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Annual expo in Fremont Saturday

By [Todd R. Brown](#), STAFF WRITER
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FREMONT — When Alfred Twu moved in with his great aunt in **Fremont** for a few months, he found the setting culturally lacking compared with urbane Berkeley, where he studied architecture at UC.

Twu didn't sit around bemoaning his brief "exile" in the Silicon Valley suburb, though. He drew comic books about it.



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"It's kind of a forgotten place in terms of popular culture. I wanted to give the place some dignity while I was there," he said. "I really got to get a feel for some of the neighborhoods. I found there was a lot of immigrant cultures."

"It's the fourth-largest city in the Bay Area, but people just know it as the last stop on the BART line. There's really a lot more to it."

Now back in Berkeley working for an architectural firm, Twu will revisit his **Fremont** days Saturday, when he will attend the third **Manga, Art & Graphic Novel Expo** for Teens to promote his work and to give feedback to budding comic artists.

This year the event, costing \$9 to \$12, features a costume contest, a tongue-in-cheek superhero Olympics, performances by two San Francisco J-rock bands (Japanese rock) and portfolio assessments by artists from San Jose's Slave Labor Graphics.

The **expo**, hosted at the **Fremont** Teen Center, is expected to attract 500 fans of **manga** — a Japanese comic style that is now global in popularity — animation, graphic novels, "Gothic Lolita" fashion and other assorted pop culture.

"**Fremont** is kind of unusual — it is the

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come here, it is."

Comic artist Alfred Twu based some of his work on his short time living in Fremont. "People just...

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Comic artist Alfred Twu based some of his work on his short time living in **Fremont**. "People just know it as the last stop on the BART line," he said. "I wanted to give the place some dignity while I was there." Twu will be at the **Manga, Art & Graphic Novel Expo** for Teens on Saturday at the **Fremont** Teen Center. (By Alfred Twu and Naomi "tanukinao" Barbour, www.firstcultural.com)

only convention of this sort that is run by a government," said Twu, 22, whose mangastyle comics include "**Fremont** Diary" and "**Fremont** Girl." "Every single other one is run by a company or a group of fans."

Rena Dein, **Fremont's** recreation supervisor, put the event together, although she said a co-worker suggested the theme several year ago.

"I did read classic comics," Dein said. "That's how I read 'The Three Musketeers.' I did watch 'Speed Racer.' It's not really my focus of life. (For) some of the people who



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She said comics fans of 20 years ago might not recognize today's graphic novels as the sort of funnies they used to enjoy. Comics have matured, with nuanced characters facing moral dilemmas, and overall darker themes.

"Teens, they're either into the 'Dark Knight' comics (about Batman) or graphic novels that don't relate to any series I knew growing up," said Dein, 42. She noted that Art Spiegelman's "Maus" — a Holocaust survival story that portrays Jews as mice and Nazis as cats — resonates with young readers.

John Scharmen, a Sony computer animator who is on sabbatical to study drawing by hand, agreed that today's comics are more relevant to older readers. That means racier material winds up on exhibit at larger expos, including San Jose's Fanime convention.

"You can take your kids, but you can't really take them unattended anymore," said Scharmen, who will show samples of his online, page-a-week comic at the **Fremont expo** and has works in the "Funny Papers" exhibit at Olive Hyde Art Gallery.

"I'm really excited to be going to this **expo**, to show my comics to younger kids," the 40-year-old from San Diego said. "There are not a lot that are aimed at younger people, 100 percent."

Twu — now taking art classes at Laney College in Oakland and enjoying daily life close to friends and watering holes — explores the suburban contradiction for youths in his **Fremont** comics.

One reads, "You get to suffer in climate-controlled, upper-class suburban comfort!" but notes that "for half the world, this is the American dream."

"I tried to capture how people were really sacrificing a lot to make a life for their family or get ahead," he said.

the ethnically Taiwanese, New Jersey-bred artist agreed that the **Fremont expo** is a cultural boon.

"It's definitely got a different character, but I think it's a good one," he said. "It brings out a lot of people who otherwise might be a little intimidated coming out to one of the larger conventions."

Learn more about the **Fremont expo** at <http://www.ci.fremont.ca.us/Teens> or call (510) 494-4344. View Alfred Twu's **Fremont** comics at <http://www.firstcultural.com>. View John Scharmen's work in progress at <http://www.sankam.net>.

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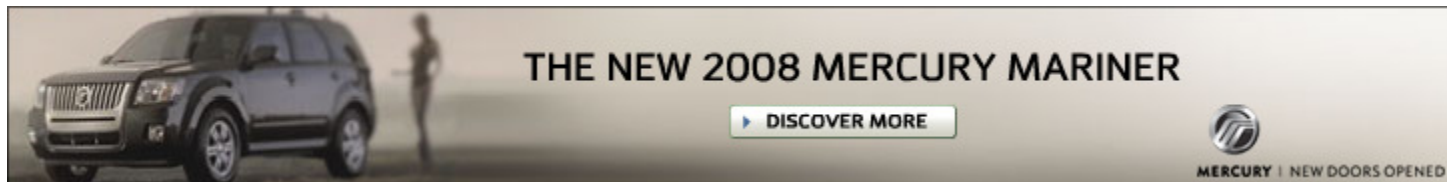
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