

# BEVERLY HILLS

*Celebrating 100 Years of Glamour*

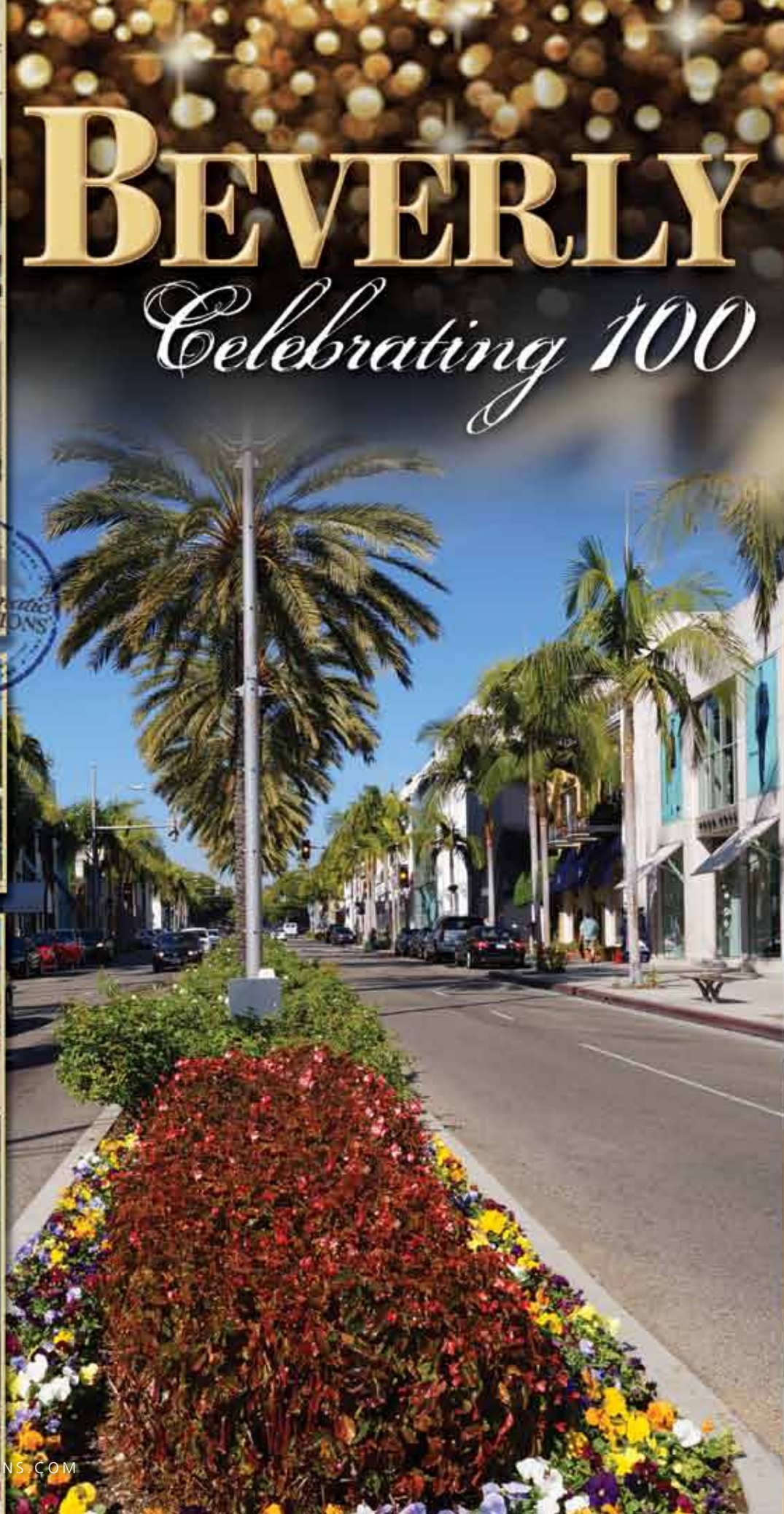
by Monica Frim

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL DESTINATIONS

*Monica Frim visits Beverly Hills where star-gazing is a national past-time and ties to the entertainment industry are strong. Here celebrities live and play, and an endless parade of fascinating people shop for brand names in fashion, jewelry and art. Once the area's most precious resource was water; today it's luxury boutiques and fine restaurants.*

*Photography by John Frim PhD and Monica Frim*

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There is always some sort of celebratory event taking place in the city of ritz, glitz and glamour, but 2014 holds special promise for year-long revelry in Beverly Hills. That's because on January 28, 2014, the city of Beverly Hills will turn 100!

