

H O L L Y W O O D

—most beautiful suburb of America's most famous residential city, set amid charming scenery where the mountains blend into the plain, blessed with all-the-year sunshine, fanned by ocean breezes, surrounded by one of the most fertile regions of the world, and peopled by men and women who appreciate and demand the best of everything in their community life, invites the stranger and sojourner of like mind with them to make his home here where nature and civilization have united to produce ideal living conditions.

DEEP WATER IS DARK AND FULL OF PEACE—It was at the close of February 1914 that California state government agencies surveyed all of Los Angeles County after three days of catastrophic flooding, and estimated an excess of ten million dollars in damages. Legislature quickly formed the LA County Flood Control District, which spent the next three years systematically terraforming the soppy county—draining creeks and brooks, backfilling them with busted boxcars and plastered film set-pieces. Ancient ceremonial mounds, now in the way of a fantasy downtown, get pancaked, creating makeshift valleys that will one day host purse shops, pilates studios, and yogurtoriums. Very few lomas survived. Prehistoric marshlands covering a hundred thousand acres with tall, sharp, golden grasses were given the old concrete treatment, rolled over, and turned into the boulevard of the Cienega. And, for all their destructive efforts, the developers still had to come to terms with the everlasting simple truth that Los Angeles County proper was, is, and forever shall be, a desert. The small ranching community of Los Feliz borders Hollywood to the east at Van Ness Avenue, which includes areas known today as Silver Lake, a significant chunk of Griffith Park, and the desert oasis. The Feliz familia was among the first Spanish descendants to put down roots in the Southland, choosing this temperate, rocky landscape to stripe with citrus orchards and dot with banana tree groves. The rancherias were built from repurposed Tongva/Gabrielinos villages ... er ... inherited when Spanish Governor Pedro Fages deeded this purdy parcel to José Vincente Feliz in 1795. Alas, many decades of quick-drawing and digging have made this plot ripe for reconstructive surgery, so Los Feliz gets a major bioturbation to meet

the growing demand for a landing zone—a shopping stop-off for those commuting between the hills and flats of Beverly, and that calcifying pearl downtown.

Near Hyperion Avenue, where Tracy and Monon Streets helix together, Sacatella Creek once snaked between rolling lomas all the way to the main branch of the Ballona Creek, pacing Fairfax Avenue into Ballona Bay before finally feeding into the Pacific. Sacatella Creek will soon be slabbed over and gain recognition as the LA River. Wise men once gathered at the intersection of St. George Street & Rowena Avenue, where the waters of knowledge sprang from a natural springhead that the Tongva/Gabrielinos believed summoned forth spirit animals into our world beyond the fissure. The custodians sowed and reaped the land before new decorative vegetation was planted in 1910. The spirit animal faucet was capped, redirecting water into a youth fountain that cuts a timid channel through an anointed section of Ferndell, down the hill toward Los Feliz Boulevard, where it quietly rejoins the groundwater table. Sheesh. The Tongva/Gabrielinos will take none of the credit, but all of the blame.

It is going to rain, rain more, and flood in 1917, so L.A. had better be prepared. The Flood Control District has installed nearly twenty major storm drains that all feed floodwaters into the 48-mile concrete channel, the Los Angeles River. A series of concrete and steel cubes and sheets, floating on buried creeks and redirected rivulettes. Under the futile threat of outdoor malls, or high schools, or animation studios, the water swears that it will find a way unless handled. Enough of that, let's get away from this whirlpool and move west, inching into Hollywood, at the intersection to be home to the Vista Theatre once this corner develops into a convergence of the two famous boulevards: Sunset and Hollywood. The Vista will eat up the corner in a building that houses offices, one of which becomes Edward Davis Wood's first production headquarters. Today, on the hottest day so far in August of 1919, there is no theatre or bustling boulevards, only a trickling stream

running the length of a modest Temple Avenue. There is the elephant in the city—the rotting set from D.W. Griffith’s *colossal spectacle, Intolerance*. Production wrapped in 1916, and much of the massive structures have been left to spoil into a quarter mile of jagged crud, anointed in dirt and horse shit and bug legs, pieces crumbling against the tropical backdrop after holding out as long as possible. What remains doubles as a shelter; a sanctuary for a dozen depraved and infirm, the hopeless and lost, homeward-bound. The 2x4 ribs splinter under the ply skins, creating a canopy or blanket for some to sleep under. Here come the boys in blues. The ragged foreman chalks shards and marks, indicating what is to be broken down, dismantled, and destroyed by the arriving crew of work-release prisoners. It takes 30 destitute men, two entirely dirty days of blowing up shit, tearing shit down, hacking massive chunks into tinder sticks to set ablaze. They are soiled harbingers; creators of endless pasts. At the close of the second day during the criminal round-up, some spooked officers discover that two inmates are, uh, *unaccounted for*.

