pacific NW Native American cultures, set vaguely in a post apocalyptic future?" Also, while I like a nonlinear narrative and I like poetry and specifically Le Guin's poetry (and translations) I felt like I was missing the point of the book. Despite that, I read on: because I was curious; because it's the Potlatch book of honor; because it's Ursula Le Guin and therefore likely to be awesome (and capable of being way over my head); last but not least, because so many people I respect, like Cynthia I 960, Alexis/heyiya, and Laura Quilter, have praised it so highly. It was disconcerting to have enormous doubts while reading a book I expected to love. "Do I even like this book?" I kept asking myself. I was not sure, even days later. I have settled now on liking it and wanting to talk about it.

There is a linear narrative, told by a woman named Stone Telling, of herself as a young girl, when she was named North Owl. On page 41 the story is interrupted and there are extensive footnotes. If you want to read the linear narrative, you can follow the "Turn to page 173" and continue on. If you don't skip, there are chunks of poetry, a play, folktales, maps, histories, and all sorts of stuff.

But it's not like reading the appendix of *LOTR*; it's like reading *Technicians of the Sacred* or *American Indian Myths and Legends* or some book like that, that tries to present many different kinds of story, many literary forms of a primarily oral tradition, mixing them up and giving a variety of perspectives. If you have read anthropologists' writings from before 1900, or often, translations of stories into English from many other cultures, oral histories or not, they are re-told in Western European style as folktales or fables. I'm no expert in anthropology, but methods of trying to represent one culture to another have definitely changed. Whether these methods succeed in being less colonialist or imperialist is debatable. But by being "difficult", literature presented in a non-linear way can definitely kick my mind into a new frame of reference as I try to understand a new context.

So, as readers of science fiction, what if we approach stories of future people like we might a culture we aren't a part of, whose context we don't understand, who don't speak or tell stories in our ways of narrating?

The practical advice I give you-the-reader is twofold. Either plow through like I did, trying to keep your mind very open, and let it cook a while before you judge the story. This requires patience. If you don't have that kind of patience, or you can't stand poetry, I totally respect that. I recommend you skip around, read the linear narrative of Stone Telling, and dip into the other bits of stories and histories as you please.

That story of North Owl is a good one, about a girl, her town, her family background, and her desire to experience new things and to prove herself. In the fine tradition of Feminist & Utopian SF, she comes out of a somewhat free (though not perfect) existence and enters a horrible patriarchal dystopia, where she is oppressed, imprisoned, and enslaved. We should list off a whole bunch of those "descent into being controlled by patriarchy" and perhaps think of

them as political descriptions of what happens when a relatively free girl child hits puberty and crashes into a wall. (And, often, returns or recovers or escapes.) If that is your experience surely you know what I'm talking about! So, North Owl visits the horrible Warlike patriarchy who view women as property and have a patrilineal aristocracy. I won't spoil the rest of it.

Anyway, I'm still thinking about *Always Coming Home* and letting it wash over me.

I raised the idea of cultural appropriation and of the Kesh people of the Valley. The book presents a future heavily influenced by western Native American cultures, which did not necessarily "evolve" straight from Native American sources but which may have been adopted by whoever happened to survive the the Fall of Civilization. That is completely unclear. So there is an implied cultural appropriation in the very setting of this future history. It's not rewriting a past where Native Americans remained predominant, more powerful, or in control of the area. And I don't think it posits a survival of specific people or races; more like whoever avoids the fatal mutations. The presentation of a new culture with roots in older ones looks quite interesting, and makes me think about the role of written records, histories, computers, etc. Another thing left quite unclear on purpose is who is telling or receiving the story; it is not "for" the people it is about. None of this is, well I'm not saying it's not problematic. But I don't find it to be the ripoff I halfway feared. It succeeded for me in making the immersive experience of the book very complicated. What does, or would, or could, the future of culture in this place look like? Making the future be in this place, on this world, identifiably in future California, instead of in space on some other planet, with some other "race" of humans or aliens? I still feel uncomfortable and uncertain about what the book is doing, considering how people read anthropological works, or the literature of other cultures; the way white people in the U.S. fetishize Native American cultures, etc. What do you think? Does it succeed, does it offend you? I'd like to talk more about cultural appropriation issues.