As the apex of elegance and luxurious living, Beverly Hills is planning to pay tribute to past, present and future developments with a hive of momentous celebrations that will involve visitors and local citizens alike. While history, art and architecture give the city its cultural veneer, it is its reputation as the playground of the rich and famous that packs the hotels and bundles the beautiful people into its bars and lounges.

Toward that end, five of the city's most luxurious hotels have teamed up with the Beverly Hills Conference and Visitors Bureau to ring in the centenary with characteristic Beverly Hills pizzazz in a program known as the Suite 100. Beginning in March, hotel guests will be transported into the past of one of the world's most legendary cities to experience all the excitement of a specific era right down to the finest details. Participating hotels choose a decade from the last 100 years, then redesign a suite with furnishings and accessories that reflect the fashion and lifestyle of the celebrity or event that is most representative of that era. Depending on which hotel they stay at, guests can opt for a suite with silver-foiled walls reminiscent of Andy Warhol's Factory or a suite that oozes with the sultry

sensuality of Marilyn Monroe's Golden Age complete with shag carpeting and tropical prints.

I recently stayed at the Peninsula Beverly Hills, one of the participating Suite 100 hotels, and picked up the scoop on the Peninsula's upcoming celebratory refurbishment. In a salute to 1990s glamour, the Peninsula will highlight "The Birth of Modern Luxury" with a champagne and Rolls Royce initiation that leads straight to a pampered poolside stay complete with a couples massage of crushed diamonds in oil. Their "Red Carpet Experience" will extend to supplying a hair stylist, make-up artist, gown, jewelry and professional photographer to snap pictures of guests walking the red carpet right in their private suite. Mirrored bedroom walls, a Swarovski crystal chandelier and murals of red carpet events will complement film, music and menu selections evocative of the 90s cultural scene.

Once a lowly bean field, Beverly Hills evolved into an apogee of luxury and glamour where anything that doesn't drip with wealth and sophistication remains hidden or transformed. You'll never find a garbage can plopped on the perfectly manicured lawns of the city's mansion-lined streets — trash is tucked into back alleys away from public view — and fire hydrants are silver, unlike the ubiquitous yellow ones of Los Angeles and other communities.

The iconic Beverly Hills sign on Mount Lee in the the Santa Monica Mountains is visible from many spots in Los Angeles, but a fence keeps hikers away from its base.

HOLLYWOOD



Chris Burden's Urban Light—a sculpture of 202 restored street lamps from the 1920s and 1930s—dominate the entrance way to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).



Designer shades or not? In California even four-footed wannabes emulate the stars.

While the streets aren't exactly paved with gold, they do front some of the most opulent commercial and residential properties in the world. Designer brands like Prada, Gucci, Valentino, Armani, Versace, Dior, Tom Ford, Michael Kors, Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Hermès and Vera Wang occupy a three-block corridor of the world-renowned Rodeo Drive, which attracts millions of visitors each year but only a few buyers. The Drive cuts through the Golden Triangle, a pricey dining and shopping destination dotted with Porsches and Maseratis, and bounded by Santa Monica Boulevard, Wilshire Boulevard and Canon Drive. It's nothing for media moguls to drive in from the hills for a \$500 haircut, \$50,000 suit or a \$1.5 million Audemars Piguet watch.

The best part is that despite the car culture that pervades Beverly Hills (and indeed all 88 towns that make up Greater Los Angeles), Beverly Hills is a pedestrian-friendly city with most of the high-end shops and enclaves accessible to anyone, regardless of the depth (or brand name) of their pockets.

