

May/June 2003

Casual Living

THE SAN FERNANDO VALLEY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE



NOHO ARTS DISTRICT

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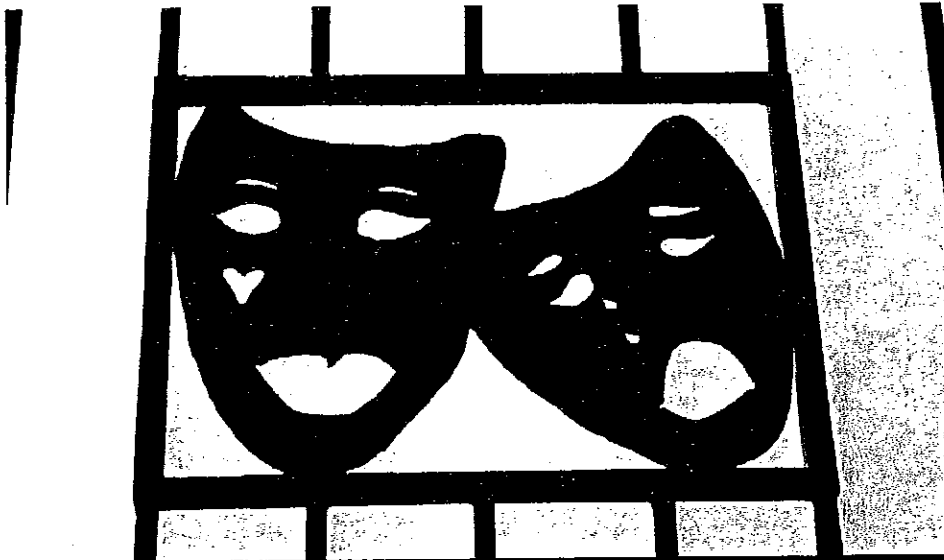
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NOHOLLYWOOD

ARTS DISTRICT

By Charlene Worthley

Searching the web for the history of North Hollywood, the paucity of information leads one to believe that the city has no history. Perhaps that is because she has turned her back on her past, and like many in Tinseltown is pinning her hopes on the invention of a new and glorious future.

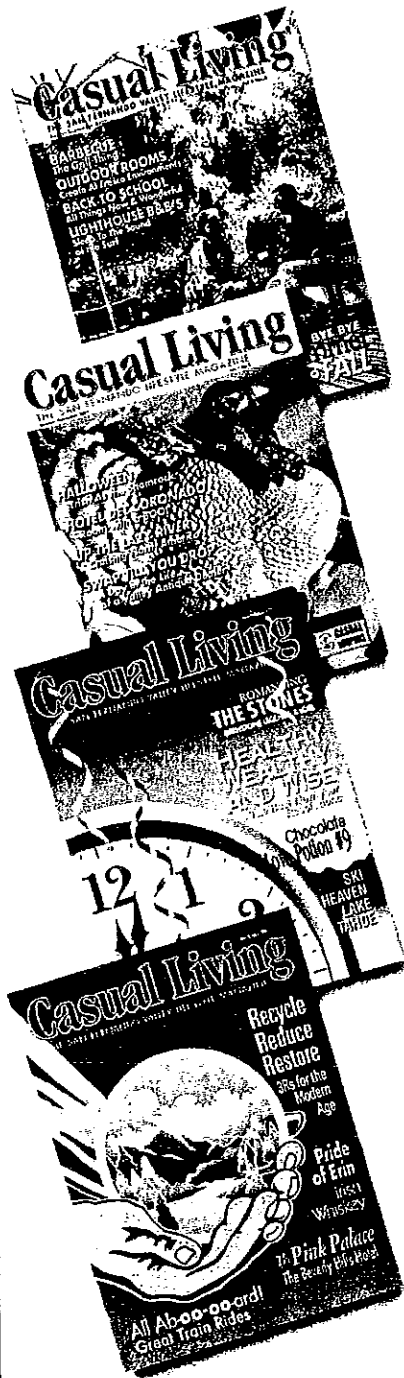


Theatre, in all its many forms is the heart and soul of the NoHo Arts District.

