

FÉLICIEN CASSAN AND DARROW CARSON



SECRET LOS ANGELES

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

JAPANESE GARDEN AT THE DOUBLETREE HOTEL

⑥

Little-known garden on a parking lot roof

Japanese Garden at the Doubletree hotel

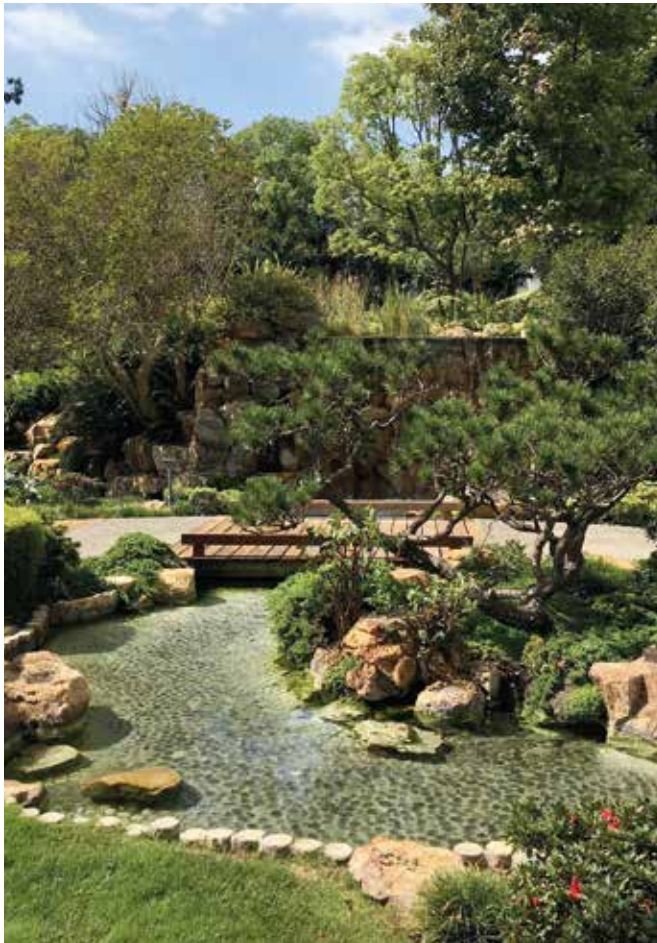
Kyoto Garden at DoubleTree by Hilton

120 South Los Angeles Street

+1 (213) 629-1200 – hilton.com/en/doubletree

Open year-round except during private events

Metro: Red or Purple Line, Civic Center / Grand Park Station stop



Los Angeles is home to a significant number of Japanese gardens. They're among numerous green spaces, botanical gardens and other public or private parks that crisscross the city's diverse neighborhoods. From the lush gardens of the Huntington Library (San Marino, near Pasadena) to the discreet Earl Burns Miller Garden (Cal State University at Long Beach), the South Coast Botanic Garden (Palos Verdes Peninsula), and the Descanso Gardens (La Cañada Flintridge), it's all zen. Some locations even embrace the beauty of the Japanese tea ceremony, the architecture of traditional houses or rock gardens, meticulously maintained.

The Western-style Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, at 120 South Los Angeles Street near Little Tokyo, LA's main Japanese district, does not automatically attract attention. There's no indication that the parking lot roof, between tall skyscraper apartment buildings and the hotel's charmless tower, conceals a botanical wonder.

Kyoto Garden, undisturbed by the sprawling city's wail of sirens and urban clamor, is open to casual visitors, though usually reserved for hotel guests or private receptions, including newlyweds in search of a romantic backdrop.

The garden's stream and waterfall contrast beautifully with the aging building. The pool is iconic, an arch awaits lovers, and the view of the downtown skyline is superb.

A real urban oasis, Kyoto Garden is a replica of a 16th-century Tokyo garden created in honor of samurai Kiyomasa Kato. It's the perfect stop before heading to the city's nearby Japanese district, where colorful shops and noisy restaurants welcome tourists.

THE TRIFORIUM

⑩

The remains of an ill-fated, mid 70s public art experiment

Fletcher Bowron Square
Temple and Main



In the shadow of City Hall, atop the eerily deserted aisles of Los Angeles Mall, stands the remains of the *Triforium* – artist Joseph Young’s ill-fated, mid 1970s public art experiment.

Six stories tall and weighing 60 tons, Young’s visionary “polyphonoptic” sculpture was at the time an unprecedented marriage of technology and public art; an Icarian failure that cost LA taxpayers close to a million dollars in 1975, and has spent decades in various states of disrepair.

Designed to reflect the city’s kaleidoscopic spirit, Young’s original design called for a massive vintage computer system, complete with motion sensors, to translate the movements of passers-by into psychedelic patterns of light, sound and music. The final product would consist of 1,494 handblown Italian glass prisms, each programmed to light up in synchrony with a massive 79-note glass bell carillon – the largest instrument of its kind in the world – programmed to play “everything from Beethoven to the Bee Gees.”