Beverly Hills was a favored place long before the movie industry marketed it as one of the best places to live and spend money. The native Tongvas appreciated the area for its water and fertile soil and called it the "Gathering of the Waters," which translated into Spanish as El Rodeo de las Aguas.





A peak at the Hollywood sign between balconies at the Hollywood and Highland Center mall and entertainment complex.



Beverly Hills City Hall

European settlers followed and used the land variously for horse, cattle and sheep ranches, agriculture and, in the early 1900s, as a potential oil field. Burton Green, a partner in the Amalgamated Oil Company (later Rodeo Land and Water Company after the oil wells failed to produce), renamed the area Beverly Hills after Beverly Farms, Massachusetts.

With development came spacious streets that flowed across and down the hills, a park (today's Beverly Gardens) that runs a narrow green swath along the Santa Monica edge of the Golden Triangle, and an elegant hotel that inspired Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford to build their mansion Pickfair nearby. Soon a wave of hotels and celebrity homes followed, side streets gave rise to high-end fashions (but with better prices than their Rodeo Drive counterparts), and the city developed its own identity, separate from Los Angeles, but symbiotic with Hollywood stardom.

If anything was overlooked it was in the way of cultural and artistic attractions. With Hollywood next door and the City of Los Angeles spread-eagled all around, Beverly Hills

could concentrate on the retail and restaurant needs of the rich and famous, leaving theater complexes, museums and art galleries to the perimeter communities.

But when the Wallis Annenberg Center for Performing Arts opened in the fall of 2013, Beverly Hills ushered in a new era of world-renowned productions in theater, dance, opera and instrumental music right on its own turf. The Annenberg Center is the latest addition to a slew of cultural endeavors that playfully merge historical landmarks with modern artistic complexes.

Just a block east of the Annenberg Center, the imposing Beverly Hills City Hall, with its tiled and gilded Spanish Renaissance tower, sweeps across the street to the Postmodern Civic Center where a library, fire and police stations along with a 9/11 Memorial Garden are all connected via courtyards and colonnades. The Memorial Garden, unveiled on September 11, 2011, the 10-year anniversary of the horrific attack on America, commemorates the tragedy with a central sculpture that is actually a structural beam recovered from Ground Zero.

West of the Annenberg Center, the modern stone and glass



Visitors to LACMA walk along a concrete trench under the 340-ton boulder of Michael Heizer's monolithic sculpture, Levitated Mass.



Shoppers play impromptu tunes with their feet on the keyboard staircase at the Hollywood and Highland Center mall and entertainment complex.



## PENINSULA MOMENTS

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Beverly Hills may have stolen some of Hollywood's thunder, but after a period of cultural stagnation, Hollywood is making a valiant comeback. When Hollywood's Golden Age ended in 1948, numerous post-war events collectively contributed to its demise: the Supreme Court decreed that studios could no longer own their own theaters, the film-industry conglomerated, the television industry mushroomed and movie studios moved north — with only Paramount remaining in Hollywood today. As the celebrities moved out, the down-and-out moved in. The elegant theaters and restaurants, bereft of their celebrity clientele, gave way to seedy bars and sex shops. A good tourist attraction was needed to

lure back the stars and their adoring fans.

It came in the form of a 15-block sidewalk project along Hollywood Boulevard and three blocks of Vine Street. Stud-ded with pink, brass-rimmed terrazzo stars laid into a charcoal grey terrazzo background, the Hollywood Walk of Fame was completed in 1960 with more than 2,500 stars laid down to be filled at a later date with the names of celebrities. Joanna Woodward was the first honoree to have a temporary star laid in August 1958 (the official groundbreaking was on February 9, 1960) along with seven other performers.

Unfortunately, in its early days, the Walk of Fame did nothing to encourage urban redevelopment, and Hollywood continued to decline. For eight years, not a single star was added. It wasn't until 1968, when a new stipulation dictated that recipients had to attend their own unveiling ceremonies, that a flurry of publicity and press coverage gave the Walk a needed boost. In 1980 another requirement — that honorees or their nominating committees pay a fee for the privilege — was added. At the current cost of \$30,000 per star, Hollywood is well on the road to recovery.

