

A song titled ‘San Francisco’

I know two songs titled *San Francisco*.

The first is by Scott Mackenzie and says, “If you’re going to San Francisco, make sure to wear flowers in your hair.”

The second is by Mac Miller and says, “Smoking meth with all the locals, asking them to teach me how to yodel.”

Both of them are correct.

You see, many people get it wrong. They think SF was at one point, the Mecca for hippies and homosexuality, but is now the Mecca for heroine and homelessness.

When really, it’s both.

San Francisco is a city of boths.

Hippies
Heroin
Hills
Harbors
Homelessness
Homosexuality
High-tech
Haughtiness
Haight-Ashbury
Heinousness
Hiking
Hybridity

If I wrote a song about San Francisco, it would go something like:

“If you’re going to San Francisco, make sure to smoke flowers with all the locals.”

A place and its signs

You can tell a lot about a place from its signs.

For example, the very first sign I saw in Cape Town, South Africa, was when we'd just turned out of the airport. There was a homeless man leaning against the traffic light, and holding a sign that said:

“Really FUCKING hungry.”

That gave me more insight into South Africa's economy than any Sunday Times article ever could.

Another example is the signs in Paris. Many stores around the world have a sign that says “Smile, you're on camera.” But in Paris, a city where smiling is reserved for special occasions, those signs say, “Suspected thieves will be pelted with stale baguettes.”

And of course, San Francisco (a city I first hated but grew to love) can be entirely understood through its signs.

The first one I noticed was in a playground near the San Francisco Public Library:

“All adults must be accompanied by children.”

At first I thought, “Surely this is a typo... a prank maybe?”

But I learned that unsupervised playing was the least of the city's concerns.

The next sign that caught my attention – and I must stress that I saw this in not one, not two, but **SIX** different places – was:

“No peeing in this elevator.”

The WeWork on California Street was too classy to be so direct about it, so they used a graphic instead.

I knew that running a startup that pretends to save the world was a nerve-wracking endeavor, but the public dampening of one's trousers?

Would've never guessed.

The next sign I saw was just around the corner from that WeWork.

But this one was a collaborative effort – a grassroots protest if you will. It said:

“HILL”

You know,

Just in case you were a few meters down the road and started to wonder why you were panting like a dog, or a startup founder.

Somebody else noticed the slight condescension in warning citizens of the HILL, so they wrote something right below it in spray paint. They wrote:

“No shit.”

It was a nice touch. But the sign's evolution didn't stop there.

Someone else – this person presumably aware of which neighborhood the hill leads to – carved into the metal sign with a knife:

“Actually, lots of shit.”