I enjoyed the book and continue to enjoy thinking about it especially in the context of utopian & feminist SF. I'd like to talk more about war & utopia, and what are the conflicts in a utopia. Also, what makes the Kesh culture seem utopian at all? I think the key is war and violence, consent and autonomy. In the war scenes, it is made very clear that particular people on both sides of the conflict between the valley people and the others is a personal choice – not always made for the best of reasons but all the warriors decide to become warriors and to go risk death & to kill others. Then... they stop. Fabulous, much better than the total lack of war and killing in some utopian fiction (Herland, I'm looking at YOU.) I liked the discussion of the aftermath of the war in the Valley, very much.

The larger war with the Condors, I'm still thinking about, and it's a bit hard to discuss without spoilers.

I also liked the plays very much, and the ways that the poetry feels imprecise, like struggled-over translations (I'm a translator of poetry, so notice that stuff.)

Here is a link to the *Wikipedia* entry on *Always Coming Home*: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Always_Coming_Home

Thanks to yonmei, Prentiss Riddle, Marguerite Reed, heyiya, Rosa, Coraa, Heather W, therem, Bene, Fuschia, and Frowner for a great discussion and many long, thoughtful comments where this post was first published at <http://blogs.feministsf.net/?p=619> on *FeministSF: The Blog!*

MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT REACTION TO GROWING UP WEIGHTLESS

Growing Up Weightless is good – dense – circular – I mean it seems best to read circularly in order to get the depth of it. Really unusual & haunting. The scene with Avakian the old designer, as good or better as any similar weirding propheticism from Gene Wolfe – evocative of Hathor’s damaged speeches about the sails – The larping teenagers and their raw naive gestalt (reminding me of that story of the children raised in the floating sargasso sea-cities) Aware of each other but not knowing how to talk to each other’s depths other than in game space and not even then. The idea – so floaty & soap bubble – of kids raised in the sort of way i imagined as the utopian future, kids bopping around, running as a team, learning stuff, doing projects, joining a theater company, inventing a microchip – from the outside, an incomprehensible cluster of age-mates, like twin-speech – And their utopian angst at being always watched, always eluding their cleverer parents – What would they do? What would they learn? What is the plot in that sort of micro-utopia even if it’s just the utopian ideal of a sensible education system and children with a decent set of human rights? The failed delicacy of the parents and of their own relationship – all very weightless itself – the composing scenes and the composer sleeping and waking as if full of music or light and noticing a hair from his busy partner’s head on the pillow. I enjoyed the poetry. The light & shadow – and the dragons. The girls of the bunch, the kid’s mom too, significant and with their own agency clear – their own thoughts, dreams, burn with ambitions, on the cusp of decisions, thinking things they hardly dare hope, no one is overdetermined; beautifully. It’s a plot that achieves being poetic. I am extremely unbored. Will re-read while taking notes for the linear thinking bits of us all, because it does need notes and lines and character lists and some explaining. Potlatch ought to be interesting if anyone will get their hands dirty in here.

– Liz Henry



ALWAYS COMING HOME

Some editions of *Always Coming Home* identify it as a novel, but it’s better to think of the book not as a story, but as a still portrait of a civilization with a specific location in time and space. The space is here in Northern California, and Le Guin is as good at portraying the feel of the landscape in words as any writer. The time is the far future, “a long, long time from now.”

Are the Kesh quaint devolved primitives chanting “*Quant Suff!*”? Well, they may seem that way at first, but look carefully: they’ll surprise you. Technology is not just high tech, electronics and rockets that zap and whoosh. To anthropologists, technology is a society’s entire relationship to its environment through tools and knowledge. The Kesh contain multitudes. They have access to something very like the Web: they call it “The City of Mind.” But they also love handcrafted tools, including their handcrafted railroad. They are homelovers, but also travelers. They live in an almost idealized peace with their landscape. But they are also materially poor, suffer from genetic disease, and quarrel with each other and their neighbors.

This is not utopia. It’s a miscellany of life stories, poetry and drama, cultural outlines and calendars, maps, and music. It’s Le Guin’s largest single book and, I think, her masterpiece so far.

