

A New Exploratorium Collection— In an Exciting New Location

The *Outdoor Exploratorium* Opens in March 2009 at San Francisco's Fort Mason

by Hugh McDonald

In the spring of 2009, a new Exploratorium exhibit collection opens to the public—but not at the museum's Palace of Fine Arts home. Instead, these exhibits will be installed at Fort Mason, a diverse landscape of historic piers, wooded hillsides, green meadows, and rocky shorelines just east of San Francisco's Crissy Field and Marina Green.

Funded by the National Science Foundation and created in partnership with Fort Mason Center and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Outdoor Exploratorium at Fort Mason is an innovative series of experiences designed to promote investigation of the natural and built environments of San Francisco Bay. The project takes the museum's goal of developing interactive exhibits and applies it to an environment radically different from the Palace floor: the world outside.

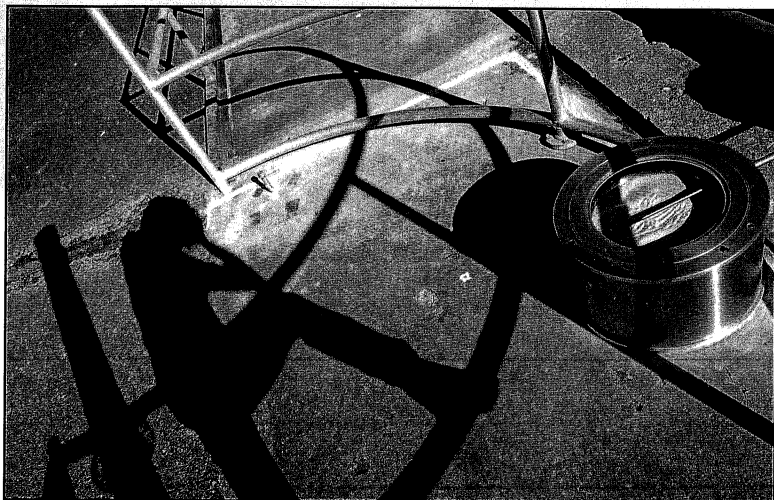
One of the Exploratorium's guiding philosophies holds that observing the world around us is the first step on the path to understanding it. Founder Frank Oppenheimer strongly felt that, through observation and experiment, people could indeed make sense of natural phenomena—and he created the museum to devise experiences offering creative ways to do so.

The Outdoor exhibits at Fort Mason continue this tradition by giving users provocative ways of exploring a wide range of subtle yet fascinating phenomena. Much like the classic exhibits inside the museum, these new exhibits help visitors focus their senses and minds on slices of the world around them.

One key difference is that many of these experiences are actually powered by the natural phenomena under investigation. On the museum floor, for example, exhibits about light might be built around light bulbs, and wind exhibits might include fans. Outdoors, of course, sunlight and wind exist on their own, and these exhibits are based on the idea of isolating, harnessing, and highlighting those natural phenomena.

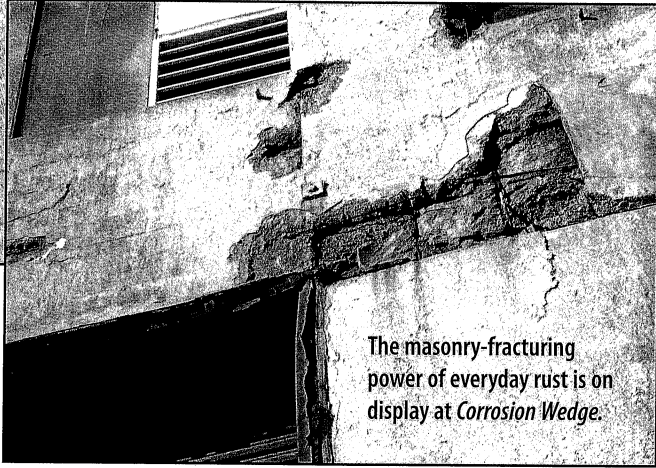
But like the most inspiring indoor experiences, these Outdoor exhibits give users the opportunity to develop noticing skills, explore nature's complexity, and achieve a deeper understanding of the world around them. Perhaps nobody summed up the project's goals better than an anonymous visitor in conversation with Exploratorium Senior Scientist Thomas Humphrey: "Before I came to the Exploratorium, my walk to work took fifteen minutes. Now it takes more than an hour—because I notice everything." **e**

Don't miss our March Members' opening! Look for details in our March/April Calendar.