Introduced on 12 December 1975 by then mayor Tom Bradley, a last-minute electrical problem delayed the *Triforium*’s dedication by half an hour – an early ill omen that would set the pace for the sculpture’s many difficult decades to come.

Though Young predicted his signature work to be a “Rosetta Stone of art and technology,” the court of public opinion seemed to have made up its mind before the *Triforium* was even unveiled. From the very beginning the work was widely disparaged by members of the press and City Council, who showered it with derision: “The Psychedelic Nickelodeon,” the “Kitsch-22 of Kinetic Sculpture,” and “Three Wishbones in Search of a Turkey.”

The carillon is gone, most of the incandescent lights are burnt out, and, in spite of sporadic repairs, what was once LA’s crossroads of artistic, civic, and technological ambition is now mostly a pigeon roost.

In the words of Mayor Bradley: “It’s ours now, so we’re going to have to live with it. More than that, we’re going to learn to be proud of it.”

MUSEUM OF DEATH

8

“One or two visitors faint every week”

*Museum of Death
6363 Selma Avenue
+1 (323) 466-8011
museumofdeath.net
Daily 11am–8pm
Metro: Red Line, Hollywood & Vine stop*



“The photos and descriptions can be very graphic, and some find that too gory.” Better to be warned.

The first room sets the tone: while still totally accessible even to a sensitive audience, it’s dedicated to the face of the serial killer, a theme embedded deep in the American psyche. But the museum’s two founders, Cathee Shultz and J.D. Healy, also have sourced European artifacts such as the mummified head of Henri Désiré Landru, the French crook turned murderer (between 1915 and 1919 he killed 10 women and conned around 300 more).

Around him are numerous drawings, objects and correspondence between known serial killers (John Wayne Gacy, Ted Bundy, Richard Ramirez) and their family or “fans,” accompanied by a mockup of an electric chair. The museum founders have so far failed to procure the real thing.

After the rooms describing the techniques used by funeral directors over the years, antiquities from various morgues around the world and the skeletons of dogs and giraffes, among other oddities, the first photos of autopsies take their place in this danse macabre. But, according to the owners (who opened a New Orleans branch in 2015), it’s meant “to make you happy to be alive.”

The horror level of these images gradually rises, but it’s so well done that you get used to seeing severed heads, photos of crime scenes and road accidents or killers posing with their dismembered victims. Happily the museum doesn’t go in for sensationalism, aiming to educate rather than shock.

Witness the relatively sober room dedicated to Charles Manson and his murderous “family.” Or another recounting the evils of Jeffrey Dahmer, which sticks to the facts even though the detailed descriptions send shivers up your spine. After that, photos of suicides seem quite touching.

The display of the deceased and famous (and their faithful four-legged friends – some stuffed specimens are displayed) relieves the tension before you exit through the souvenir shop, where skull-printed tees begin to feel civilized.

“WITCH’S HOUSE”

19

European architecture idealized by Hollywood

Spadena House (also known as the “Witch’s House”)
 516 Walden Drive, Beverly Hills
 Private property



The post-war years of the 1920s, the rapid expansion of the movie industry, the industrial era running out of steam and the fascination for different trends, typically European, gave rise to the Storybook or fairytale style of architecture. These houses, although rather a mismatch with postmodern LA decor, easy to stumble across on Californian architectural tours, are just a “Disneyfied” Hollywood version of common trends in parts of Europe where the medieval style made a comeback at the end of the 18th century.

As Arrol Gellner explains in his book on this building trend, *Storybook Style*, the Great War exposed many young Americans to Europe for the first time, and “it is all but certain that the quaint rural architecture of Flanders, France, and Germany, so different from that of the United States, would remain firmly fixed in every soldier’s mind ...” Passed through the mill of architects and art directors used to working on film sets, this idealized vision produced quirky shapes, steeply sloping roofs, tiny stained-glass windows and crooked shutters, fireplaces straight out of the Brothers Grimm and intentionally overgrown gardens.

The best known of these art directors was Harry Oliver, who designed Spadena House (named after the first private owners) in 1921, originally for studio offices and dressing rooms. Although it has undergone many renovations over the years, especially inside, the disconcerting structure and moat-like pond make a delightfully anachronistic curiosity. But the house is still private property, so view it (and take photos) from the street.

Other Storybook buildings

These odd thatched cottages can still be rented or owned, despite their movie-set decor.

At 1330 North Formosa Avenue, Charlie Chaplin had a group of four houses built for rental in 1923 (Judy Garland and Douglas Fairbanks were among the stars who lived there).

Walt Disney was inspired by the style of the Tam O’Shanter restaurant (2980 Los Feliz Boulevard), still open for business.