– David Bratman



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PROGRAM

The committee is in the final stages of putting together the program. It's not quite ready for publication, but from what I've seen, you won't want to miss any of it.

The program hours and major events have been scheduled. There are generous breaks for lunch and dinner so you can check out the wonderful variety of restaurants in the vicinity.

– Tom Becker

WRITERS' WORKSHOP

The Potlatch Writers' Workshop is open to all speculative fiction writers, regardless of experience. Submit your short fiction and receive critiques from a professional writer as well as your peers. The instructors are L. Timmel Duchamp, Jay Lake, and David D. Levine. Submissions are due by January 31 and the workshop fee is \$15. See <http://www.potlatch-sf.org/workshop.php> for more details.

– Vylar Kaftan

SCHEDULE

Friday

Program 7 to 9 pm

Saturday

Program 8 am to 12 noon

Lunch Break

Program 2 to 4 pm

Dinner Break

Special Event 7 pm

Clarion West Auction 8 to 10 pm

Sunday

Program 9 am to 12 noon

Banquet 12 to 1:30 pm

Program 2 to 3 pm

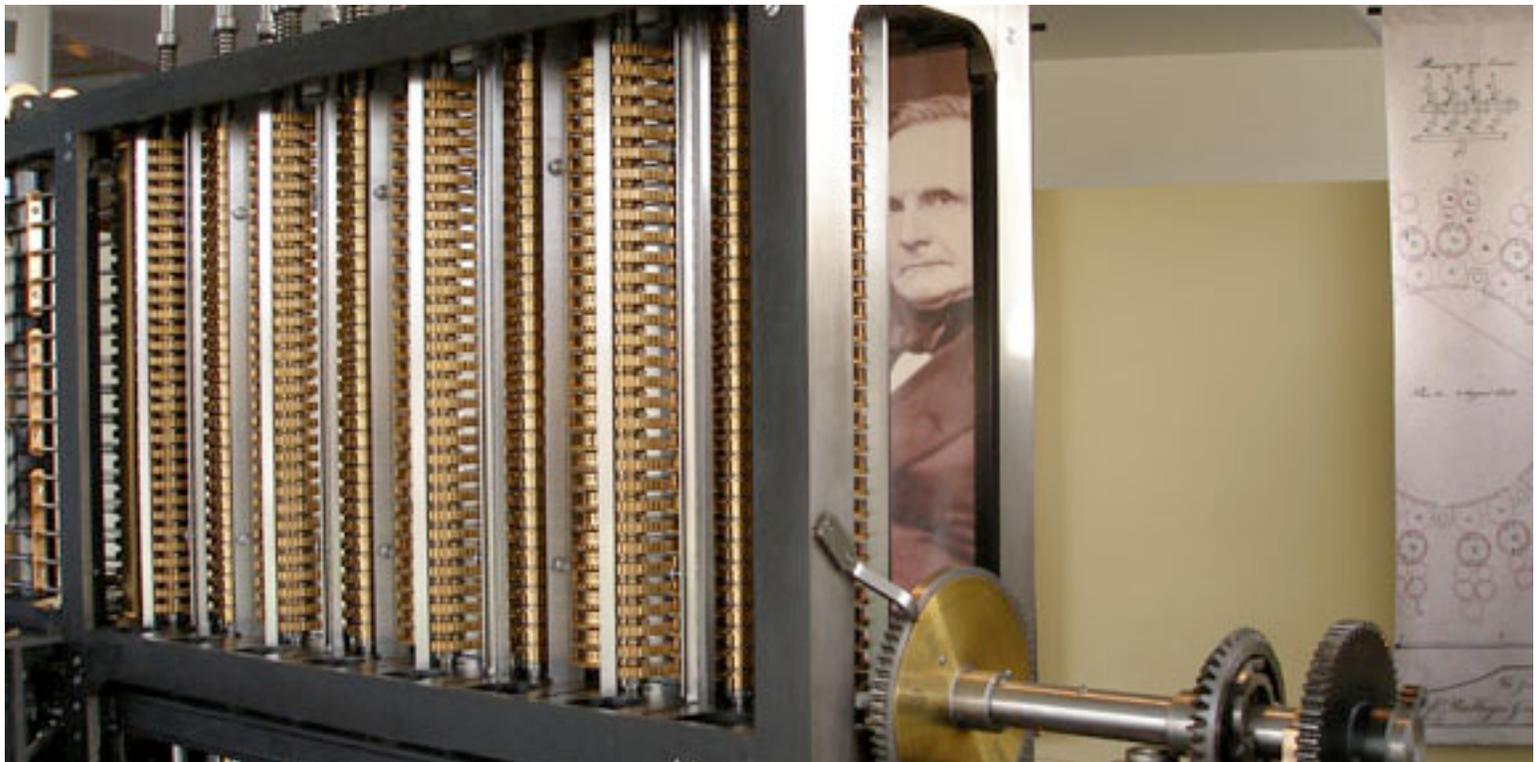
ALGONQUINS

We don't decide all of Potlatch's program in advance of the convention. Maybe you want to continue a conversation begun in a program item. Maybe it's a field trip to a local yarn or gadget shop, or a new insight, we had not thought of, into one of our books of honor. That's why Potlatch has Algonquins. We provide space, and sign up sheets. You bring the ideas and other members will join in.

Writers: if you'd like to give a reading at Potlatch, consider holding an Algonquin. Our hotel, The Domain, has lots of cozy, chair and sofa-filled alcoves that are perfect for having a reading and Q/A with an attentive and appreciative audience.