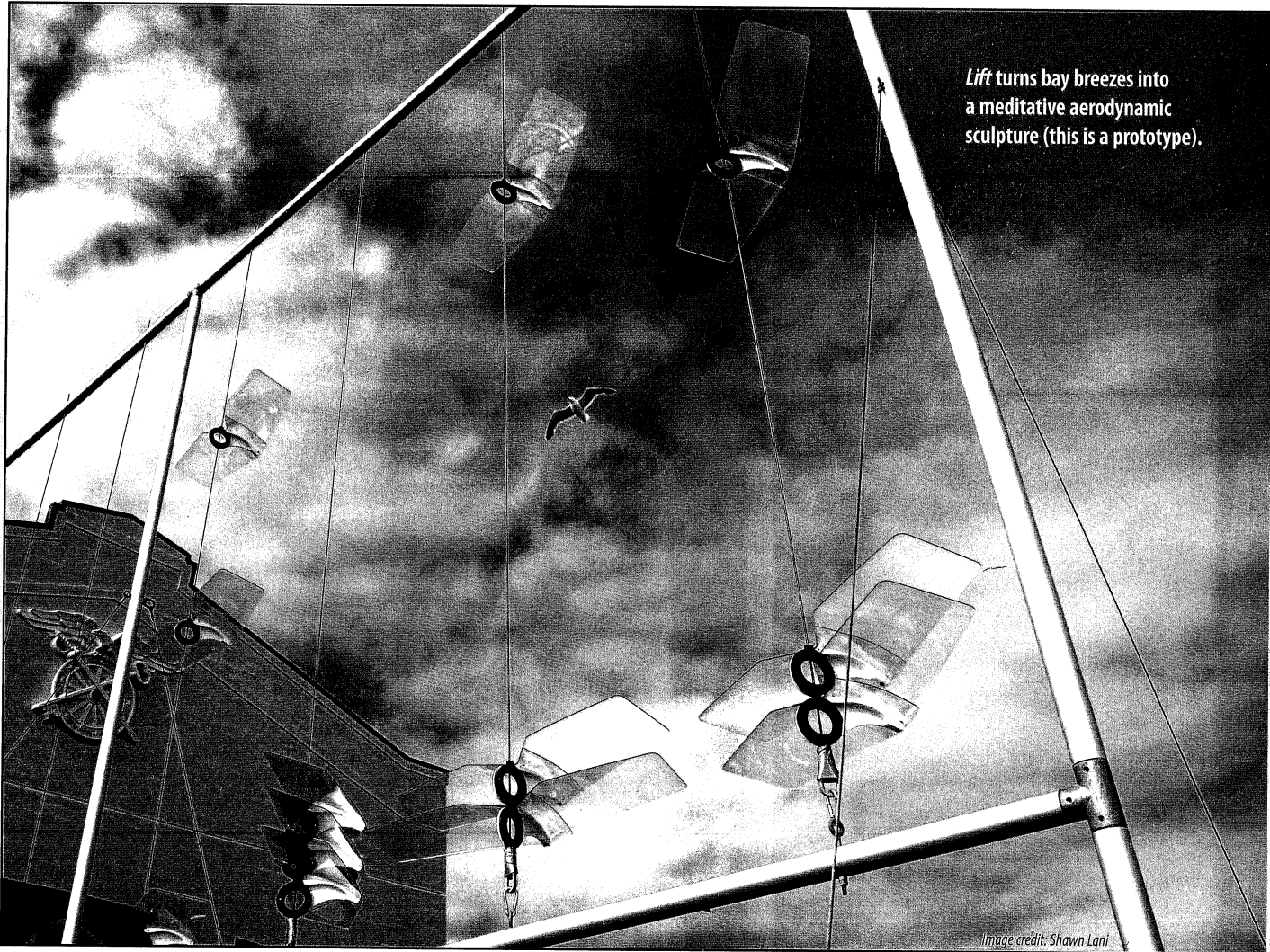
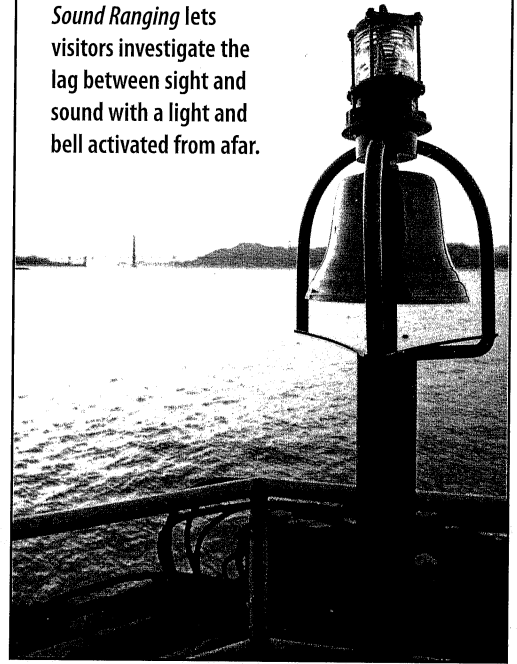
Fort Mason pier pilings oscillate in response to waves and currents, creating intricate patterns at the *Wave Tracing* exhibit.

o u t d o o r e x



The masonry-fracturing power of everyday rust is on display at *Corrosion Wedge*.

Sound Ranging lets visitors investigate the lag between sight and sound with a light and bell activated from afar.



Lift turns bay breezes into a meditative aerodynamic sculpture (this is a prototype).

Image credit: Shawn Lani

p l o r a t o r i u m