In the Fifties and Sixties, North Hollywood provided low-cost housing for workers at the nearby Lockheed and General Motors plants, among other area industries. The plants closed, industry moved on, and North Hollywood remained a sleepy community, now prized for its proximity to the local movie studios. There were neighborhoods filled with attractive homes and well-kept yards, but there were other less attractive areas as well. Lankershim Boulevard, for example, was a place one frequented only in search of cars or auto parts. As the vicinity of Lankershim and Magnolia grew increasingly unsavory, families sold and moved away to protect their children from drugs and crime. With the creation of the NoHo Arts District, however, The California Redevelopment Agency hopes to bring them back, first for the nightlife and eventually for the full flowering of the district's renaissance.

A mile square, NoHo has been called L.A.'s "First and Only Arts and Theater District." The intersection of Lankershim and Magnolia Boulevards is the hub of NoHo, which extends to Chandler on the north, Camarillo to the south, and

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Cahuenga and Tujunga east and west. For years, small theaters drawn by the low rents had been springing up in the area, and in an attempt to capitalize on that fact, in 1992 the City of Los Angeles dubbed the neighborhood NoHo. The dream was born.

The similarity to the name SoHo, that in New York City is synonymous with hip, trendy, and artsy, cannot be overlooked. But there is a marked difference between the two. While SoHo is filled with art galleries, NoHo is filled with theaters. There are now more than twenty professional theaters in the area, as well as a handful of art galleries, boutiques, vintage clothing shops, and a variety of restaurants and cafes, ranging from the tried and true neighborhood landmark, Sitton's Diner on Magnolia, to the utterly outrageous Tokyo Delve's on Lankershim.

When speaking of theaters in L.A., 'small' does not by any means imply secondary. Quite the contrary. According to the rules of the stage actors' union, Actors Equity, professionals are barred from performing for less than union scale wages in houses seating more than 99 patrons. Theaters seating smaller audiences are granted an exemption by the union and known as "99-seat waiver houses." What relevance does this bit of arcane information have for you, the theater lover? It means that you can see some of the finest professional actors, performing in plays for the love of the art at ticket prices that will not blow your monthly budget.



Guitar-strumming Mark Twain, the slave Jim, and Huck Finn in the Deaf West Tony Award-winning musical "Big River" ----- Photo: Ed Krieger

Actors' Alley, always a favorite with Angelenos hungry for good theater, evolved into The Company Rep, and relocated to NoHo. John Rubenstein's Interact Theater Group is there, and the venerable Actors Forum Theater, in existence since 1975, raised its curtain in NoHo in 1994. Deaf West Theatre, where actors perform in both spoken English and American Sign Language, has been so successful that its production of "Big River" was presented at The Mark Taper and is now heading for Broadway. The roster of NoHo's theaters is extensive, the performances are varied and exceptional, and in the economic scheme of things theater is the ticket that promises Noho will have a long run as L.A.'s foremost arts district.

Though not nearly as replete with art galleries as New York's Soho, NoHo has also been discovered by the visual arts crowd. In the handful of galleries that have so far set up shop, the crown jewel is The Lankershim Arts Center. The aluminum-clad neo-modern structure that originally housed DWP administration offices has

been declared a historic site. The Center offers art classes and acting classes, and holds a monthly juried show open to local artists. It is also home to the Road Theatre Company.

Looking for something original and a tad off-beat to wear to the next NoHo opening night? It's a fair bet you'll find just the thing at one of the vintage clothing emporiums lining Magnolia. Perhaps you are driven to redecorate. NoHo Modern will fulfill your retro sixties desires; Magart offers reproductions of Spanish colonial furniture and sacred art; Emanuele's House of Iron has a selection of the most amazing and intricate wrought iron work you will ever see, and if you can't find exactly what you're seeking, they will happily design a piece to order.

Okay, you say, theater, visual arts, acting and fine art classes, fashion, home furnishings, and good eats all wrapped up in a 21st century Bohemian atmosphere. Is this enough to lure people back to North Hollywood? And just what does NoHo's future hold?

In 1975, the Los Angeles City Council passed a twenty-year community master plan that called for the Community Redevelopment Agency to take a major role in rehabilitating the area. This planned regeneration came about at the urging of local business and theater owners and is supported by the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. According to North Hollywood project manager Lillian Burkenheim, the CRA built 1,800 housing units and renovated 900 more. In 1992, the official designation, NoHo Arts District, was coined, just in time for the economic downturn of the 90's and the Northridge quake (1994). The entire project seemed to stall, and even the most optimistic wondered if the NoHo dream would ever be realized.