Most Algonquins take place during breaks in the main program: lunch and early evening on Saturday.

– whump



CLARION WEST

SCHOLARSHIP AUCTION

Potlatch is pleased and proud to host the Clarion West Scholarship Auction, which has been held at every Potlatch for the last 18 years. The auction raises funds for the nonprofit Clarion West Writers Workshop.

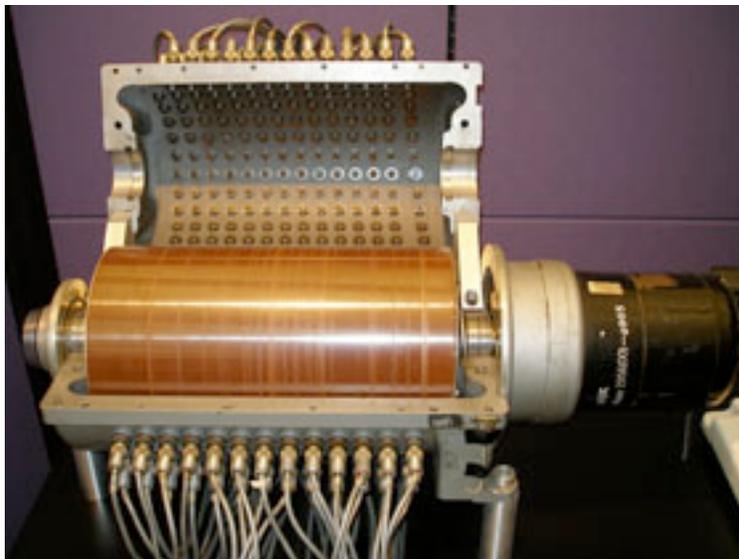
The “quick sale” table will be open during the convention, giving you a chance to pick up your heart’s desire, a late Valentine’s day present, or the best silly thing you ever saw on impulse. Saturday evening will be The Big Show, where anything can happen. Never underestimate the amusement power of an auctioneer who wants to clean out your wallet ...

The auction can’t happen unless you (yes, you!) donate cool stuff, nifty books, or services that you’re willing to describe in public (this can be anything from poker lessons to themed poems on demand). All donations are fully tax-deductible and it’s a Good Cause too. We know you have Cool Stuff, but in case you’re doubtful about that, you can buy your own at the auction instead of donating some. Or you can do both. Clarion West also gratefully accepts monetary donations..

Please email auction coordinator Kerry Ellis, at auction@potlatch-sf.org if you want to donate, have questions, or would like to help with the auction.

Over the years, Potlatch auctions have received and sold: —one of the first personal laser printers —Vonda N. McIntyre beaded sea creatures, and other works of scientific art — Ursula K. Le Guin privately distributed chapbooks — Original art jewelry by Elise Matthesen and Laurie Toby Edison.

What will this year’s great items be? Come and see for yourself!



