



HOORAY
FOR
(WEST)

Hollywood

92 VIRTUOSO LIFE

Sunset Tower's pool with a view and
(right) the laid-back, leafy allure of WeHo.



THE RISING STAR OF
CALIFORNIA COOL BUZZES FROM
BRUNCH THROUGH LATE NIGHT.

BY KIMBERLEY LOVATO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE SCHMELZER



From

THE OUTSIDE, THE THREE-story mansion bordered by manicured trees looks like the setting for an epic French romance novel. But buzz through the front door of L'Eclaireur, and it's apparent you've fallen into a contemporary treasure chest. The renowned Parisian brand has displayed avant-garde fashion finds and rare furniture and design pieces since opening the first of five boutiques in 1980. But with the recent debut of its first location outside the City of Light, Meryl Hadida Shabani, cofounder and director of L'Eclaireur Los Angeles, hopes to bring something different to Southern California.

"We knew from the start that we didn't want to replicate an exact model of what we have in Paris," Hadida Shabani says of her goal to focus more on design than fashion. "The fact that we're located in the heart of West Hollywood's Design District is an added value."

Colloquially known as WeHo, West Hollywood cranks up Los

Shiny pennies: L'Eclaireur's collector-worthy home furnishings and (opposite) Colette Jewelry.







Rooftop dining at Catch LA and its truffled tuna and hamachi sashimi with caviar.

Angeles' creativity and entertainment with a well-earned reputation for "it" restaurants and celebrity-friendly night spots. Discerning shoppers know, however, that WeHo is also the city's capital of impeccable taste, and the Design District, an area orbiting the Pacific Design Center, is its heart.

More than 300 art galleries, designer showrooms, salons and spas, and alfresco dining spots flourish along Melrose Avenue, Beverly Boulevard, and other major thoroughfares. But it's the quieter streets that exude a neighborhood feel and make it not only possible, but also a pleasure, to walk in L.A. Soak in the European vibe of three tree-lined blocks on Melrose Place, where flagship boutiques of new, sophisticated jewelry and fashion labels have settled into ivy-covered storefronts. Or window-shop along Robertson Boulevard, whose celebrated arrivals, L'Eclaireur's outpost and Alexandra von Furstenberg's new emporium, add zing to an already sizzling area. If you're looking for something different in L.A.'s patchwork sprawl, WeHo nails it. As von

WEST HOLLYWOOD CRANKS UP LOS ANGELES' CREATIVITY AND ENTERTAINMENT WITH A WELL-EARNED REPUTATION FOR "IT" RESTAURANTS AND CELEBRITY-FRIENDLY NIGHT SPOTS.

Furstenberg says, "The energy around here is exciting."

SETTING THE SCENE

Primary Colors

Eyesore or eye candy? Opinions of the César Pelli-designed **Pacific Design Center** run hot to cold. Its three behemoth glass buildings – one blue, one green, one red – anchor the Design District and house showrooms from top interior designers and brands such as Mimi London and Armani Casa, Wolfgang Puck's Red Seven restaurant, and a branch of L.A.'s **Museum of Contemporary Art**. 8687 Melrose Avenue; pacificdesigncenter.com.

Storied Strand

Sunset Boulevard might run for 22 miles from downtown L.A. to the Pacific Ocean, but it's WeHo's mile-and-a-half ribbon between Hollywood and Beverly Hills, known as the **Sunset Strip**, that earns immortal status. With a rotation of fashionable shops and cafés sprinkled between legendary hotels and entertainment venues such as The Comedy Store, The Viper Room, and Whisky a Go Go, sidewalk strolling has never been more enviable.

STAY A former apartment building that housed stars such as Jean Harlow, Clark Gable, and Truman Capote, elegant **Sunset Tower Hotel** has a prominent position on the

Sunset Strip, which is visible from its curved floor-to-ceiling windows. Relax at the small pool out back or in the spa (once John Wayne's apartment). The hotel's famed Tower Bar is overseen

by maître d' Dimitri Dimitrov, who is as well known in Hollywood as the patrons who've caroused here. *Doubles from \$362, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*



Clear winners: Alexandra von Furstenberg's new flagship and (left) The Guild's fried Jidori chicken with fennel slaw.



TIP

"West Hollywood boasts several world-famous comedy clubs, where you can see the best established and up-and-coming stand-ups. For a fun night out, see a show at the **Laugh Factory**, then stop by **Pinches Tacos** a few blocks away for a late-night bite."