Every affluent American community of the West needs an equally alluring putting green, something to make Tubal Caine proud, maybe even a little jealous. Jog a 3.5-mile zig-zag southwest to arrive at the Los Angeles Country Club, where Rossmore Avenue and Temple Street cross. Although the club is open to the public, it will take another three years to complete construction of the links, creating California’s first double 18-hole golf course. For the time being, the courses are bisected by a shallow lake that, since the end of the war last November, has become a stagnant wetland left to swell atop the groundwater table while some suits propose and finance solutions. The coveted fairway poses the most significant and immediate problems, one of which is the 100-yard section of exposed creek that cuts through it. It is abundantly clear that a herculean sponging-up effort is necessary. And, so it be done by thy city’s blessing, great numbers of greasy men arrive in hulking hydraulic machines, thirsty to steadily drink down the marsh

until only a modest creek remains to trickle across and then eventually alongside Temple Avenue until being driven into submission under the soil. They tip the groundwater table up and down all along Temple Avenue as holes are poked and things are buried.

The Los Angeles Country Club golf course opened to game-starved club members in August 1921. Today's roster promises remarkable matches on this virgin emerald fairway, where you'll remember a shallow lake once was. If you stand near that ruddy trench separating the jockeys from lackies, you'll spy a silver sliver sipping daylight before digging back under the cover of freshly plotted sod. The golfers, junior Jesuses, every last one, are essentially walking on water. After a heated match, a formal dinner on a tented lawn is held near the Clubhouse. 400 guests eat and dance. The entire event is filmed.

It is October 18, 1922, opening night of Sid Grauman's Egyptian Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard :: NOW SHOWING :: *Douglas Fairbanks in Robin Hood*. Grauman hired designers Meyer & Holler only several months back to dream up a Mediterranean-themed interior, but, for reasons unknown, the décor duo made an eleventh-hour executive decision to change the entire design—from floor to ceiling, projection booth to restroom stall—to an ancient Egyptian ruin, complete with plaster pillars and polystyrene gods. And wouldn't you know it, by a dumb stroke of blind luck, Meyer and Holler's stupidly optimistic moment of design intervention is validated five weeks later, when on the afternoon of November 26, 1922, archeologist Howard Carter discovers the nearly completely intact tomb of King Tutankhamun. Carter had searched the Valley of the Kings for three years before uncovering the find of the century. Tut's bougie booty sets off a North American facelift—*Egyptomania*, it's called. Boring, flat urban apartment spiced up their facades by affixing all kinds of Egyptian thingees over entryways and arches. Where once Spanish tile greeted tenants, now instead is a cartoonishly carved winged disk with a Sumerian god zooming around in the salad bowl. Bodega owners rub

doorknobs down with scented oils. Movie stars are mummified in celluloid, embalmed by the plastic arts. All this ancient ballyhoo and this theatre well ahead of the culture curve; how very fortuitous for Sid Grauman.

We have driven two hours north to arrive at the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes in San Luis Obispo. Miles and miles of the coastline are rimmed with rolling mounds of silica. It is here in 1923 that Cecil DeMille utilized the desolate desert to construct the biggest film set ever for *The Ten Commandments*; Paul Irbe's art direction required the enormous efforts of 600 craftsmen. Half a million feet of lumber filled the space, plastered over with 250 tonnes of white minerals. It's been a rough shoot, and this desert getaway didn't work out quite like he intended. The desert sun has turned DeMille's brain to mush over the prolonged shoot, and now after principal photography has wrapped, and full-blown paranoia has set-in, he has but one commandment of his own; dynamite the entire 800-foot wide, 110-foot tall set to molecules—assuring beyond any shadow of doubt, that not one of those two-bit, wannabe talentless goons looking to steal his every creative fart—tucked into the smokey back booth of Musso and Franks—not a single one of them will get the chance to rob DeMille of his greatest achievement, nor to reduce his trademark to a fad. And so it was, the *City of the Pharaoh* was blasted to smithereens, leaving men and diggers to shovel tonnes of sand over dismembered plaster pharaohs, chalk pillars, and papier mache hieroglyphs. From a loma off the highway, a perched spy documents the processional, transcribing coordinates and computations onto the sleeve of his dress shirt. He backs off into the darkness, moving soft-footed and undetected as a mynx on a bed of pine needles.