I hit the star-studded pavement on a sleepy Sunday morning

hoping to capture a precursory illusion of Hollywood's romantic past before the tourist throngs intruded and reaffirmed Hollywood's stereotypical image as the synthesis of glitz and grunge. For a brief moment, the empty street, with the stars still untrodden, revealed a Hollywood that captured the glory of old. It was there in the world's first circular office building, rising 13 stories like a stack of records and known, appropriately, as the Capital Records Tower; in the refurbished Egyptian Theater, Sid Grauman's ode to Hollywood ostentation where Douglas Fairbanks starred in the first Hollywood premiere, "Robin Hood;" and in Grauman's Chinese Theater, which hosted the Academy Awards in the 1940s. The theater was renovated and renamed TCL Chinese Theater in 2013, after its new owner, Chinese TV manufacturer TCL. However, most people still call it, simply, the Chinese Theater. In its forecourt, the handprints, footprints and autographs of more than 200 actors and athletes are embedded in cement. Some of the more unusual imprints include Groucho Marx's cigar, Roy Rogers' gun, Jimmy Durante's nose, Betty Grable's legs and Whoopi Goldberg's dreadlocks.

These days, the Academy Awards take place next door



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in the Dolby Theater, part of the flamboyant \$615 million Highland and Hollywood Center that houses a hotel, high-end designer shops as well as chain stores, a 30,000-square foot candy emporium and a courtyard replica of the set used in Cecil B. DeMille's now forgotten 1916 film "Intolerance" (Don't worry if you haven't heard of it — neither had I.). The courtyard is a perfect example of how Hollywood now alludes to its romantic past with hype and showy displays. Two concrete elephants, each weighing 13,500 pounds, loom atop massive pillars in the fittingly named Babylon Court.

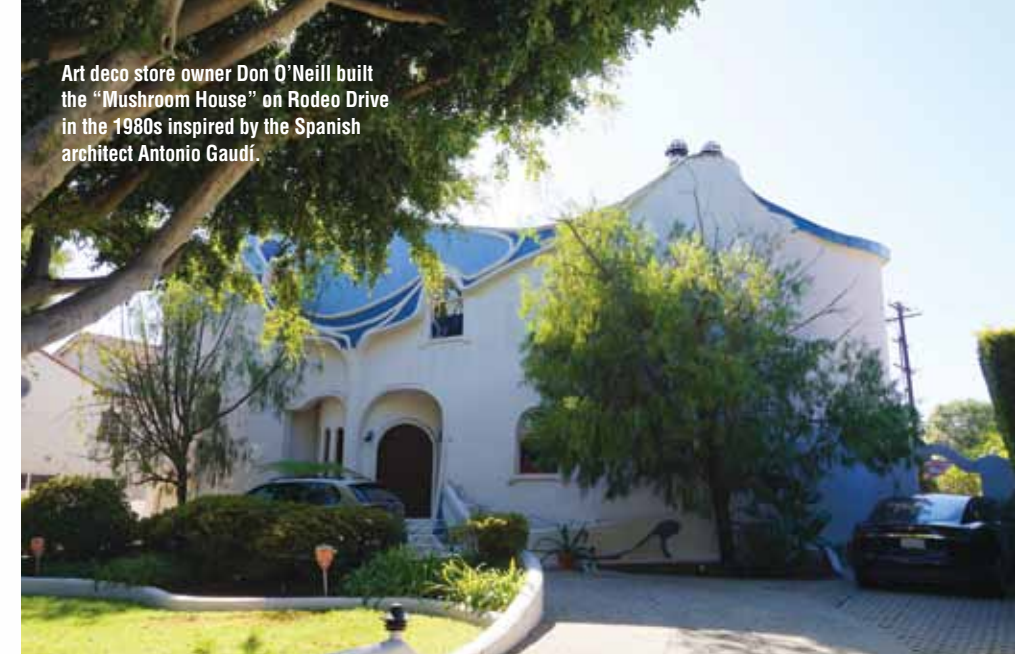
When the awards are held, red velvet curtains cover the store fronts to hide the fact that the Academy Awards actually take place in a shopping mall. The hour-glass-shaped staircase that normally acts as a shopping conduit swoops into an elegant pathway for designer-clad celebrities, its low-rise steps perfect for heels and gowns. Eighteen thousand-square feet of iconic red carpet stretch from Highland Road to the Dolby Theater with not a hint that alongside the carpet a slew of seedy souvenir shops sell bogus Oscars along with the usual tourist kitsch and trinkets.