— Whitney Brodie, *Virtuoso* travel advisor, West Hollywood

ALL THAT GLITTERS

Haute House

"For L.A., we wanted to introduce rare and limited editions of midcentury and contemporary pieces and one-of-a-kind and made-to-order items that will surprise a client who has seen it all," says Hadida Shabani. Her parents, Ar-

mand and Martine Hadida, still travel the world in search of unknown designers and original works to help fill **L'Eclaireur Los Angeles**. The store's mix of furniture, sculpture, and home decor includes American sculptor John-Paul Philippe's metalwork, Italian ceramics from Aldo Londi, tables by Belgian artist Ado Chale, and an impressive selection of pieces from the art and design house Fornasetti. 450 N. Robertson Boulevard; leclaireur.com.

Jet-Set Gems

Murano glass chandeliers, portraits in gilded frames, and the rings, bracelets, and necklaces of French-Mexican designer Colette Steckel set the scene at her jewelry box boutique, opened last summer. "There's something about Melrose Place that feels very European and reminds me of my French background," she says. "I couldn't envision **Colette Jewelry** anywhere else." 8463 Melrose Place; colettejewelry.com.

Disco Queen

Parisian designer Vanessa Seward planted her first American roots in West Hollywood last summer, bringing retro printed blouses and dresses, high-waisted denim, trench coats, and other 1970s-inspired separates to L.A.'s closets. 8407 Melrose Place; vanessaseward.com.

Color Us Happy

Alexandra von Furstenberg's 1,500-square-foot flagship on the corner of Beverly and Robertson opened a year ago and is filled with the designer's signature Popsicle-colored Lucite and acrylic tables, neon signs, and home decor accessories. Her design ethos is one to cheer: "I hope each piece adds style and a smile to the room it's in," she says. 300 N. Robertson Boulevard; avfhome.com.

LOOK THE PART

Skin Deep

Before last fall, New York facialist Joanna Vargas only dropped in to cater to her roster of Tinseltown clients during awards season. But her now-permanent West Hollywood salon offers skin care, detox, and massage treatments that are, apparently, Oscar-worthy. 109 1/2 N. Flores Street; joannavargas.com.

Let the Music Move You

Turn up the music and workouts go from excruciating to exhilarating at the drop of a beat. That's the mantra behind year-old **Playlist Yoga**, where hour-long power vinyasa flow classes are choreographed to hip-hop, R&B, rock, and other high-octane tunes. Drop-ins are welcome, and three- and five-class packages are also sold. 624-A N. La Cienega Boulevard; playlistyoga.com.

OUT ON THE TOWN

Party Perch

Take **Catch LA's** elevator up to a 12,000-square-foot rooftop space where wood beams, tufted booths, and exposed brick walls sit below a retractable roof. Tables on the flower-filled terrace provide full-frontal views of the Pacific

Design Center and the Hollywood Hills. "When we found this space in West Hollywood, it was an immediate 'yes' moment," says partner Mark Birnbaum. 8715 Melrose Avenue; catchrestaurants.com.

Make Room

Since last May, well-dressed – and well-known – patrons ranging from Alicia Vikander to Justin Bieber have turned up for **Doheny Room's** handcrafted cocktails and chef Danny Elmaleh's modern comfort food, such as beef-and-foie-gras sliders, mushroom toast, and lobster poutine. Post 11 PM, the upstairs dining room transforms into a bouncer-guarded lounge, where resident DJs spin anything from current dance-chart tracks to 1980s one-hit wonders and even vintage Bruce Springsteen. 9077 Santa Monica Boulevard; sbe.com/nightlife.

Get Fired Up

If **Norah's** light-filled, rustic space with dark wood, smooth marble, sculptures,

and leafy plants doesn't whet your appetite for date-night dinners, its cast-iron cornbread, uni-butter-poached shrimp, and wood-grilled rib eye will. 8279 Santa Monica Boulevard; norahrestaurant.com.

See and Be Unseen

Hidden behind 1960s-inspired, indoor-outdoor Estrella restaurant, contemporary **MA Lounge** beckons invitees "through a parking lot and a dodgy stairwell," according to manager Samuel Calabrese. Steal away here for leather couches, dim lighting, cocktails, and all you'd expect from a place you need a digital key, sent via text, to get into. 8800 Sunset Boulevard; estrellasunset.com.

Brunch Hunch

The Screen Actors Guild headquarters occupied the building in the 1930s, but **The Guild** is now a cozy restaurant with an adjacent gourmet Grilled Cheese Bar, perfect for pre-night-out bites. Better yet, drop in for the weekend brunch with chicken and



Cocktail time at Norah.

waffles, maple-cheddar biscuits, and bottomless mimosas that make mornings after much more bearable. 8741 Sunset Boulevard; theguildla.com. VI



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