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NOVEMBER 2009

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TRAVEL+LEISURE | AFFORDABLE CARIBBEAN | SCOTLAND | AMERICA'S FAVORITE CITIES | NOVEMBER 2009

VOLUME 39 : ISSUE 11

T+L 11.09

COVER STORY

144 Affordable Caribbean
A room on St. Lucia for $55 a night? A private cottage in Barbados for $180? No, it's not too good to be true. T+L dispatched our experts from Jamaica to Curaçao to create the ultimate resort finder. We've uncovered 26 stylish places to stay for less than $250 a night. **PLUS** Money-saving tips, advice for exploring the islands, and all the latest news. *Edited by* CLARK MITCHELL

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COVER At Moon, a waterside beach bar in Curaçao. Photographed by Whitney Lawson. Styled by Catherine Crate. Model: Babette Trip. Tunic by Hampton & Co.; sunglasses, Ray-Ban. See Buyer's Guide, page 188.

DAVID NICOLAS. MODEL: DANA DOUGLAS/TRUMP; STYLED BY CATHERINE CRATE; COVER-UP BY MILLY



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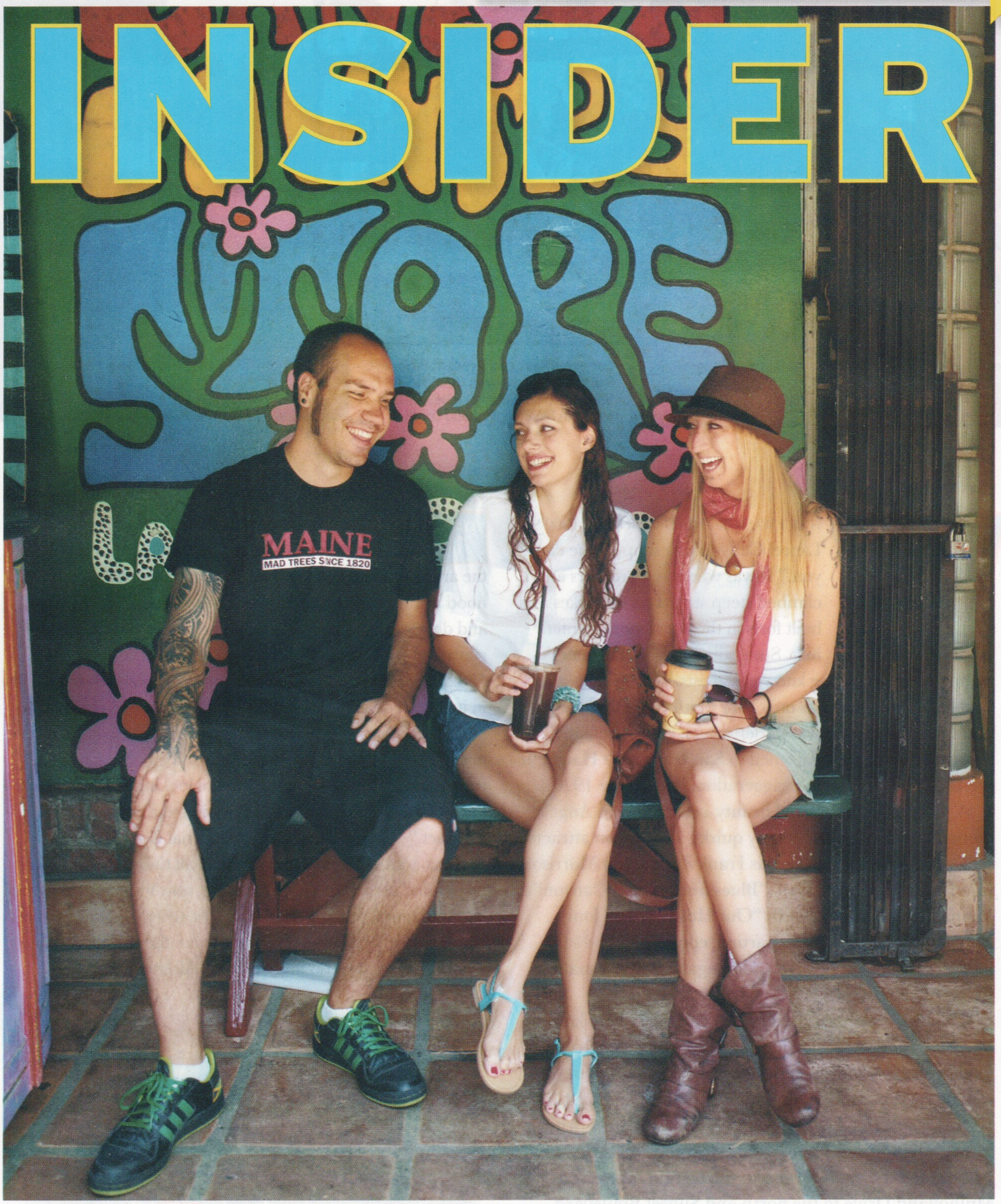
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FROM TOP: MARCO RAVENNA; GREGOR LENGLER/LAIF/REDUX