Hollywood is its own biggest star. Next to the theater and overlooking the courtyard, arched bridges provide viewing platforms of the famous 45-foot tall Hollywood sign that has reigned from the hills for more than 90 years. The sign was originally a promotional gimmick for a new housing development called Hollywoodland. Over the years its letters have been pranked, yanked, blown down in a storm, and the name shortened and rebuilt until, finally, a fence and security system were installed to keep people away. Today it is impossible, and illegal, to get to the sign.

Like an aging star trying hard to make a comeback, Hollywood hasn't quite doffed its Golden Age glamour, 1980s and 90s sleaze, or made a full entry into the 21st century. But luxury condos, trendy restaurants and elegant lounges are making inroads, somehow complementing the old grand dame theaters such as the Pantages and El Capitan in an oddly unifying way. The outlandish museums — Madame Tussauds Hollywood, Ripley's Believe It Or Not! and the Hollywood Museum housed in the old Max Factor warehouse — continue to attract a touristy clientele, and that's as it should be. Unlikely



The Hollywood Museum was once the workshop and studio of Max Factor, legendary make-up artist to the stars.



Art deco store owner Don O'Neill built the "Mushroom House" on Rodeo Drive in the 1980s inspired by the Spanish architect Antonio Gaudí.

pairings are what Hollywood is all about and everyone needs an occasional fix of larger-than-life. Even if you don't pose for a picture with a snake charmer wearing nothing more than a tattered codpiece or a faded Marilyn Monroe look-alike who appears as if she's slept in her polka dots, you can't help but get caught up in the weirdness that's as legendary to Hollywood Boulevard as the trampled terrazzo stars.

Los Angeles is full of eccentric locales, each with differing idiosyncrasies that may have prompted Dorothy Parker to once describe L.A. as 72 suburbs in search of a city. In that vein, Hollywood is still in search of itself, perhaps ambivalent to the fact that its "self" marched away to Beverly Hills when the stars moved out.

Today's celebrities live not only in Beverly Hills, but also in numerous tony districts and neighborhoods such as Bel Air, Brentwood, Holmby Hills and Westwood. Their trophy mansions have become noteworthy waypoints on the tourist

circuit, depicted on maps sold on street corners or pointed out by the guides of tour companies with top-down vehicles that allow for great snapshots of fellow passengers' elbows and heads, and possibly a cock-eyed slice of roofline over a privacy hedge: "... under that Mediterranean-style roof is the pink house that Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne sold to Christina Aguilera after their reality-TV show run ...." Be prepared for a lot of black entrance gates (Ringo Starr's, Ellen DeGeneres') and then click like mad when you get to Jackie Collins' unimpeded, modern white mansion, which she designed herself. The "raunchy moralist" (Louis Malle's words) has been known to proffer a friendly greeting to bypassing tourists who manage to catch her at "presentable" moments. But if you see someone in sweats and a pony tail acting like a maid, perhaps picking up mail, remember this is the land of make-believe where things (and people) are not always as they seem. ■



The former home of Jackie Chan.



Jackie Collins' House



In Beverly Hills, where juice diets and cleanses are as ubiquitous as the stars themselves, pressed juices of every variety are dispensed from an ATM-style juice machine 24 hours a day.



# BEVERLY HILLS



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City passes can be purchased at [www.citypass.com](http://www.citypass.com) or in-person at any member attraction.

### Beverly Hills Conference & Visitors Bureau

This is the city's primary marketing organization. The company initiates creative strategies to promote travel and tourism and provides visitors with information on local restaurants, hotels, shops and attractions.

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