

# The Reactor

Paul Azevedo



## Atlantic City of the West

2/4/87  
"Just a question or two: If you can have a home of your own — at a price you can pay, at a distance you can afford to travel, where the climate is the best, the soil the richest, the view the most inspiring — will you consider the proposition worth looking into?"

We think you will. On the assumption, we would say, that just 18 miles from the heart of San Francisco — only 35 minutes ride — with rapid transit by the Ocean Shore Railway where the climate is unsurpassed, with no fog nor unpleasant gales, where there is a magnificent beach, with warm water and excellent bathing, with an unobstructed view from all lots, is San Pedro Terrace by-the-Sea."

If that bit of salesmanship in print sounds a bit too good to be true, think of it as proof that while salesmen never lie, they have been known to "exaggerate." If you know Pedro Point, you can probably find at least one or two slight errors in that rhapsodic description.

The headline in the Chronicle for Feb. 21, 1908 was "Coming Atlantic City of the West" followed by "Suburban Charms Reach Climax at San Pedro Terrace by-the-Sea. No More Desirable Homesites Are to Be Found in All California."

If that pitch hasn't already sold you, the story goes on with the price (\$250) and the cheap installments (\$5 a month) with no interest to be paid, and no taxes. Many free improvements, including boulevards, a casino, an esplanade, bathhouses, and glass bottom boats "are contemplated." Contemplated does not mean installed, of course. Pie in the sky has nothing on George A. Hensley and R. Masson Smith, the two dreamers who had subdivided San Pedro Terrace by-the-Sea and who advertised the water as being 10 degrees warmer than any other "northern waters."

They were so eager to get prospective buyers to this paradise that they refunded the cost of the Ocean Shore Railway ticket and served a bouillabaisse luncheon to everyone who showed up and took the tour. The news story described the Hensley-Smith Company as a firm whose judgment was "sound and reliable at all times."

"Soon the Ocean Shore Railway will have a great terminal station at Twelfth and Market Streets in San Francisco and from there its trains, on elevated tracks, will leave at speeds approximating fifty miles an hour. The ride to San Pedro Terrace by-the-Sea is probably the most picturesque suburban ride in America."

San Pedro Terrace was only one of the many subdivisions in what is now Pacifica sold to enthusiastic buyers by fast talking salesmen those eight decades ago. You can discount their puffery, their exaggerations and their outright lies about the climate, the water temperature, and the amenities they "contemplated" so glowingly, yet the properties they sold so long ago have turned out to be better investments than many others being sold at the time. The railroad is long gone. The lands were subdivided into minuscule lots that drive our city planners up the wall. Yet San Pedro Terrace is still a place where people move to enjoy the country living 30 minutes from San Francisco, just as they were promised those many long years ago.