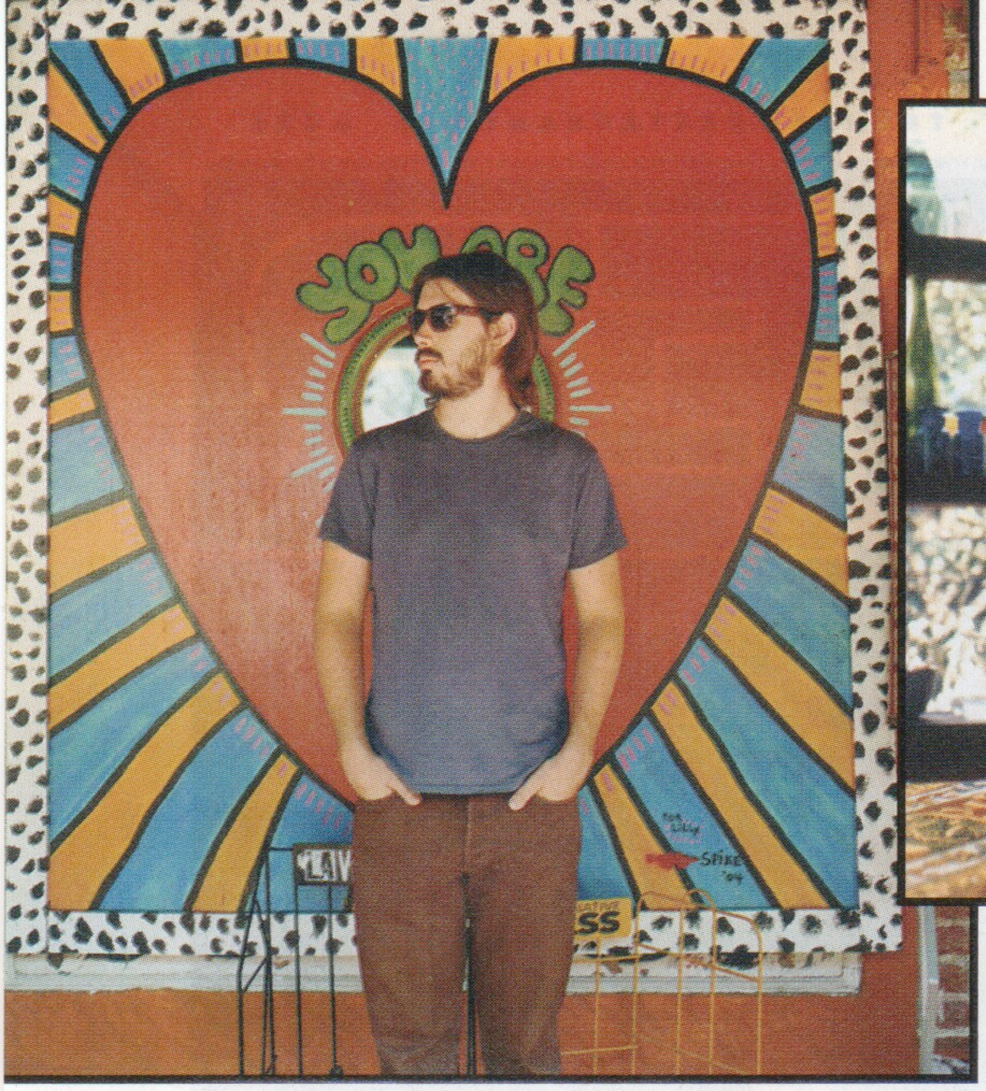


Customers at the Canyon Country Store, in Laurel Canyon.

DRIVING: CANYON HIGH

On a tour through the twisting canyons of Los Angeles, **Michael Frank** looks for traces of the area's rock 'n' roll past, and finds its cool bohemian culture lives on.