The inconveniences entailed by the construction of the Metropolitan Transit Authority North Hollywood subway stop didn't help the ambience; but the MTA station, which opened in 2000, now links North Hollywood with points as far away as downtown Los Angeles and the Santa Clarita Valley. The CRA then turned its concentration to making pedestrian improvements along Lankershim near the subway stop, and has commissioned local artists to create attractive street-scaping. In addition, the CRA is buying property adjacent to developer Jerry Snyder's \$218 million dollar project, NoHo Commons, which will begin construction in September of this year. The NoHo Commons will cover 16.7 acres next to the metro stop, and encompass office space, residential units, retail, community spaces, and eight additional acres that will go to the Los Angeles Unified School District for a new school.

Just the other day, I saw further refurbishing and face-lifting in progress. Michael Hoffner, of Emanuele's House of Iron, sees all of the new projects as exciting signs of things to come. Will the regentrification be enough to bring people back to North Hollywood? Local business owners have a wait-and-see attitude, but they are convinced that once NoHo's new look lures the curious into its environs, the Arts District's many attractions will keep visitors returning again and again.



SUSHI PARTY

The neon jukebox over the entrance to Tokyo Delve's Sushi is a clue. This place rocks. Inside, a wall of sound hits like a tsunami. The staff wear headsets. So they can hear each other? No, the sets are remote p.a.s. These people are all talented performers, and the show's as much a part of the dining experience as the food.

The next thing that strikes you about this very hip sushi joint is the color - lots of lights everywhere, flashing, blinking, pulsing. Then you see the motion. Wait staff, sushi chefs, busboys, and patrons all dancing - on the floor, on the chairs and tables - all to the beat of relentless rock 'n roll and wild cheering from staff and patrons alike. Karaoke sushi masters, chorus lines of dancing-prancing-singing waiters, and tunes that segue wildly from rock to Latin to rap.

Okay, it's wild, raucous and truly cool, but is the food good? YES! Want yellowtail sashimi and a California roll? You can get that, but why be timid? We asked one of the experts to choose, and we dined like gods.

Our meal started with perfect tempura - exquisite shrimp, and an unusual mix of veggies, mushrooms, potatoes, carrots and asparagus. This was followed by beef teriyaki. The meat was tender, marinated in a piquant sauce, and lightly grilled. Then came the sushi. Cracked pepper-crust. Seared Ahi, followed by The Fireball - slices of avocado-jalapeno salmon rolls surrounding a flaming mini-volcano (not kidding) - and the amazing Spicy Sushi Plate. This is an enormous, eye-beguiling, tastebud-boggling assortment of spicy rolls and spicy sushi. The tempura ice cream with chocolate raspberry sauce dessert was almost anticlimactic. We arrived thinking we could nibble and run. No. For a full two hours, we sipped sake, plowed through plates of perfect sushi, karaoke'd like Nipponese CEOs, and boogied in the aisles.

The original Delve's was in Tokyo. Its American incarnation opened in North Hollywood 17 years ago when NoHo was nowhere. A few words with Tokyo Delve himself revealed the secret of his success. The man loves sushi. "The sushi is basic," he asserts. "The fish has to be perfect. Everything else is extra." Yes and yes again!

Tokyo Delve's has three seatings Mon-Sat, at 6-8-10PM. Reservations needed. Ask for the sushi bar and prepare to be blown away. 5239 Lankershim Boulevard. 818-766-3868.

NOHO AT A GLANCE

THEATER

Theaters abound in NoHo, many housing more than one acting company.