And at Silverlake, 2900 Griffith Park Boulevard, is a group of eight thatched cottages thought to have influenced the set designers for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, released in 1937.

Today, in an ironic reversal of references, this complex (which appears notably in David Lynch’s 2001 Gothic fantasy *Mulholland Drive*), is called “Snow White Cottages.”

O'NEILL HOUSE

20

Beverly Hills tribute to Gaudí

507 North Rodeo Drive
View from the street

In a country with few legal barriers to construction, Los Angeles has pushed the lack of architectural regulations to the limit, exacerbated by vast fortunes able to realize the craziest urban visions.

The diverse styles range from Mid-Century Modern to Brutalism, through Storybook and Greco-Roman with kitsch touches. Beverly



Hills wins hands down in this contest for originality at all costs. The most remarkable creation has to be the O'Neill House, on famed Rodeo Drive, where celebrities and wealthy individuals come from all over the world to satisfy their appetite for upscale shopping in the shade of the palm trees.

Before the highway near Wilshire Boulevard grows steep and winding, like a miniaturized (and idealized) version of Paris complete with glitzy shops, further north, along immaculate alleyways, is Rodeo Drive. It's a near-normal road and one way into Beverly Flats – a multi-million-dollar neighborhood where each house is more improbable than the last. The first, at the corner of Park Way, is typical.

The Gaudí-inspired Art Nouveau structure has almost no right angles, just repetitive undulating and asymmetric curves. Yet its concrete overcoat hides a rather more traditional original construction.

Don O'Neill, the owner, was an art dealer obsessed by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí. He and his wife, Sandy O'Neill, wanted to give their buildings a touch of Gaudí's crazy modernism in a "renovation" project that, over the years, took in the whole property. Unfortunately, just like the visionary architect, he would never see the final version of his fantasy. He died in 1985, three years before his wife completed the work with the help of architect Tom Oswalt.

The building, reminiscent of Barcelona's Parc Güell blended with American cake you'd think was topped with overmuch whipped cream, seems out of place even in such a heterogeneous neighborhood.

The white concrete flows from the decorative terminals to the roof tiles, *trencadis* (broken-tile mosaic or shardware) additions decorate the façade with its oval windows, and, down a side path, a statue adorns the back entrance.



Watts Towers, a sculpture consisting of 17 connected structures built between 1921 and 1954 by Italian immigrant construction worker Simon Rodia, is another tribute to Gaudí. The towers, in the poor neighborhood of Watts (southern LA, just above Compton) are victims of their own success and mentioned in all the guidebooks.

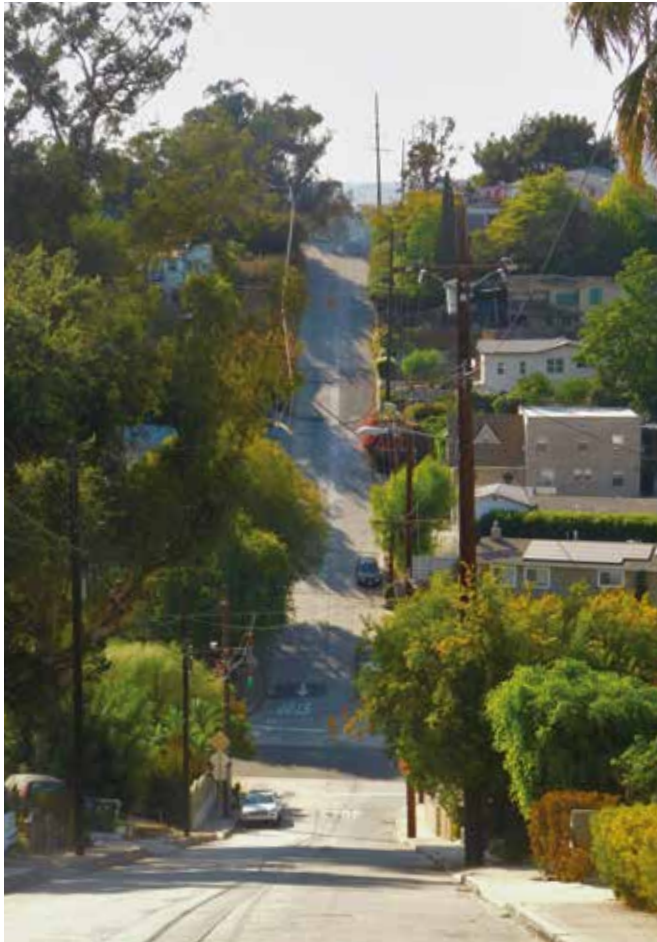
BAXTER STREET

①

One of the steepest streets in the States

Always accessible

San Francisco, originally built on seven hills, has the reputation of being the city with the most precipitous streets. But a close runner-up is Los Angeles, despite its image of wide, flat and monotonous highways barely disturbed by neon lights and palm trees. The



unrelenting canyons that make up LA's less accessible spaces have some amazing hidden passageways, like at Highland Park, San Pedro or here in Silverlake, near the reservoir.

