



THE VIEW FROM THE BALCONY The starting point for this column is art, and for 16 years now, I've tried to find it wherever I could—most often somewhere in our little corner of Nor Cal—and then share it with readers so we can all join the fun. When I leave Chico, I'm often looking for art as well, and sometimes it's too good to not include in this space, despite not being related to the local scene.

It's all art though, right?

That said, let me paint you a picture of my visit to a bubble on a mountain in France:

Le Balcon de Belledonne is one of the many “bubble houses” built in the 1960s and '70s that were designed by two Swiss-born architects, husband and wife **Pascal Hausermann** and **Claude Costy**. The couple's focus was organic architecture that took the form of big white bubbles (or eggs? UFOs?) placed in rural environs, mostly in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region of France.

The building technique is straightforward—a skeleton of rebar bent into the desired shape is covered in chicken wire and then frosted with concrete that's just kind of mashed into place by hand. It's a practical, egalitarian way to build, born of the utopian mindset of the times (hippies!), with fewer materials required for the sphere/spheroid's economical form and right-angle free construction that opens up the creative possibilities in a way that's fairly accessible.

Le Balcon de Belledonne was built in 1966. It looks kind of like a just-landed white spaceship, situated in the Chartreuse mountains as a “balcony,” with floor-to-ceiling windows on one side looking out at a breathtaking view of the Belledonne mountain range (part of the French Alps) across the valley.

Last year, a lifelong friend of mine, **Scott Lawrimore**, bought Le Balcon with his wife, **Alice Christophe**, with the aim of restoring the place to its original glory. This is why I found myself in the Alps last month with my neighbor John. He's a contractor and I'm a ... I don't know. Beast of burden? I can push a mean wheelbarrow!

Scott and Alice are both art historians, and in one year's time, they have already transformed the place into something approaching its original form (you can follow the progress on Instagram, @balcon.de.belledonne), putting in as much work researching (historical drawings, building materials, etc.) as they have demo-ing, cleaning, rebuilding and painting.

John and I were there to work for one week, to help with whatever was needed. John welded, plumbed and did other contractor-y stuff. I cleared overgrown vegetation, pressure-washed and primed. Scott put cheap red wine, and jars of soups and duck confit lovingly prepared by Alice's uncle (*Merci, Roland. Impeccable!*), in our faces.

I also did some repair work to damaged sections of concrete on the exterior. Scott put a trowel in my hand and basically said, “Go fix it.” So I did, molding patches into place, using my hands to texture the concrete to match whatever was going on around it. I organic-architected like a boss!

With the spring sun on my face and the Alps at my back, my hands were literally part of Costy and Hausermann's visionary creation. Not a bad picture. I felt like I was connected to *all* the art!

THEATER REDEMPTION Of all the canceled-by-COVID casualties of the past couple years, one of the most tragic was the thwarted debut of the musical **Stuff-N-Things**, the first original production by local playwright/director **Wade Gess**. It was supposed to open at the **Blue Room Theatre** in March 2020, the same week the country first shut down. Cut to now: Gess is finally getting his opening, this time with a new original work.

The Death Clock Paradox, “an original play with music” that's “inspired by true events,” is showing May 12-21 at a private residence. Look up it up on Facebook for more details, or call (530) 370-1006 to reserve a seat.



Le Balcon de Belledonne



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