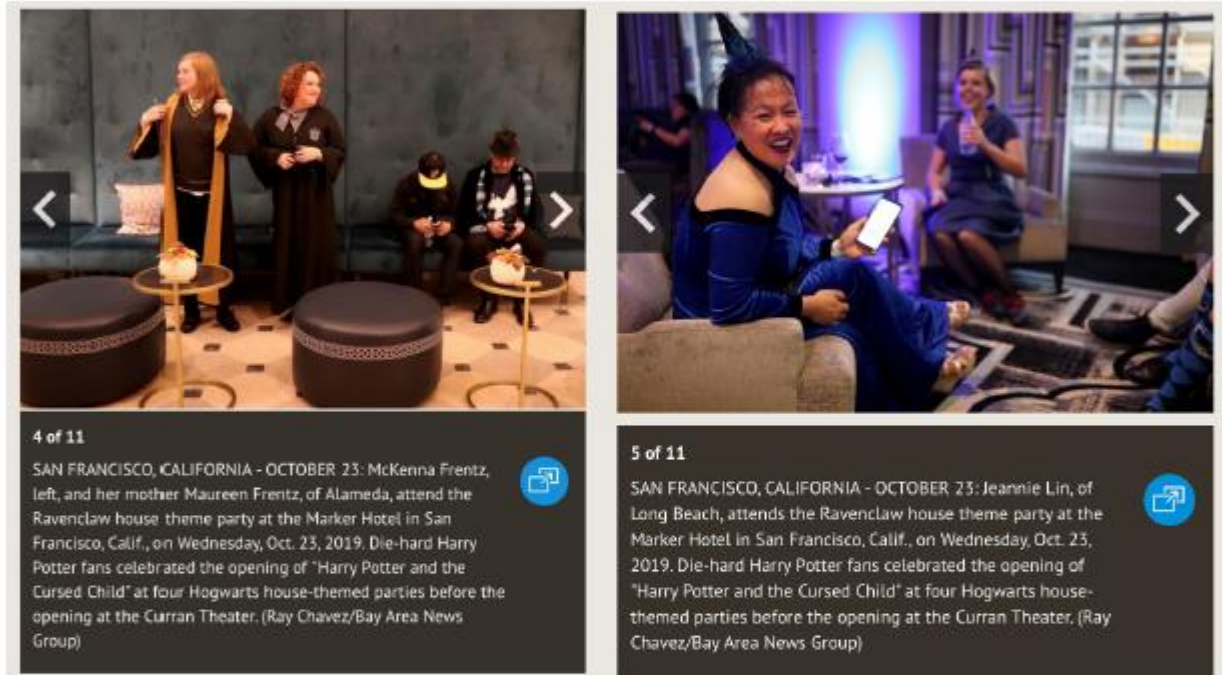


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Hogwarts' witches and wizards party in San Francisco Lucky fans celebrate opening night of 'Harry Potter and the Cursed Child'

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The light is starting to fade on San Francisco's O'Farrell Street and hill-weary tourists are making their way along the sidewalks, when something unusual begins to happen.

People, some in robes and cloaks, start appearing as if by magic outside Bartlett Hall. Many are dressed normally, at least for San Francisco, but it soon becomes obvious these are not mere muggles.

They are lucky lottery winners, devoted Harry Potter fans who scored discounted tickets to the opening preview of "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child" and captured exclusive invitations to Hogwarts' house parties.

On Wednesday night, Gryffindors began gathering at the Bartlett Hall gastropub, Slytherins at Ayala restaurant, Hufflepuffs at the Fifth Arrow bar and grill, and Ravenclaws at the Marker Hotel.

Each house-party venue was draped in the colors and banners of the four Hogwarts' houses. Guests mingled over British foods and non-alcoholic drinks, snapping photos, reciting favorite lines from J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and talking about the show to come.

The production — which is making its home for the foreseeable future at [San Francisco's Curran theater](#), the only West Coast theater to stage the play — offered an opening night lottery, giving winners \$20 tickets and a party invitation. The city joined in on the magic, too: Hogwarts house colors illuminated City Hall, Coit Tower and SFO through the night.

The play is in previews for the next few weeks, with an official opening on Dec. 1. “Cursed Child,” which centers on Harry’s middle child, Albus, and his estrangement from his famous dad, is staged in two parts. Those attending Wednesday night’s Part 1 will return Thursday night for Part 2.

The lottery winners, 150 from each house, came from throughout the Bay Area and then some. Paige Carter of Scottsdale, Arizona, brought her boyfriend to the Slytherin House party, even though he’s really a Ravenclaw.

“It’s a once-in-the-lifetime opportunity,” Carter said. “The books were the beginning of my reading enjoyment, and it’s stayed with me and my family.”

Like many of the fans in attendance Wednesday night, Carter is a teacher, working to earn her master’s in English. And she’s proud to be a Slytherin, she said. Despite their dark reputation, Slytherins put their families first.

Over at the Gryffindor House party, teachers and sisters-in-law Monica Hight, of Oakley, and Lindsay Hight, of Antioch, were among the first to arrive. They were thrilled, they said, to see the play and attend the party, even though it meant rearranging schedules. When the book series ended they were left longing for the story to continue.

Meanwhile, at the Hufflepuff party, Naomi Blanco, of Santa Cruz, and her 13-year-old daughter, Natali, were still pinching themselves. Blanco must have downed some Felix Felicis, the famous potion that brings luck to those who consume it, because she not only won “Cursed Child” tickets and party invitations, she also won tickets to “Hamilton” for the night before.

Of the pair, Natali is the biggest fan. Blanco looked quickly around before admitting in hushed tones that she hasn’t read the books — but Natali has clued her in.

“I used to be a super fan,” Natali said. “I went to Universal Studios (for the Wizarding World of Harry Potter). I bought a robe. And then I got a scarf. And then a wand. I had a Harry Potter birthday party. Then I sort of stopped, but I still love the books.”

Hufflepuff Ashley Costa, of Santa Clara, and Ravenclaw Keiko Kobayashi, of Cupertino, talked over their empty plates about what the Harry Potter franchise has meant to them. Costa, who is training to be an elementary school teacher, grew up reading the books, went to the midnight book launches and made some midnight movie premieres.

Kobayashi said she and her dad read the books together — it was a special connection. She also used the books to increase her vocabulary, writing down all the words she didn’t understand and looking up their meaning.

The world of Harry Potter has a unifying quality, they said, and it opened up the literature world to millions.

San Franciscans Shelly Howard and Jack Reardon were another mixed combo. Reardon devoured the books; Howard binged the movies. But the pair, living up to their Ravenclaw status, spend a lot of time discussing concepts, plot holes in the films, and everything Harry Potter.

“I’m an amateur fan,” Howard said, but after this week, her status may have changed.

Joan Morris

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