Photographed by KATIE SHAPIRO







Canyons Past and Present From left: Outside of the Canyon Country Store; musician Joni Mitchell in her house in 1968; Mulholland Drive.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP IN THE 1960'S, Laurel Canyon was simply "the canyon." It was where my brothers and I climbed steep streets on our bikes and built forts in the eucalyptus-scented hills. Sure, some of our classmates' parents were becoming known as artists—Ed Kienholz and Carole King—but it was only later that I came to understand that the canyon was undergoing a burst of creativity that would someday be likened to San Francisco's Haight in the 1950's or, with some exaggeration, Paris in the 1920's.

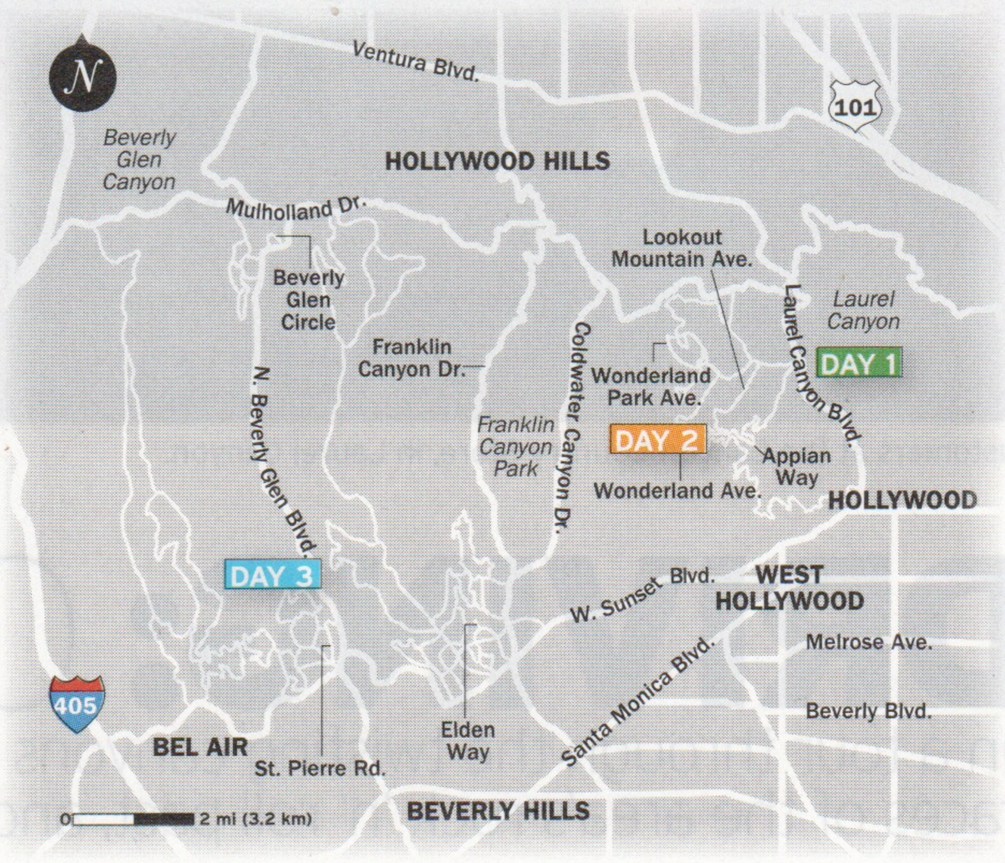
A place of great natural beauty, central in Los Angeles though also hidden and highly quirky, the canyon attracted such now-legendary rockers as Frank Zappa, Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, John Mayall ("Blues from Laurel Canyon"), Mama Cass, Graham Nash ("Our House"), and Joni Mitchell, who lived, loved, partied, composed, and sang their hearts out in cottages and bungalows in the snaky streets off Kirkwood and Lookout.

That era may have ended when canyon ladies like Mitchell came "wrapped in songs and gypsy shawls" and found true love with shaggy, starry-eyed guitarists, but the canyon retains a special unbuttoned magic. And on a recent visit from New York City I spent a few days driving through Laurel and its nearby canyon cousins.

I limited my explorations to the terrain between Mulholland Drive to the north and Sunset Boulevard to the south. These roads set the parameters of the canyons, which are, geologically speaking, former streambeds that cut through the Santa Monica Mountains, the camel's hump that divides the city from the valley. Though I drove maybe 30 miles in three days, the tiny streets and hidden, shady folds make the canyons feel far more vast and intricate.