TIPTREE BAKE SALE

The James Tiptree Jr. Award is given annually to the work of science fiction or fantasy that best explores or expands gender. The award is 18 years old this year (coincidentally the same age as Potlatch!). To learn more about the award (and the award-winning SF/F), please visit www.tiptree.org.

From the beginning, it has been entirely funded by contributions from the science fiction community, and we’ve been able to give at least \$1000 to the winner or winners every year (plus original art work, chocolate, and a hand-made certificate). The original funding idea comes from award co-founder Pat Murphy, who said, “If you can’t change the world with chocolate chip cookies, how can you change the world?”

If you know what you’re going to be bringing, or if you’d like to help, please email bakesale@potlatch-sf.org. If you’d rather be impulsive, just bring your home-made baked goods (and/or your wallet) to the convention to participate.

Looking forward to seeing you at Potlatch 18,

– Debbie Notkin



CALLING ALL

RESPONSIBLE ADULTS

While we love putting on a great consuite for all of you, we’d also like to see the rest of the convention. So this year we’re putting together a schedule of Responsible Adults (RAs) who will watch over the consuite for short shifts. If there is no RA for a particular shift, the consuite will close temporarily until the next shift. We’re planning a low-key consuite this year, so the RAs’ duties will not be strenuous.

Want to help out? Let us know: consuite@potlatch-sf.org. We realize that your slot choice will likely be influenced by the programming schedule, so we’ll contact you when that info is settled.

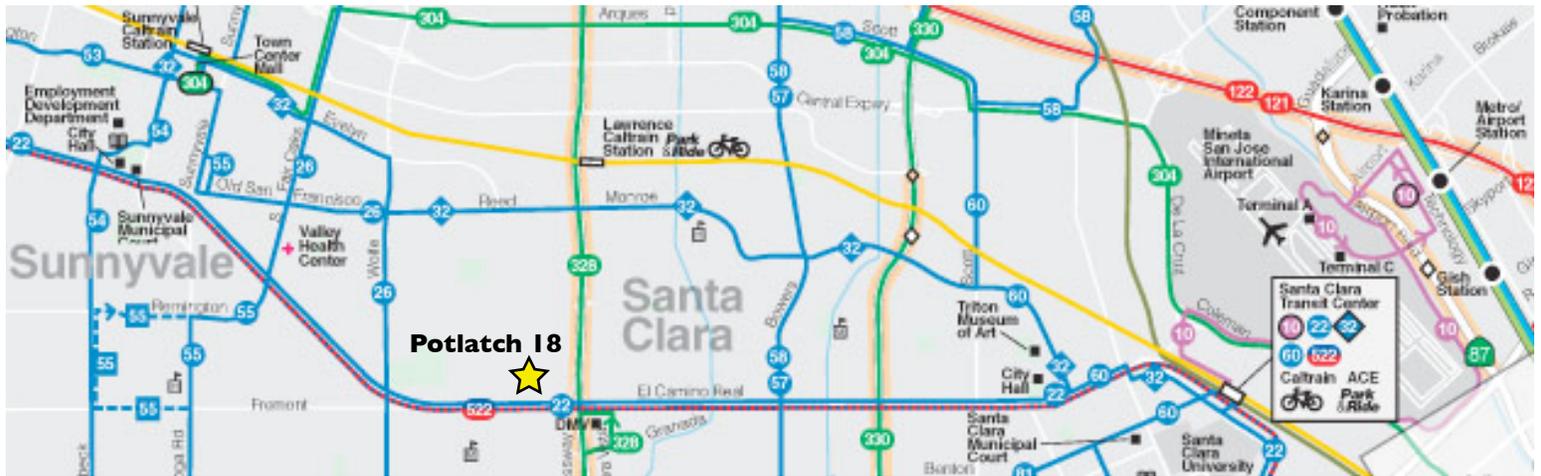
Thanks so much!

Your consuite co-heads,

– Karen Schaffer & Janet Lafler

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GETTING HERE

The address of the Domain Hotel is 1085 E. El Camino Real, Sunnyvale, CA 94087. If you're entering it into an online mapping service or some other pathfinder, be sure to include the "E" for East. The location is between Wolfe Road and Lawrence Expressway close to the city of Santa Clara. If you get an address close to Mary Avenue near the city of Mountain View, that's the wrong half of town!

