



Rachel Marlowe, “3 Newly Renovated Historic Hotels Celebrate L.A.’s Eclectic Past,” *Vogue*, August 21, 2018.

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3 Newly Renovated Historic Hotels Celebrate L.A.’s Eclectic Past

AUGUST 21, 2018 12:50 PM

by RACHEL MARLOWE



Hotel Figueroa

Photo: Courtesy of Hotel Figueroa

When it comes to culture, Los Angeles is often erroneously accused of having close to none —“I don’t want to move to a city where the only cultural advantage is being able to make a right turn on a red light” goes the famous putdown in *Annie Hall*. But a recent surge in the redevelopment of historic neighborhoods like Hollywood, South Park, and Westlake has put



the city's eclectic past back in the spotlight. Here, three buzz-worthy, newly-renovated historic properties prove that Los Angeles has long been a cultural hub.



Hotel Figueroa

Photo: Courtesy of Hotel Figueroa

Hotel Figueroa

Opened in 1926 as an exclusive women's hostel by the YWCA, Hotel Figueroa was “financed, built and operated by and for femininity,” according to a *Los Angeles Times* article at the time, and was the largest project of its kind in the United States to be financed, owned, and operated by women. Located in the South Park district of downtown L.A., the hotel was advertised as “an ideal stopping place for ladies unattended.” The first managing director was the pioneering aviatrix Maude Bouldin, and for years the space served as a meeting place for practically every woman's club in Los Angeles. Now the hotel has been restored to its original Spanish Colonial splendor by Santa Monica-based design agency Studio Collective, with a



lobby art gallery featuring a newly acquired permanent collection of all female artists. The two restaurants—one poolside—are led by Chef Casey Lane, formerly of Venice hot spot Tasting Kitchen, while the bar program is designed by the team behind bi-coastal speakeasy Employees Only. The hotel also hosts a literary collection of Los Angeles based authors, and a schedule of women-centric events that kicked off with the YWCA's annual meeting.



Villa Carlotta

Photo: Courtesy of Villa Carlotta

Villa Carlotta

Hollywood history was literally written in this former apartment building in the heart of Hollywood's Franklin Village. Built by the first major Hollywood studio head Thomas Ince and his wife Eleanor, and designed by Arthur E. Harvey—also architect of the chateau-inspired Scientology Celebrity Center across the street—Villa Carlotta played home to a host of Hollywood icons including David O. Selznick, Marion Davies, Montgomery Clift, and



gossip columnist Louella Parsons, whose write-ups were delivered to a courier from her apartment window. Legend also has it that William Randolph Hearst financed the building, which was completed in 1926, after he accidentally shot and killed Ince on his yacht in 1924 (the bullet was apparently intended for Charlie Chaplin, whom Hearst believed was having an affair with his mistress Davies). Now this ornate Churrigueresque-style historic landmark has been restored—with oversight from the Hollywood Heritage Museum and the Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources—and reborn as an extended stay “residential hotel.” No two units share the same layout, and almost all original moldings, cabinetry, sinks, doors, and windows have been preserved, a painstaking process for development company CGI. The 50 units range from studios to two bedrooms, many with Juliet balconies, wrought-iron window grilles, and views of the Hollywood sign, all with kitchens (although guests should eat breakfast at The Oaks Gourmet Market, dinner at French institution La Poubelle and have drinks at the retro-glam MiniBar like current locals Kristen Stewart, Amanda Seyfried, and Dakota Johnson). Upon its construction back in the day, the *Los Angeles Times* declared Villa Carlotta “the last word on luxury,” and with its 24-hour concierge, and roof terrace with sweeping views of Hollywood where guests can host dinner parties, the same can still be said today.

The Mayfair

Photo: Courtesy of The Mayfair

The Mayfair

This prohibition-era hotel was the tallest building west of the Mississippi River when it opened in 1926, the ballroom was the site of the first Oscar afterparty in 1929 (where stars including Joan Crawford, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and Robert Montgomery celebrated over illicit bourbon cocktails), and Raymond Chandler lived here with his mistress during the 1930s. Located in the Westlake section of downtown Los Angeles, The Mayfair has recently been restored to its Roaring '20s glory by L.A.-based Icelandic architect and interior designer Gulla Jónsdóttir, who used an original set of drawings from 1923 and '24 as inspiration. The original flooring, brass





fixtures, and fluted column pillars have all been preserved (again with the help of the Los Angeles Historical Society), juxtaposed with a splash of modern-day L.A. in the form of bold contemporary works by artists including Shepard Fairey, Geoff Melville, and Richard Mirando. Other modern additions include the Library bar—where you can order a Little Sister signature cocktail (named for Chandler’s novel “The Little Sister”) with bourbon, yellow Chartreuse, apple spice syrup and smokey bitters—Eve American Bistro (helmed by Hell’s Kitchen winner Scott Commings), and the first LA outpost of Chicago’s cult Fairgrounds Coffee and Tea Bar. There’s also a podcast studio for guests to rent and record segments. For a greater sense of the neighborhood’s Jazz Age remains, wander along 6th street, where you can eat enchiladas in one of the oldest remaining buildings on Wilshire Boulevard—the former home of property developer Charles Chapman in 1905, which is now Mexican restaurant La Parrilla—or have a steak dinner in a converted railroad dining car at the Pacific Dining Car, established in 1921.