

Time & The River -- Confessions of a Macroneurotic - by Carol Pearlman

Perspectives from a new Vallejo resident-to-be

Confessions of a Macroneurotic

Forget safety. Live where you fear to live. Destroy your reputation. Be notorious -- Rumi

By Carol Pearlman
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TIME & THE RIVER

I've never lived on a river. I know that swift narrow strip of water that separates me from the island I see every day when I move into my condo, is not a river, it's a strait, but the word river evokes magic for me, and it's so much more poetic. I'll write a poem for that river one day.

The island that sits in the middle of this straight looks like a set for a science-fiction ghost-town horror-movie, with abandoned buildings and giant cranes that jut into the sky in front of the sunset, frozen in time, unable to budge, erect yet bent like praying mantises waiting for something. Will they attack us?

If we were more enterprising, we could call it a sculpture garden dedicated to the time in our nation's history when Mare Island thrived as an important maritime station. We'd sell tickets at the bridge & conduct pricey guided tours like universal studios, hawk hot-dogs & little souvenir crane key-chains, like the Eiffel Tower.

While walking along the river one fine sunny day I came across a white-bearded, turbaned fellow feeding the birds. It was a stirring scene: great flocks of hungry white seabirds and purple/green pigeons, swooping down and up, again & again, over the river and down on the grass. And in the center of the maelstrom, his kind, smiling dark-skinned face beaming with joy. He didn't speak English but managed to tell me he fed them every day, I think there's a homeless woman who does the same each morning.

There's a lot to learn from a river. I wonder if it has tides, which fish live in it, where it flows, what grows beside it. I want to study its history & geography, gather rocks from its banks. Oh, no, I'd better not do that. It's time for a visit to the Maritime Museum.

But, I digress. Let me get back to business.

I HAVE A TEAM

After the first nightmare days of errors, I managed to pull the right people together and the work will get done. I'm the captain of my ship, and I run a tight one, in charge and on top of every detail. But I couldn't do any of it without my first in command, 'L,' who showed me what could be done with a homely little space on the river, and did the necessary planning to make it happen. From the outset, he recognized its potential and told me what needed to be done. He started with the floor, whitewashed distressed boards, like a beach house, and all the rest followed from that.

'L' is a miracle-man to me; a trained designer/decorator/transformer-of-spaces par excellence. His ideas are brilliant; I love his taste; he's a gentleman and an inspiration. He's not only a master at what he does, with more than a half century of experience, he's patient and caring, driving me to every junk, consignment, & antique shop in Vallejo, Benecia, Berkley, Oakland, Napa, and Calistoga without a word of complaint. He enjoys it.

Next is 'R,' superman, hero, contractor who understands what I want and knows how to give it to me. Whatever the challenge, he doesn't give up. There's no blah-blah-blah with R; if there's a question of what's behind a wall, he just grabs his hammer and BAM! takes a look. And, he's a tough taskmaster with his workers, who don't mess around. He tells me he's been in the business for nearly 40 years, and knows all about it. This is another man who enjoys his work and does it seven days a week. His positive energy & attitude have turned what could have been a nightmare into a great experience for me — even though I'm paying him through the nose.

Then I've got 'B,' an electrician who talks a lot but seems to know what he's doing. He told me he prefers creating sound & entertainment systems to pushing wires through walls, but he's methodical & gets the job done.

There's a man who makes stone fireplaces creating my hearth right now, and a floor man who looks 18 years old but assures me he's 29, who beat out all the competition & will lay my laminate.

I'm pleased to report, like the vegetables on my table, my team is 100% local, Vallejo fellows one and all.

Having said all this, I need to add, and I know I've already said it, but it's worth repeating, again and again, home-ownership is for masochists. I don't recommend it unless you've got money to burn. I'm hemorrhaging the green stuff like it's water. If you want the dream team, you've got to pay. And then there are all the appliances…

At least I managed to hold on to enough to take myself to a mud bath & massage in Calistoga one afternoon, which also costs an arm and a leg, but a girl needs something soothing after all that pounding, smashing, ripping, scraping and plaster dust, as well as the planning, deciding, and overseeing of the thousand and one details. I confess, however, while floating in a tub full of warm mineral water, cold cucumbers on my eyelids, and a cool hibiscus drink in my hand, I couldn't stop thinking about the bathroom vanity, and the marble for the kitchen, and the pink color I'll paint the cabinets.

I need someone to make sliding door shoji screens for my closet. Please let me know if you know that someone.

On the subject of food for the soul, on my way to Jeff's Consignment Shop on Springs Road I discovered the Hummingbird Bakery where I sampled the best "apple pie muffin" I ever ate. I want to go back for their pecan pie, and chocolate cupcakes. And, the side dishes at the Good Day Café make a great light lunch. And, the staff at the Front Room Restaurant is very kind about letting patrons share plates, and patient in dealing with grandchildren spilling drinks on the floor & a 2 year old tearing off her clothes & running around like Samurai.

When will my condo be ready, you ask? I have no idea. I'm returning to Los Angeles this week, but "L," my stalwart manager, will take over while I'm away. My new (heaven sent) neighbor has asked me to cat-sit while she's away in the middle of May, and I'll be back. The show must go on!