Tinsel Town's population exploded tenfold in the first decade, growing to over 60,000 residents, and in 20 years, over 1.5 million souls call Los Angeles home. The motion picture industry thrives here and has advanced in both technology and social value, with the eighth art evolving from the world of two-reelers and penny arcades into features

and movie palaces. Overnight growth leads to the west portion of Temple Avenue gaining its own identity: Beverly Avenue. (*Beverly*, Old English; *a beaver stream*.) A crew of surveyors lines the new avenue, moving in unison like a flock of pigeons in search of abandoned fried mozzarella sticks. Each surveyor falls in line behind the last; the leader sets out ahead. The trailing tribe inputs measurements and data, and the leader shouts back at them as he shakes dowsing rods, witching away in search of Mother Nature's mainline. At this rate, if they continue due east, they'll find it quickly swaps identities first with a small segment of Virgil Avenue, before forking into Temple Street and Silver Lake Boulevard. Walking the paved path would effectively demonstrate that many Los Angeles streets are shaped and vibrate as a silk ribbon dropped on the floor, lying atop the natural flow of rivulets. All avenues and boulevards feed into the Los Angeles River, seeping into the Pacific Ocean at a spot the natives called Balona Bay. The ontology of the word *balona* is little more than mythos. Gabreilinos and Tongva's stories point to the spill-out being a port for beluga whales, a rest stop along their 3,000-mile journey to new waters.

In May of 1927, there it is, written clear as crystal in the *Los Angeles Times* for hooch-mover-cum-wireman E.L. Smith to read aloud at the breakfast table—*BEVERLY BLVD. Major cor. Beverly & La Cienega. Cor. Beverly & Laurel. Must be sold. Make offer, Mr. BENSON, WHitney 1138*. The paper crinkles loudly under Smith's thumb when he turns the page over to judge his family's reaction to his proposal. In mid-June, Smith submits an offer, and Mr. Benson accepts, and no sooner does the deed ink dry than Smith gets the jump on this landmark-making industry looming over SoCal. Smith submits plans to the city, illustrating his intent to erect the largest structure on Beverly Boulevard; a giant brick and steel chocolate box that will consume the northwest corner of Beverly and Laurel Avenues, a combination of retailers and hotel rooms, essentially two 55'x55' blocks flanked by an eight-foot-wide vestibule housing a set of stairs that lead up to a

mezzanine. By midsummer, the Los Angeles Municipal greenlights Smith’s schematics (which fail to incorporate the wireman’s intention to add four stories soon before evolving city codes circumscribe any skyward ambition—a three-story cap is to be placed on all structures, preventing the growing Hollywood cityscape from blocking views of Mount Wilson and criss-crossing arclights).

DEPARTMENT OF BUILDING AND SAFETY

Application for the Erection of Buildings
CLASS “C”

Lot No.....352.....No. of Rooms.....No. of Families.....
Purpose of Building...Store...+...Hotel.....
Owner’s name.....E.L. Smith.....
Owner’s address.....2708.....So...Vermont.....
Architect’s name.....Eric....Black.....
Contractor’s name.....E...L...Smith.....
TOTAL VALUATION OF BUILDING \$....37,500.....
Size of proposed building....55.48....x.118.6.....feet
Lot size..56x120...No. of stories...2...Highest point...31.6”...
Foundation...Concrete.....Floors.....wood....Roof...compo.....
Material of exterior walls.....Brick.... interior walls...plaster.

PERMIT NO.

22788 [crayon check mark]

APPROVED!

America dried up like an old maid seven years ago, and now stricken with the itch, Smith is off to the races building his Hollywood speakeasy cake-topper. After two weeks of construction, Smith makes several amendments to the municipality-approved schematics, petitioning for a *basement enlargement* for a basement that, by all accounts, doesn't exist. This sub-structure has not been officially recognized in any building documents. The floor rests eleven feet below street level; the plans indicate expanding the floor plan with a five-foot-by-seven-foot addition and a small shower area. SoCal builders are not in the habit of building such subterranean quarters, much less one in the footprint of a swelling rivulet displaced by a country club up the road. We've already discussed at length the unique situation Los Angeles finds itself in; no matter how much paving one does, *dino pee pee* is forever. Anyway, *enlarge basement. Install sidewalk door. Substitute stud partition for brick.* In July of 1927, dry agents from the Venice sheriff's office blitzed a roadhouse in that county. Flasks and bottles vaporize, but twenty not-so-magical whisky runners get busted for illegal *transportation*. E.L. Smith is among the unfortunate bootleggers caught red-legged. The D.A.'s office confiscated Smith's automobile, and he will likely spend a handful of days in pokey, all for selling three pints nearly a decade into Prohibition. Before the big shakedown ended, officers kicked over hundreds of gallons of hooch, spilling alcohol rivulettes out, quenching the dirt.