By Car – from San Francisco

Take US 101 south to the Lawrence Expressway exit in Sunnyvale. (About 40 miles; or 28 miles from SFO.) Turn right (south) on Lawrence for 2 ½ miles, then take the turnoff to El Camino Real. Turn right, and the Domain is just over 2 blocks (¼ mile) ahead on the right.

If facing rush hour traffic from San Francisco, I-280 is a good alternative route. From here it is best to exit at Wolfe Road. Turn left on Wolfe, go 1 ½ miles to Fremont Avenue. Turn right on Fremont which immediately merges into El Camino Real. The Domain is just over ½ mile ahead on the left; you'll need to make a U-turn.

From the East Bay

Take I-880 south and change to CA-237 west in Milpitas. Go about 5 miles to the Lawrence Expressway exit (same as the Caribbean Drive exit). Go south on Lawrence for 4 miles, then take the turnoff to El Camino Real. Turn right, and the Domain is just over 2 blocks (¼ mile) ahead on the right.

From the South

The easiest route is to take I-280 to the Lawrence Expressway exit (about 7 miles west of downtown San Jose). Go north on Lawrence for 2 miles, then take the turnoff to El Camino Real. Turn left, and the Domain is just over 2 blocks (¼ mile) ahead on the right.

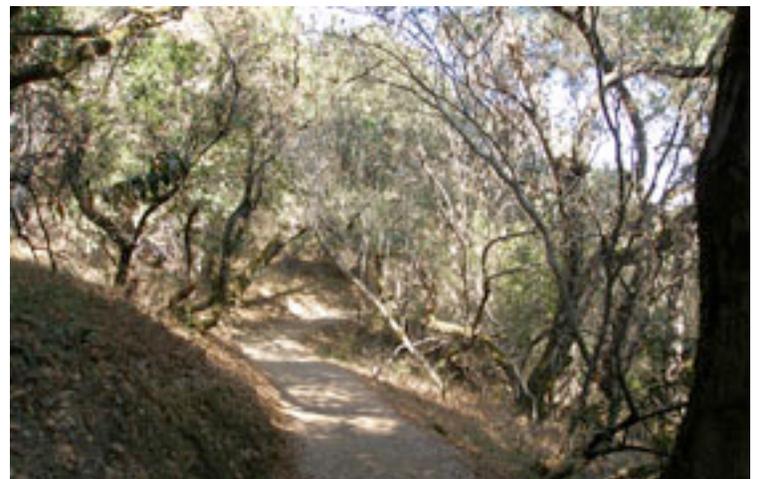
By Public Transit

The website www.511.org is your friend for Bay Area transit info. It correlates information from various public transit sites. Specific information on CalTrain (the commuter train between San Francisco and San Jose) is at www.caltrain.com. Santa Clara County bus information is at www.vta.org. The Domain is served by VTA's 22 line. Bus fare is \$1.75.

Using CalTrain, go to the Santa Clara station. Walk out through the parking lot to El Camino Real and take the 22 bus northbound (stops at the same side of the street). Stay on the bus past Lawrence Expressway and then get off at the second bus stop past the expressway, the one by the muffler store and the Comfort Inn at Sycamore Terrace. This is just past the Domain on the same side of the street.

If you're at Diridon Transit Center, the Amtrak station in downtown San Jose, you can either transfer to CalTrain to Santa Clara, or simply catch the 22 bus northbound, which passes along Santa Clara Street, one block to the left from the station entrance.

When you leave the Domain, walk up El Camino one block to the first light, Henderson Ave., cross the street, and the sound-bound bus stop is right there.



From the Airports

San Jose (SJC) is the closest and most convenient airport, located 8 miles from the Domain. But it is undergoing major construction, so patience will be needed. San Francisco (SFO) and Oakland (OAK) airports are possible alternatives, over 30 miles away by road. SFO and OAK are also accessible by public transit, though the trip to Sunnyvale is very time-consuming this way.

The Domain does not run an airport shuttle bus.

San Jose (SJC)

By car: ask your rental car agent for directions. The simplest route for those not familiar with the area is to head for US-101 northbound. Drive about 5 miles on 101 to the Lawrence Expressway exit. Turn left (south) on Lawrence for 2 ½ miles, then take the turnoff to El Camino Real. Turn right, and the Domain is just over 2 blocks (¼ mile) ahead on the right.