Actors Forum Theatre, 10855 Magnolia Blvd. 818-508-0600

Actors Workout Studio, 4735 Lankershim Blvd. 818-506-3903

The Antaeus Company, 4916 Vineland Ave. 818-506-5436

Bitter Truth Theatre, 11050 Magnolia Blvd. 818-755-7900

Company Rep at American Renegade Theatre, 11136 Magnolia Blvd. 818-506-7550

The Creative Center, 11223 1/2 Magnolia Blvd. 818-763-0323

Deaf West Theatre, 5112 Lankershim Blvd. 818-762-2773

Lonny Chapman's Group Repertory Theatre, 10900 Burbank Blvd. 818-760-936

Interact Theater Company, 5215 Bakman Ave. 818-773-7862

NoHo Actors' Studio, 5215 Lankershim Blvd. 818-990-2324

Raven Playhouse, 5233 Lankershim Blvd. 818-509-9519

The Road Theatre Company, 5108 Lankershim Blvd. 818-761-8838

Secret Rose Theatre, 11246 Magnolia Blvd. 818-766-3691

Theater Tribe at El Portal Theatre, 5267 Lankershim Blvd. 818-763-3232

Theatre Unlimited, 10943 Camarillo St. 818-771-7330

Whitmore-Lindley Theatre Center, 11006 Magnolia Blvd. 818-761-0704

Zombie Joe's Underground Theatre, 4850 Lankershim Blvd. 818-202-4120

SHOPPING

Whether you're seeking home furnishings, a wardrobe or rare books, expect surprises.

Age of Innocence: Day-glo 70s duds. 11054 Magnolia Blvd. 818-980-0462

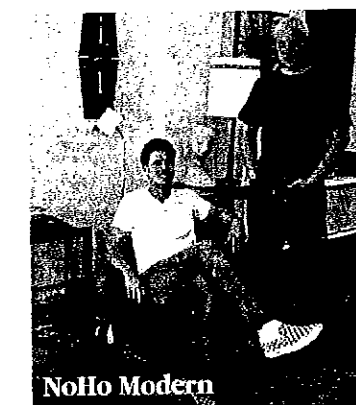
Alice & Annie: Frills for shabby chic gals. 10056 Magnolia Blvd. 818-761-6085

Emanuele's House of Iron: Heavy metal creations. 5245 Lankershim Blvd. 818-753-5670

Halloween Town: Costumes plus. 5229 Lankershim Blvd. 818-509-0757

Illiad Book Shop: Used, rare and collectible books. 4820 Vineland Ave. 818-509-2665

Magart: Spanish Colonial Furnishings & Art. 11221 Magnolia Blvd. 818-755-3904



NoHo Modern: Furnishings from the 50s & 60s. 11225 Magnolia Blvd. 818-505-1297

Ragtime Cowboy: Vintage clothing. 5515 Lankershim Blvd. 818-769-6552

Someone Else's: Vintage Hawaiian & surf styles 11024 Magnolia Blvd. 818-761-6627

VaVoom: Fashions for the funky fem. 5219 Lankershim Blvd. 818-769-8700

ART GALLERIES

The Arts Coalition: Underground/alternative art. 5227 Lankershim Blvd. 818-506-0938

Chandler Outdoor Gallery: 10-blocks of murals and other art by 19 local artists.

The Judith Kaufman Gallery: Work by Los Angeles Visual Artists (LAVA), a group of traditionally schooled fine artists from the NoHo Arts District. El Portal Theatre, 5269 Lankershim Blvd. 818-508-4200

The Lankershim Art Gallery: Painting, photography, sculpture, and mixed media by local artists. 5108 Lankershim Blvd. 818-766-0529

NoHo Art Gallery: 5007 Lankershim Blvd. 818-755-0020

The Sunny Meyer Gallery: Fine Art and restoration studio. 11223 Magnolia Blvd. 818-985-6630

EATS

Eagle's Coffee Pub: Coffee and news. 5231 Lankershim Blvd. 818-760-4214

Eclectic Café: Classic CA fare. Sandwiches, salads, risotto and pasta. 5156 Lankershim Blvd. 818-760-2233

Ned's On Magnolia: Open for lunch and dinner. 11108 Magnolia Blvd. 818-760-4787

Pit Fire Pizza Company: Not your granny's pizza. Also sandwiches and salads. 5211 Lankershim Blvd. 818-980-2949

Sitton's NoHo Diner: Old-fashioned home cooking in a 50s atmosphere. 11139 Magnolia Blvd. 818-761-5541

Tokyo Delve's Sushi Bar: Disco sushi. 5239 Lankershim Blvd. 818-766-3668

OTHER

The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, at its new location since 1991, is the home of the Emmy awards. Visit the outdoor Hall of Fame Plaza, featuring a larger-than life sculpture of the Emmy Award and bronze statues of America's favorite TV stars, including Jack Benny and Lucille Ball. 5220 Lankershim Blvd.