

metroactive | ARTS



Greg Arundel

House of Freedom

FUZZY MEMORIES A man wears a Sons of Champlin T-shirt during an outdoor concert at the Chateau Liberté.

NUMU Los Gatos looks back at the Chateau Liberté in latest exhibit

BY NICK VERONIN

OLD JACK DANIEL'S bottles, various rusty motorcycle parts, an abandoned Volkswagen minibus and what appears to be a tiny glass jar full of pills. In and of themselves, these dusty artifacts don't amount to much.

However, when illuminated in context, they are imbued with a sense of history and intrigue. Upon learning that all of these items were recovered

from the Santa Cruz Mountains property known as the Chateau Liberté, myriad questions arise. For example, did any of those bike parts come off of Sonny Barger's chopper? Did that minibus belong to a Merry Prankster? And those pills—do they contain bathtub speed or are they perhaps tiny mints dosed with LSD?

All of this miscellany comprises one of the New Museum Los Gatos' newest shows, "Chateau Liberté: House of Freedom." Opening this Friday, the exhibit delves into the history of a centuries-old property, which has reinvented itself many times over.

Starting out as a stagecoach stop off

Old Santa Cruz Highway, the Chateau Liberté has also served as a mountain resort where San Jose and Los Gatos businessmen would retreat with their "nieces"; an early example of French farm-to-table cuisine; and more recently, a nexus of the South Bay's counterculture scene.

Purchased in the mid-'60s by a woman named Pearl Regis, the Chateau Liberté was a family-run music venue and bar that threw concerts showcasing local performers. As the '60s blurred into the '70s, the Chateau built a name for itself as an out-of-the-way destinations for freaks, outcasts, artists and weirdos of all stripes. What's more, as time wore on, the Regises stepped up their bookings—bringing in the likes of The Doobie Brothers, Blue Cheer, Hot Tuna, Kingfish and Jerry Garcia.

There's even a rumor floating around that Janis Joplin wanted to buy the place. Who knows?

What we do know is that the cover of the first Doobie Brothers record was photographed on the Chateau grounds and that The Doobies would frequently mention the venue in early interviews. There are also plenty of hand-drawn flyers and tickets that Amy Long, NUMU's history curator, has dredged up.

"It was kind of like this little hideaway where they could do whatever they want," Long says of the bands and party animals who would convene at the Chateau Liberté. "The police kind of ignored the place—lots of sex, drugs and rock & roll. I've heard some crazy stories that probably won't go into the exhibit."

On a recent afternoon, Long is sifting through the ephemera she's collected for the show on the lower floor of NUMU. This is where the show will have its run—along with a companion exhibit titled "Faces of Resistance: Through the Lens of Ilka Hartmann," which collects photographs Hartmann took of social justice crusaders, such as Cesar Chavez, the Black Panthers and the Indians of All Tribes group, who occupied Alcatraz from November 1969 until June 1971.

The umbrella title for the floor is called 'After the Lovin', Long says, explaining that both exhibits are meant to pay homage to the Summer of Love, 50 years ago.

The Chateau Liberté shut down in 1979 and fell into disrepair. It sat vacant for about a decade and was badly hobbled by the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. The property was purchased by a local real estate agent named George Rabe in 1996, and he has since largely restored the grounds—including a painting of the Zig-Zag rolling papers man on the floor of the swimming pool.

The exhibition opens July 14, but the official launch party is scheduled for Aug. 3 at 6pm. Long says several former employees and notable patrons are set to show up for the celebration. One former bartender is flying in from Washington state for the gathering.

JULY 14 11am	CHATEAU LIBERTÉ: HOUSE OF FREEDOM
	NUMU, Los Gatos
\$10	numulosgatos.org