DAY 1 MY FIRST STOP WAS THE CANYON COUNTRY STORE, ON Laurel Canyon Boulevard, the most tangible relic of the area's musical heyday. The Country Store is a neighborhood institution and a purveyor of surprisingly good wines and delicious custom-made deli sandwiches. Resolutely ungentrified by Tommy Bina, who has owned the place since 1982, the red-brick building still packs a flower-power punch in its psychedelic murals, bougainvillea-splashed patio, and palimpsest of a bulletin board from which, in the same afternoon, I could have enrolled in a reflexology class and found my pet gainful employment ("We are looking for a talented parrot or any other kind of bird to sign to a recording contract."—The Laurel Canyon Animal Company).

Bina is an enthusiastic cicerone to all things canyonesque: he pointed across the way to a house, now hiding under some bad horizontal siding from the 1980's, where Morrison wrote "Love Street" ("There's this store where the creatures meet/ I wonder what they do in there…"). Afterward, in the »



BARON WOLMAN/RETNA (JONI MITCHELL). MAP BY YANIL TACTUK

Road Trip Refuge Clockwise from above left: Owner Sandy Gendel in Laurel Canyon's Pace restaurant; Pace's cedar-planked salmon; overlooking the reservoir in Franklin Canyon Park; the park; Case Study House 21, by architect Pierre Koenig (pictured, standing by the stereo), in 1958; the house's interior reflecting pool, photographed in 1956.

store's basement, he showed me the former apartment where Mama Cass (of the Mamas & the Papas) briefly lived upon first coming to L.A. When Bina converted the apartment into more wine storage several years back he found Cass's flute, whose worn case he touches with the kind of reverence that guides in other settings might gesture at, say, Proust's evening cape or Chekhov's pen.

Sharing the building with the Canyon Country Store is Pace, as in "peace" (or: "Peace, man!"), a restaurant in the space that during the 1960's housed Café Galleria, which hosted open-mike nights for canyon habitués. In a room hung with black-and-white photos of the musicians, I dined on the establishment's most popular dish, cedar-planked salmon; it was by far the best meal of the drive.

Earlier, while Bina and I were downstairs in his store, he drew my attention to the brick building's river-rock foundation, a clue to a different piece of the canyon's story. In old L.A., the area was undeveloped countryside; remote and rugged, it was first reached in any organized fashion in 1913, when Charles Spencer Mann built a trackless trolley (it ran on electric cables) that brought hunters and hikers up from Sunset Boulevard. A development known as Mann's Bungalow Land provided cottages for these early weekenders, and the first (wooden) country store, its foundation bolstered with rocks harvested from the then-open streambed, sold them provisions. The rest is real estate—and therefore Angeleno—history. »

CASE STUDY 21 HOUSES COURTESY OF J. PAUL GETTY TRUST







L.A. Hideouts Clockwise from above left: The Virginia Robinson Gardens, in Beverly Hills; the property's pool pavilion; the garden's estate mansion; inside Fabrocini's, in Beverly Glen; Fabrocini restaurant's grilled artichokes and margherita pizza; a lemonade stand on Wonderland Avenue in Laurel Canyon.

DAY 2 SINCE DRIVING BY HOUSES IN LOS ANGELES IS THE equivalent of making the rounds of museums and monuments in other cities, I decided to begin my morning by passing by some of the canyon's more notable addresses. Continuing a mile or so up to Lookout Mountain Avenue, I glanced to my right at the ruins of a mansion where Houdini is said to have been summoned with séances by his grief-stricken wife; then I turned uphill and drove past the site of Mann's roadhouse tavern, which not long after it was built in 1916 was bought by silent-screen star Tom Mix and, in 1968, was briefly but memorably rented by Zappa. With an 80-foot living room, a bowling alley, and an enchanted garden, this oversize log cabin "raged as a rock-and-roll salon and Dionysian playground," as Michael Walker, the canyon's chronicler, sums it up in *Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock and Roll's Legendary Neighborhood*, his book on the era. The scene moved on, the house burned down, but the place retains a charge: The bones of its garden, still discernible from the street, tell you that Something Happened Here.

