

Hollywoodland Historic Neighborhood Profile



Early days at the Hollywood Realty Office

Hollywoodland is located at the northern end of Beachwood Canyon just below Mt. Lee, neighboring Griffith Park. Twenty years after the city of Hollywood was founded, and thirteen years after Hollywood merged with Los Angeles, the Hollywoodland Realty Building was constructed in 1923, at 2700 North Beachwood Drive. Several years before Hollywoodland was established, Albert Beach had already paved the first road into

the hills in 1911, naming it Beachwood Drive. The neighborhood has retained its natural beauty over the years. The hills and canyons in Hollywoodland are still covered with sage and sumac, oak trees, eucalyptus, and poppies.

Hollywoodland was a prestigious, planned development of a 500-acre subdivision atop Beachwood Drive, known as the Sherman & Clark Ranch, by a five-member real estate syndicate. The syndicate included Harry Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*, General M.H. Sherman, (after which Sherman Oaks was named), E.P. Clark, of the original ranch on the land, and developers Sydney Woodruff and Tracy E. Shoultz. The same syndicate was known as the Title Insurance & Trust Company of Los Angeles. They intended for Hollywoodland to extend all the way to Lake Hollywood, but with the stock market crash in 1929, their plans came to a halt.

Developers Sydney Woodruff and Tracy E. Shoultz conceived of "Hollywoodland" as a neighborhood with a "superb environment without excessive cost on the Hollywood side of the hills." They hired noteworthy Spanish and Mediterranean revival architect Jon DeLario as lead architect for the development. He designed many of the original homes, most of which are still intact today. The original plan included a gated entrance, and a community center with tennis courts and a pool. Horse stables were also built in the canyon, and Hollywoodland residents could ride, English saddle, to Lake Hollywood. The developers hired and brought a team of stonemakers from Italy to Hollywoodland to complete several architectural elements for the neighborhood, including retaining walls, entry towers, and stairways winding up the canyon.



Hollywoodland during construction

The same real estate company was responsible for mounting the Hollywood sign, which eventually became Los Angeles' greatest monument. At that time, many groups opposed the development of the hills and the placement of the sign.

The developers had plans to extend Hollywoodland to the east, but these plans were cancelled once the Depression hit. Their grand plans for the community came to halt only six years after they began.

Many early film stars and other film industry players took up residence in the neighborhood, building fantasy castles that affirmed their status as Hollywood royalty. Like other parts of Los Angeles, early Hollywoodland real estate was targeted to wealthy winter visitors from the East Coast. Until the 1929 stock market crash, developers promised winter visitors that, when they returned the following year, their homes would be ready.

Great cowboy artist Charles M. Russell lived in Hollywoodland and found many subjects for his paintings in the undeveloped canyon. Painter Edward Biberman also lived in Hollywoodland in the 1950s, and sculptor Salvatore Scarpitta also lived in the neighborhood at one time. Many writers and directors have also lived in the neighborhood, such as, Herbert Biberman, who was a major figure during the McCarthy era. Writer Aldous Huxley was living on the hill on Deronda Drive, until a fire destroyed 24 homes in 1961. James M. Cain, the author of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, was a member of the community, as well.

Mack Sennett of Keystone Kop fame owned the land at the highest point of Mt. Lee. He had plans for John de Lario to design an 18-acre estate on this crest, but it was never built and the property was sold before a home was built on it. The flat top later became a radio station that is now used as a communication post.

Hollywoodland has housed numerous celebrity residents such as Doris Day, Lowell Thomas, Bela Lugosi, Melissa Manchester, Bugsy Siegel, Vincent Price, Connie Selleca, and many more. Musicians such as Peter Tork, of the Monkees, and Stan Kenton lived in Hollywoodland. In addition, Busby Berkeley lived on Beachwood in the early years, in a home now owned by Ned Beatty. Humphrey Bogart lived on Ledgewood in a Tudor mansion. Madonna took up residence in an early Hollywoodland mansion for a number of years.



An original house after construction

Hollywoodland was originally intended to be a gated community with strict architectural regulations. It was one of the first case-study real-estate developments. Initially, the development had four approved architectural styles, French Normandy, English-Tudor, Mediterranean revival, and Spanish revival. Once the developers bowed out in the 1940s, architectural restrictions were lifted and people

began to build to suit their own tastes. When land was cheap in the 1960s, numerous platform homes were built.