By taxi: Fare should be about \$30, regardless of number of passengers.

By shuttle: Airport pickups must be reserved in advance. A list of shuttles is at www.sjc.org/travelers/d2d.php. Typical fares to Sunnyvale are \$20-\$25 for the first person, \$6-\$9 each additional. Returns may also be made by reservation.

By bus: Take VTA bus 10, a free shuttle, to the Santa Clara Transit Center. The bus will let you off immediately in front of the Santa Clara CalTrain station. Walk out through the parking lot to El Camino Real and take the VTA 22 bus (fare \$1.75, see “By Public Transit” above). This will take less than an hour most times of the day.

San Francisco (SFO)

By car: See “By car, From San Francisco” above.

By taxi: Fare is approximately \$120.

By shuttle: Walkup service at the airport is available.

List of shuttles is at www.flysfo.com/web/page/tofrom/transp-serv/dtd/. Typical fares to Sunnyvale are \$25-\$35 for the first person, \$6-\$9 each additional. Returns may be made by reservation.

By public transit: Take the free AirTrain to the airport’s BART (rapid transit) station. Transfer to BART to the Millbrae station (fare \$1.50; requires changing trains at San Bruno). Transfer to the CalTrain commuter train to the Santa Clara station (fare \$6.00). Transfer to the VTA 22 bus (see “By public transit” above). This will take about two hours with decent connections.

Oakland (OAK)

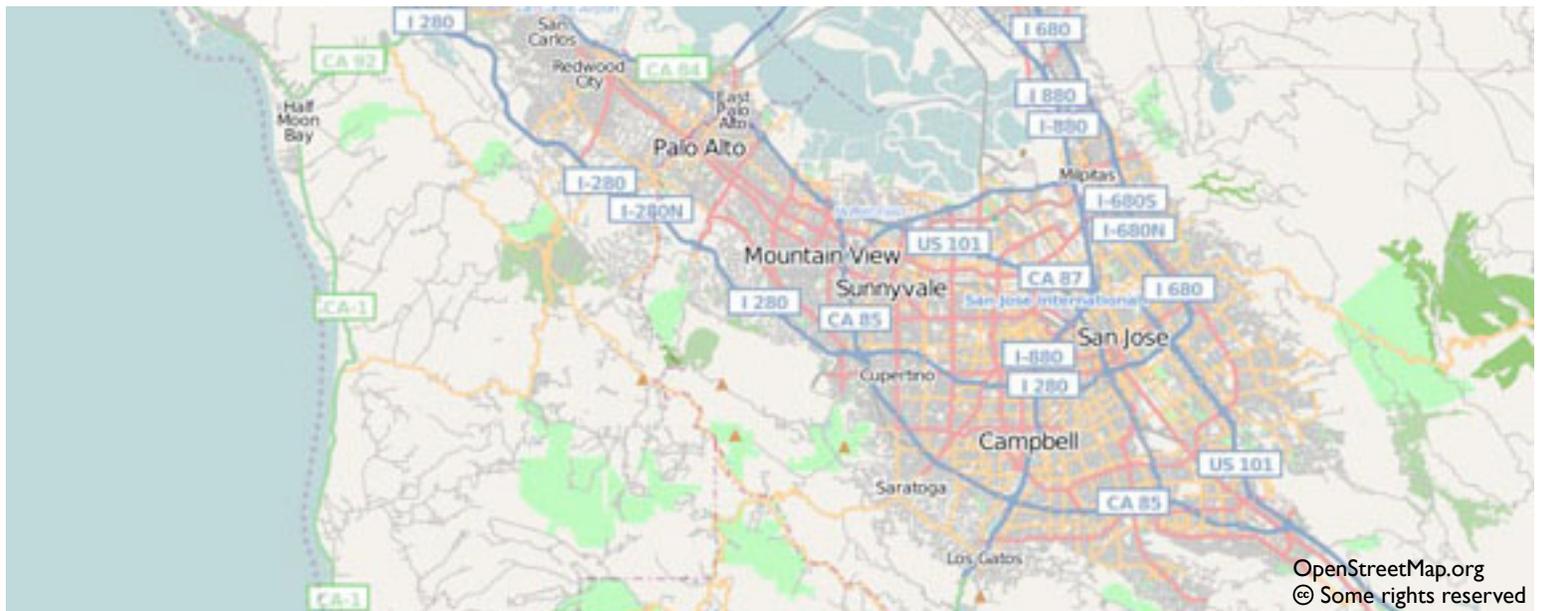
By car: See “By car, From the East Bay” above.