With its 32% slope (equivalent to about 18 degrees), Baxter Street, just off Highway 2, is one of the steepest streets in the nation and a notorious accident site when rare showers drench the city. In 2018, fed up with skidding cars careening into their gardens or up against their fences, folks were writing to the authorities and to GPS and mobile app developers to demand improved traffic flow in the form of algorithms to avoid their street at all costs. Since a fire truck also has been stuck on the ridge, discussions are ongoing to find a viable solution and alternate routes.

The 10 steepest streets in the USA

Even crazier, Eldred Street (near Mount Washington) and 28th Street (San Pedro) have a 33% and 33.3% slope, respectively, but they are not as long and busy as their big Silverlake sibling. This trio of impressive statistics makes the state of California the holder of seven of the 10 steepest streets (a fourth, Fargo Street, is in Los Angeles, two are in San Francisco and the last is in Spring Valley).

And just to show off at Trivial Pursuit: the other three are in Honokaa (Hawaii) and Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania).

And that makes ten!

LA's shortest and longest streets

Powers Place, a 13-foot strip in the Pico-Union district connecting Alvarado Terrace and South Bonnie Braie Street, was named after Pomeroy Wills Powers, a lawyer from Kansas City who became a LA City Council president. LA's shortest street, it barely leaves a car enough room to make a tight U-turn.

The longest street in LA is the unmissable Sepulveda Boulevard: this mastodon, sections of which are known as Highway 1 (the iconic Pacific coastal route), stretches 42.8 miles from Long Beach to San Fernando.

SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP ③ LAKE SHRINE

One of the most enchanting sites around

17190 Sunset Boulevard

lakeshrine.org

310-454-4114

Wednesday–Sunday noon–4pm

Reservations taken via website at 10am Saturday for the following week

Ceremonies in the temple: Discontinued during Covid



A *utobiography of a Yogi*, published in 1946, is considered one of the most important spiritual books of the 20th century. It was written by Paramahansa Yogananda, who in the 1920s traveled across the US teaching the precepts of Kriya Yoga philosophy through his Self-Realization Fellowship. In 1950, he founded a haven of peace in exquisite taste at Pacific Palisades, perhaps the most enchanting site in the region.

This sublime location, very popular with certain Western musicians and businessmen drawn to Indian mysticism (like Elvis Presley, Steve Jobs, and even George Harrison, who married there), is an invitation to refocus on yourself and commune with nature. A lake embellished with several temples, a windmill chapel and a luxuriant garden, among other curiosities such as a houseboat, call for meditation and understanding between religions (a concept interpreted by a poignant monument).

Even rarer, a small Chinese sarcophagus surrounded by flowers and topped with a pergola shelters some of the ashes of Gandhi, the Indian leader and spiritual guide, who wanted his remains to be dispersed in different rivers around the planet.

Yogananda, as his friend, received some of the ashes in Los Angeles, shortly after the Mahatma's assassination. Although this site didn't need to summon up such a historical figure to be fascinating, Gandhi's presence only accentuates its magical aura.

Shumei Hollywood Center

7406 Franklin Avenue

Metro: Red Line, Hollywood / Highland stop

Gardens can be visited on request

+1 (323) 876-5528

The Shumei spiritual organization (“World Messianic Church” in Europe, sometimes considered a sect) was founded in the 1930s by the Japanese philosopher Mokichi Okada. In Hollywood, a handsome house in an indeterminate style (Greek columns, Spanish façade, French windows) serves as its center. The house once belonged to writer and journalist Joan Didion and has seen everything that Hollywood and American rock has to offer, from drugs to high spirits. Seemingly purged of demons, it's now an oasis where patients come to treat their spiritual or physical afflictions, through Jyorei workshops and other exercises inspired by a mixture of Shintoism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Tea ceremonies, arts performances, and festivals also are held here.

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Bison on the loose, the actual end of Route 66, a ramble over a Cold War army base, the statue of a Japanese man recognised as Righteous Among the Nations, the original Batcave, an abandoned Nazi camp, camouflaged oil platforms in the city, the largest section of the Berlin Wall outside of Germany – Los Angeles' urban sprawl is brimming over with unusual and secret treasures.

A concrete jungle incongruously surrounded by ubiquitous nature, L.A. is much more than a glamorous show of celebrities, beaches and theme parks.

Intended for everybody, visitors and locals alike, who would like to explore the city in depth, this guide seeks to dispel the misguided image of a megalopolis that is often superficially dismissed or even disliked. But it can also be read as a declaration of love for the City of Angels.

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