At the start of 1928, after months of schematic amendments and hooch runnin' run-ins, fragments of a structure pull together to form a stucco box that eclipses the northwest intersection of Beverly and Laurel avenues. The build is two stories; 21 rooms are allocated for use as a workshop, hotel, and stores, with a footprint on land and in the air totaling 13,446 square feet. At its core it is reinforced brick, skimmed with a flawless stucco job—tinted in the fashionable colors popular around the affluent and beauty-conscious neighborhood—soft pinks, greens, blues, and yellows—Once, I received a postcard from an ugly

cousin; the front was a gouache painting of a canoe rowing upriver to a Spanish colonial mud hotel with tall, warm, show-through windows lining the second floor, everything overlooking the busy waterway below. One might be struck with the same sentiment standing across the beaver stream, taking in the myriad colors washing over the building as beams of setting sunlight graze it unobstructed, turning the evening pastels neon in the twilight. Smith is far from finished and decides to convert a few closets into a hallway and install a shower and toilet for use by men only, of course. Oh, and there's that little matter of marking skylights in place on plans that already have stamped approval. I hope this will not be an issue in a few decades ...

Some peculiarities surround the physical mailing address. Its facade runs 55 feet down Beverly Boulevard, with two entrances; the main center gate is 8053 and accounts for the entire second floor. 8055 is at the farthest-west corner of the building and is a partitioned single unit. The east wall of the building runs from the corner of Beverly Boulevard, down Laurel Avenue 118 feet, which exposes five entrances; 8051 Beverly Blvd. takes up a significant portion of the first floor, and then four doors trail leading to similar but smaller units; 301, 303, 305, 307 of Laurel Avenue. Turning the corner down the alley, the building's rear is latticed with a fire escape system staggering from the rooftop down to a single large reinforced door at the west end of the wall, a steel gateway leading from the alley directly underground, where most of our second part is to take place, but let's not put the cart before the horse:

Application checked and found O. K. 1/16/28

HOTEL

Purpose of Building presently? STORE & APT BLDG

HOTEL

Purpose of Building hereafter? STORE & APT BLDG

STATE EXACTLY WHAT ALTERATIONS WILL BE MADE TO THIS BUILDING: *ADDITION OF WORKROOM ON LOWER ROOF. AND ELEVATOR ROOM ON UPPER ROOF.* **Addition size? 35 x 26 Application checked and found O.K. 1/28/28**

Apr. 14—\$100,000 WAS SPENT ON THIS NEW BEVERLY BUILDING—The new E.L. Smith Building at Beverly and Laurel is said to be the largest business structure on the boulevard west of Melrose. With the announcement that the new Smith Building, erected for \$100,000 and located at the corner of Beverly boulevard and Laurel avenue, is completed, E.L. Smith & Sons, owners and builders, and electrical contractors formerly of Huntington Park, are planning to occupy their new home on May 1. The new Smith Building is one of the most unique in Southern California; it is a class-A structure, reinforced brick with stucco covering, tinted in various rainbow colors in keeping with the beauty of the elaborate residences of the fashionable Beverly district. Plans were drawn up by Eric Black, architect, with the view of making the building one of the finest structures, with facilities and space for offices, businesses, and apartments combined, departing abruptly from the usual type of building. Erected on the property, which affords the structure with floor space of 7000 square feet on each of its three floors, the Smith Building will undergo a few changes when the builder adds several more floors to the top. Smith intends to make the addition within the next two years with the view of having a limit-height building.

On the first day of May, the Smiths move into their new home at 317 N. Laurel Ave., which sits mere yards directly behind their \$100,000 crown jewel. E.L., as proud as he is of his architectural achievement, is eager to see a return on his sizeable investment. Until asses occupy rooms, it might as well be a pile of cow patties. Pressures from outside are coming to Smith about getting his literal underground speakeasy down and running.

higher.

The fog

and

higher,

rises higher, and

Hillyard is blot ed out west of where Beverly Avenue and Fairfax Avenue conjoin.

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