By taxi: I don’t have figures for this, but it would be well over \$100.

By shuttle: Reservations are recommended. List of shuttles is at www.flyoakland.com/shuttles.shtml. Take one that serves the Santa Clara area. Typically only exclusive van service is available to here from Oakland, which will cost about \$130 regardless of number of passengers. Returns may be made by reservation.

By public transit: Take the AirBART shuttle bus to the BART (rapid transit) station (fare \$3). Transfer to BART to the Millbrae station (requires changing trains daytime weekdays; fare \$4.65). Transfer to the CalTrain commuter train to the Santa Clara station (fare \$6.00). Transfer to the VTA 22 bus (see “By public transit” above). This will take about three hours with decent connections.

– David Bratman



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HOTEL

The Domain Hotel is located at 1085 E. El Camino Real, Sunnyvale, California. This is between Wolfe Road and Lawrence Expressway on the Santa Clara side of the city.

To reserve a room: Please visit the Potlatch website at www.potlatch-sf.org. The Hotel page has a link for on-line reservations. Or call 408-247-0800 (mention the Potlatch attendee code: 0902POTLAT). **Our room block is released on February 13. Please reserve by then to get a room at the convention rate.**

Rates: \$109/night for a regular guest room with either one king bed or two queen beds; \$139/night for an executive suite, including king bed, sofa bed, and Jacuzzi. Handicap-accessible rooms are available on inquiry to the hotel. The rooms have lots of drawers and desk working space, refrigerators, and large LCD TVs that can be used as computer monitors. (Free wired and wireless internet, of course.) The hotel has free parking, a heated outdoor pool, and a fitness studio.

The rates include a hot buffet breakfast for one or two people, with scrambled eggs, bacon, potato, oatmeal, pastries and cereal, plus (this is Silicon Valley after all) rice, miso soup, and Japanese condiments. For three or four persons, \$10 extra per day will be charged, except that there is no additional charge for children under 10 years old.

The Potlatch rates are good for stays arriving as early as Monday, Feb. 23, and departing as late as Thursday, March 5. This is a real bargain for a business-oriented Silicon Valley hotel, so come and pay a long visit and see some of our sights!

– David Bratman

POTLATCH BANQUET

The Potlatch banquet will be Sunday's lunch. (For hotel guests, complimentary breakfast included in the room will be served earlier.) The meal will be served as a hot buffet, and the menu is:

*Atlantic salmon with whole grain mustard creme fraiche
Fusilli pasta salad nicoise of olives, roasted red pepper and green beans
Tabbouleh with parsley, tomato and cucumber
Chicken breast stuffed with apple and fennel
Marinated grilled vegetables
Fresh fruit sorbet
Iced tea, hot tea, and coffee*

The meal will be \$30 per person. **Banquet tickets must be ordered by February 14. They will not be available at the door.**

– David Bratman

MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION

You can purchase memberships, banquet tickets, t-shirts, etc., by check or on-line. By check, please send the registration form with your check to:

Potlatch 18
c/o Lyn Paleo
PO Box 3400
Berkeley, CA 94703

Please make checks payable to "Potlatch 18".
To register on-line, please visit www.potlatch-sf.org.

– Lyn Paleo



Potlatch 18 Membership Registration Form

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Badge Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

E-mail _____

T-Shirt M L XL 2XL 3XL 4XL @ \$16

Banquet _____ @ \$30

Writers' Workshop _____ @ \$15

Please check if you are interested in:

- volunteering
 helping out
 working on the convention

Membership:

- Regular @ \$55 (through Feb 14)
 Supporting @ \$20
 Youth (ages 7–17) @ \$25
 Child (6 and under) @ Free

Amount enclosed \$ _____