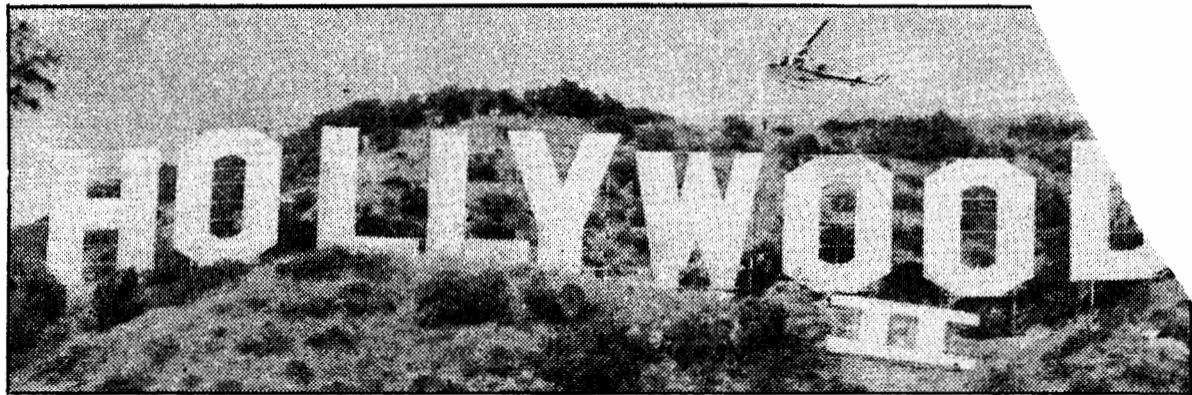


LEVEL



Hollywood sign has seen many changes — the latest promoted civic revitalization.

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Follow that car for the solution to mystery of Hollywood Hills

BY CHARLES LOCKWOOD

Special to The Globe and Mail

LOS ANGELES, Calif.

IF ANY SINGLE topographical feature symbolizes Los Angeles, it is the Hollywood Hills. This mountain ridge provides a dramatic backdrop for such well-known landmarks as the Hollywood sign and the Griffith Observatory, and it divides sprawling coastal Los Angeles proper and the inland San Fernando Valley.

Despite their inescapable presence, the Hollywood Hills remain a mystery to many Angelenos — and to even more visitors — because of the winding hillside roads and confusing deadends. But for people who

know exactly which streets to follow, the Hollywood Hills are a wonderland of handsome homes — many owned by celebrities, dramatic views of the city below, and rustic canyons and hillsides that look like they are in remote countryside rather than in the middle of the second-largest city in the United States.

The best place to start a Hollywood Hills driving tour is the intersection of Sunset Boulevard and Sunset Plaza Drive in West Hollywood. Turn onto Sunset Plaza Drive and head up into the hills, past 1930s and 1940s Colonial-style houses, colorful flower gardens, and stands of palm trees.

Keep driving higher into the hills until Sunset Plaza Drive ends at the intersection of Crescent and Wonderland avenues, about five kilometres from Sunset Boulevard. Park your car and gaze down on sprawling Los Angeles.

Before returning to your car for the drive through Laurel Canyon, admire the line of eucalyptus trees along unpaved Wonderland Avenue. Like so many trees and shrubs that appear to be Southern California natives, the eucalyptus is an import — in this instance, from Australia in the mid-nineteenth century. When several eucalyptus trees stand together, they give off a wonderful fragrance, and their flat leaves produce a delightful sound.

For the secret back entrance to Laurel Canyon, drive down Wonderland Avenue. With its narrow roads and picturesque cottages often hidden by foliage, Laurel Canyon is like an enchanted glen, where you might expect to find hobbits or — this being Hollywood — the Seven Dwarfs.

Actually, Laurel Canyon has always attracted the freethinking and free-spirited, such as Harry Houdini in the 1920s, actor Robert Mitchum who was arrested here for marijuana possession in 1948, and singer Frank Zappa in the 1960s. Today, its residents are often artists, actors and actresses on the way up, leftover hippies, singers, as well as Timothy Leary and former California governor Jerry Brown.

Follow Wonderland Avenue all the way down the hill to Laurel Pass Avenue, where you turn left and head uphill to Mulholland Drive, deservedly one of the most fabled streets in Los Angeles. Running along the crest of the Hollywood Hills, it offers breathtaking views of chaparral-covered hillsides and Los Angeles on one side and the flat expanse of the San Fernando Valley on the other.

Continue on until Mulholland Drive passes Laurel Canyon Boulevard, find Torreyson Place on the right, proceed for a hundred metres or so, and carefully park your car on the side of the road. Look to your right and somewhat to the rear. Can you find the Malin Chemosphere

house that rises from the hillside like a giant mushroom? Actually, the Chemosphere house is an eight-sided saucer that sits on a single concrete post, which was architect John Lautner's highly original way of using this striking location without bulldozing the hillside in order to provide enough flat space for a conventionally designed dwelling. Residents reach the house by way of a tram that runs from the garage area at the bottom of the hill to the front door.

On the hillside to the right stands Errol Flynn's former residence. In the open land closer to the road, you can see the white wooden guest cottage which was the scene of the gambling and drinking the actor so vividly described in *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*.

After several more curves in the road, you can frequently look down on the Hollywood Freeway and central Hollywood.

Once you cross an old concrete bridge over the Hollywood Freeway, turn left at the stop sign onto Lake Ridge Place, turn right on Wonder View and proceed through a secluded undeveloped canyon. When you drive up the first hill and reach a T-intersection, turn right and continue along Wonder View, thereby avoiding Tareco Drive. At the next intersection, which is Y-shaped, turn left and head up the hill to another T, where you turn right, still continuing along Wonder View.

At the next stop sign, go around the ivy-planted traffic circle and continue straight ahead on Wonder View. At the next stop sign, turn right and stay on Wonder View, then make an immediate right on Lake Hollywood Drive. Now you see the Lake Hollywood Reservoir below, plus the 1930s dam that supposedly broke in the movie *Earthquake*.

Follow Lake Hollywood Drive around the eastern edge of the reservoir, then turn left on Tahoe Drive. At the first stop sign, turn right on Canyon Lake Drive. At the top of the hill, you come to a Y intersection. Turn left on Mulholland Highway.

Looming ahead on a chaparral-covered hillside is the Hollywood sign, which symbolizes Hollywood — perhaps, all Los Angeles — better than any other landmark. Constructed in 1923 at a cost of \$21,000, the sign originally read Hollywoodland because it advertised a stylish subdivision by that name in nearby Beachwood Canyon.

After the Second World War, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce removed the "land" from the hillside, but by the 1970s the original sheet metal sign was falling apart. The Hollywood sign was rebuilt in steel and concrete. On Nov. 11, 1978, it was dedicated in true show-business style as searchlights scanned the darkened skies.