Hillside living means many stairways

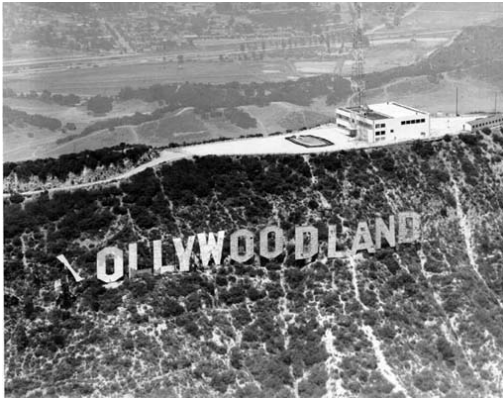
Hollywoodland, today, has a wide range of architectural styles. In the 1980s, some of the spaciousness of the area was lost when massive homes were built, overwhelming their lots. Most homes, however, are attractively situated on the hillside, which gives the neighborhood its striking character. There are a number of whimsical styles represented in the area including, vine-covered cottages, Tudor revival homes, and Normandy style castles, all of which seem as though they could have been used as movie sets when the tract was first developed.

Few, if any, homes have been converted for multi-family use over the years and the neighborhood remains upper middle class, though a wide range of ethnicities are represented.

Although no historic preservation overlay zone exists in Hollywoodland, a design review process is in effect. This Design Review board of the City of Los Angeles helps ensure that alterations and new construction are keeping within the neighborhood flavor. Hollywoodland attracts residents who generally wish to maintain the history and charm of the neighborhood.

Few homes have ever been torn down or lost, except for 54 homes that perished in the hillside fire of 1961. Almost a third of the homes in the neighborhood are original, in close to their original condition. These original houses from the 1920s and 1930s are mixed with homes that were built over the course of the twentieth century. There are many vacant lots that were plotted by the early plan.

Unfortunately, a large number of Exceptions to the Hollywoodland Specific Plan in recent years has threatened to erode the cohesive "European Village" character of the neighborhood. Most recently, a controversial Exception case along Durand Drive involved the construction of a private fence affecting City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument No. 535 -- Hollywoodland's Historic Granite Retaining Walls and Interconnecting Granite Stairs. Because the Specific Plan expressly prohibits walls and fences from being constructed on granite walls located within the public right of way, the effectiveness of this neighborhood plan has seemed increasingly in doubt. The Committee to Save the Hollywoodland Specific Plan and the preservation organization Hollywood Heritage have therefore filed a legal challenge to this approval in order to protect the integrity of the Specific Plan and the unique ambiance of this historic neighborhood.



Hollywoodland sign

The world famous 'Hollywood' sign is clearly the neighborhood's most significant landmark. The sign was actually erected as the ultimate real estate advertisement for in 1923. The sign, proposed by Harry Chandler, became the largest billboard and symbol Los Angeles in subsequent years. With thirteen 50-foot, sheet metal letters and four thousand twenty-watt bulbs proclaiming, "Holly...wood...land... Hollywoodland," the sign cost \$21,000.

The sheet metal panels were dragged up the hill by caterpillar tractors when the sign was constructed.

The Hollywood sign generated its own lore. In 1930, Peg Entwistle jumped to her death off of one of the letters. Her ghost is said to haunt the site today. It is rumored that a caretaker who was responsible for lighting the sign lived in a small cabin behind the letter 'L'.

By 1939, the sign was in a state of disrepair. The land was deeded to city of Los Angeles in 1946, though the city was not maintaining the sign at the time. In 1949, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce removed the last four letters, which had collapsed on the hillside, leaving the sign to read, "Hollywood."

The sign was declared a Historic-Cultural Monument in 1973 by the City of Los Angeles. By 1978, the sign was desperately in need of repair. Several individual sponsors came forth to fund the restoration of the sign in 1978. The Department of Parks and Recreation now owns the sign, but it is maintained by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce.



A Hollywoodland house today

In the first quarter of 2003, the lowest priced house, a two bedroom plus den and one and half bath, sold for \$584,000, while highest went for \$3.6 million. Some larger estates have sold for over \$5 million, such as, Madonna's 11,000 square- foot home. Also on the high end, Wolf's Lair recently sold for \$2.9 million, while Casa de Lilah, which was built in early 1990s, sold for \$2.5 million. There is a premium for the neighborhood's earliest homes from the 1920s, which sell for over one million. A small, early home sold for \$665,000 last year.

The Hollywoodland Homeowners' Association is the primary community group in the neighborhood. The *Hollywoodlander* is their newsletter. Beachwood Canyon Neighborhood Association covers the area below the gates. Hollywood United Neighborhood Council is another group in the area.

Who are the realtors/experts who work with historic houses in the area?

Hollywoodland Realty is still located in the original office

Rose Ware, Prudential Realtor 323-874-7150

Dia and Ray, Remax 323-461-5743

Peter Lavin, President Homeowner's Association 323-469-2457

Dino Williams, historian 323-877-3566

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