On Wonderland Avenue, I went looking for No. 8945, the largely subterranean seven-story bunker-like building that, from 1947 to 1969, housed Lookout Mountain Studios, the top-secret movie studio behind 6,500 documentaries chronicling the U.S. government's nuclear-weapons testing program. Seeing an older man raking leaves at the front gate, I pulled over and asked him what went on today in those now privately owned, and still gargantuan, 100,000 square feet. "People live here," he answered. Could he tell me who? "No," he said. "It's not permitted." All right, then. »







Onward to the top of the hill, where views open up to the jam-packed bowl of L.A. with, on a clear day, a ribbon of ocean hovering on the horizon. Appian Way—a rare flat street at the summit—took me to Lookout, and Lookout back to Wonderland (it's all about loops here) and Wonderland to Wonderland Park, where I stopped to view Pierre Koenig's 1958 Case Study House No. 21, at No. 9038. A glass and post-and-beam jewel that stands in its own framework of reflecting pools, this house is the Modernist canyon at its most utopian (and pricey: Wright auction house sold the property three years ago for $3.2 million).

DAY 3

THE NEXT MORNING I RESUMED MY DRIVE ON Mulholland, that serpentine byway flanked by hide-and-seek views of the spreading valley to the north and tucked-away city to the south. I headed west to Franklin Canyon, one of the most unusual secret parks in a major city: 605 acres of bucolic National Park Service land whose centerpiece is two bodies of water that ducks, turtles, and bullfrogs now call home. I parked here and, for several dreamlike hours, utterly unaware of my urban surroundings, hiked along trails lined with California oaks, sticky monkey flowers, poppies, and sage.

After heading south into Beverly Hills, I found my way to the Virginia Robinson Gardens, the six-acre former estate of the heirs to the J. W. Robinson department-store empire that has been open to the public (by appointment) since 1982. If, after somehow falling into a California version of a Rip Van Winkle sleep, I had awakened in this splendor and been challenged to locate it, I would have answered Tuscany. The 1911 Mediterranean-style house, the blooming terraced gardens, the palm grove, the bubbling fountains, the terra-cotta statues—Gilded Age glory intact and immaculately tended at the edge of Beverly Hills.

Lunch was a tasty grilled artichoke and pizza at Fabrocini's, in nearby Beverly Glen Canyon, which at one time was home to a Native American village and, later, part of Francisco Sepulveda's ranch; yes, where mountain lions once patrolled the hills, today there is a shopping center. After I ate, I had a somewhat disjointed window-shopping experience: leather-bound sets of Dickens on offer two doors down from D&G dresses for children, each of which commanded more than my daughter's entire annual wardrobe.

My final stop was at St. Pierre Road (No. 414), where I pulled over to peer through the fence at the empty swimming pool and abandoned home that Johnny Weissmuller built out of his *Tarzan* fortune. More moat, really, than pool, the 300-foot-long snake of scabbing blue plaster and broken tile seemed like a perfect commentary on the fragility of fame. A B-minus movie star with an A-plus pool, a decaying mansion in a leaf-darkened canyon, a lone driver swinging by to think a few thoughts on the power of time: it felt like the subject of an unwritten pop song, an ode to the mysteries of the canyons.

Guitar, anyone? ✚



T+L ROAD TRIPS

For dozens of driving getaways, including wine country weekends, New England foliage tours, and scenic European routes, go to TravelandLeisure.com/ideas/driving.

GUIDE: L.A.'s CANYONS

STAY

Beverly Hills Hotel *9641 W. Sunset Blvd., Beverly Hills; 310/276-2251; beverlyhillshotel.com; doubles from $505.*

GREAT VALUE **Sportsmen's Lodge Hotel** *1285 Ventura Blvd., Studio City; 818/287-6445; doubles from $134.*

EAT

Canyon Country Store *2108 Laurel Canyon Blvd., Laurel Canyon; 323/654-8091; lunch for two $20.*

Fabrocini's *2960 Beverly Glen Circle, Beverly Glen; 310/475-7404; lunch for two $40.*

Pace *2100 Laurel Canyon Blvd., Laurel Canyon; 323/654-8583; dinner for two $90.*

DO

Franklin Canyon Park *2600 Franklin Canyon Dr., Beverly Hills; 310/858-7272; visit lamountains.com for park information, including hiking trails and tours.*

Virginia Robinson Gardens *1008 Elden Way, Beverly Hills; call 310/276-5367 for tour reservations (required).*

READ AND WATCH

Atomic Filmmakers: Hollywood's Secret Film Studio directed by Peter Kuran.

Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon—and the Journey of a Generation by Sheila Weller *(Atria Books; $28).*

Laurel Canyon directed by Lisa Cholodenko.

Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock-and-Roll's Legendary Neighborhood by Michael Walker *(Faber & Faber; $15).*