

# DownUnder: The Mystery Market Below Pike Place

BY RENA LANGILLE

Nestled into the steep bank below the Pike Place Market are several floors of Market space, some of which is open to the public and all of which are unique. These subterranean levels are reachable by the Market elevators, and by the stairs that wind down from the restrooms on the north and south ends of the main arcades. It is these lower levels of the Market that have undergone the most change.

The two lower public levels are lined with many little unique and curious shops on either side of the original flooring that was

installed sometime before World War II. The floors are held up by the unbelievably stout trunks of Douglas Fir cut from the Seattle waterfront and hillside, upon which the Market stands. In the early years, there was a butcher, a printer, a creamery and post office. A popular businessman named Herb Chilcotte had a second hand furniture outlet at the Market, which he culled from his antique business North of downtown. Sometimes his employee, Marie Erickson, would



Photo by Rena Langille

**A view of DownUnder, from the stairs outside the Barber Shop, notice the amazing Douglas Fir support columns and the shiny, recently refinished floor.**

bring her elderly mother down, all bundled up in old fashioned clothes. Erickson's mother would sit, knit and chat. Hidden somewhere in the back of the first down under level was Liberty Malt, the Market's only home brew shop, which later morphed into the Market Cellar Winery, on Western Avenue, run by John Ferias.

Later, in the 1950's and 60's Vi's breakfast and lunch counter was *the destination*. Vi ran the place by herself. It consisted of six stools and

a couple very small tables. She made big pots of clam chowder and gallons of coffee in big urns. Vi's lunch counter, and the Red Wing Cafe, across the aisle were local gathering places and gossip mills for the DownUnder folk.

There was also the poor man's social club. A collection of retired gents, who lived in cheap rented rooms from Chinatown to Belltown, found the Market a good place to meet and socialize. Among them were retired seamen, pensioners, and many shiftless men who had no families. One of the highlights of their days was getting a shave and haircut by the infamous lady barber. She had a gentle touch, didn't charge much, and gave the grumpy old men that feminine touch absent from their lives.

Jack Korsach's studio was another DownUnder destination. Korsach spent his time painting nudes and abstracts. He had many friends around the market, and occasionally they would gather together at 'Jack's place' for a visit. Soon the door would close, and shortly afterwards the place filled up with strange smelling smoke.

These businesses slowly emigrated to other locations through the years, or went out of business with urban renewal and the renovation of the Market during

the 1970s. Through the years there have been many evolutions in uses. With the advent of motorized vehicles, the stables on Western Avenue were no longer needed to hold farmers teams. Liveried porters and fancy women's restrooms with writing desks went out of fashion. Eventually the Market began to show signs of neglect and deterioration. Finally the City decided to tear it all out and build a parking garage. When that became news, the public raised a big stink! No one was going to park cars on sacred ground. Through much blustering by the City, and much organizing of the citizenry, the issue was put to a vote. The garage was soundly voted down and renovation was issued in. The planning process began.

The 1970's saw the advent of urban renewal and renovation began. The Market structures were stabilized and refurbished. Much was done to maintain the integrity of the old structure. The original floors have been refinished; and new stairs put in with recycled timbers. The old Douglas Fir columns remain, but, unfortunately, were painted. There are still many curious twists and turns downstairs, and changes in floor levels have been left as they were; the aisles are still lined with small entrepreneurial businesses. Guidelines were put in place to preserve "the Market's unique qualities rather than emulate shopping opportunities

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