

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a black dress, is seated at a table in a classic Hollywood-style restaurant. She is holding a martini glass and looking towards the camera. The restaurant has a red booth, white tablecloths, and warm lighting. The background shows a long hallway with tables and a bar area.

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**HOLLYWOOD**

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**Hollywood is  
Film Noir**

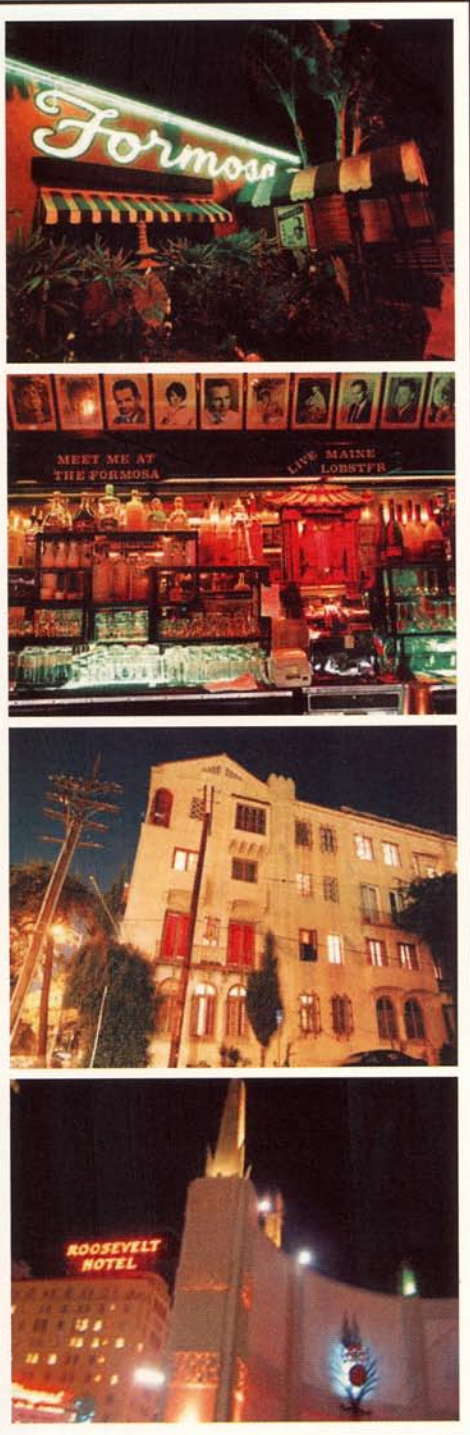
VISUAL ARTS THEATRE MUSIC FILM PLACES OF INTEREST ... AND MORE



# Hollywood **is** Film Noir

Shadowy forms lurk in the darkness as tires creep across wet asphalt. Flashbacks, low angles and a dream-like voiceover ooze desperation in a world where nothing is what it appears to be.

by Anita Rosenberg



If you have ever been in this situation you are either at an American Cinematheque film noir festival at the Egyptian Theatre or walking the steep incline of Ivar Street where a flickering neon sign welcomes you to the Alto-Nido. It is in this 1940's apartment building where a struggling writer (William Holden) pecked at his typewriter before he became aging screen siren, Gloria Swanson's, playboy lover and moved into her decrepit mansion in the classic 1950's film, *Sunset Boulevard*.

We are, after all, in Hollywood and everything here lives and breathes the movies. That is why this dream factory of creative expression has always drawn actors, writers, artists, and musicians. It is a town where a film extra with one line of dialogue can be called a movie star (from a scene in *Day of the Locust*) and a place where terms like dumb blonde, booze it up, and criminally handsome became popular vernacular of the 1930's. When pulp fiction writers like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett moved out west they turned their crime novels into screenplays and became founding stars of a new genre of filmmaking called film noir.

Film noir is a distinctively American invention, French for black film. Artistically marked by dark images and moody ambiance, theirs is a world of hardboiled private eyes, femme fatales, and petty criminals. It is a place where Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade were more than down and out detectives, they were complex characters played by Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchum. These films portrayed an era where Lauren Bacall, Barbara Stanwyck, and Faye Dunaway were cigarette smoking, martini sipping, manipulative bombshells in distress with secret agendas. These stories

**"The streets were dark with something more than night." Raymond Chandler**

revolved around violence and corruption, sexual obsession and alienation that came straight from real life. They were tales about Los Angeles post Great Depression and movie fans ate them up. It was all so juicy and delicious - erotic and disturbing.

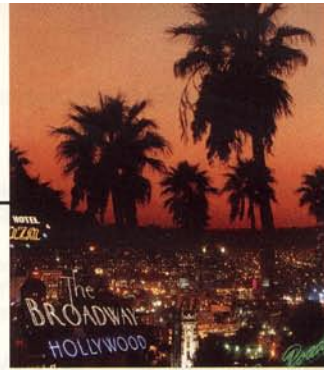
*"Life is good in Los Angeles, it's paradise on earth. That's what they tell you anyway. Because they're selling an image. They're selling it through movies, radio, and television... You'd think this place was the Garden of Eden. But there's trouble in paradise."*

- Excerpt from *L.A. Confidential*

Through the years a keen interest in all things "noir" has taken hold of Hollywood. This is the town that boasts exciting and dramatic architecture where famous movie scenes from the late 1940's and 50's were shot. Deco mansions, Spanish bungalows, and Tudor cottages from Beachwood Canyon to Whitley Heights were used in many films. The *Formosa Café* was also a recognizable location from the 1997 film *LA Confidential*. Located on the corner of Santa Monica Boulevard and Formosa Avenue, this Hollywood landmark that hasn't changed much since it first opened as a Chinese restaurant in 1939. Still owned and run by Lem Quon's grandson, Vince Jung, the *Formosa Café*, across from the historic Warner Hollywood Studio, has always been "where the stars dine." The walls are lined with 250 classic black & white photographs autographed and hand-delivered by the actors themselves. The former rail-

Pictured from top to bottom: Exterior and Bar at famed Formosa Café;  
The mysterious Villa Carlotta (photos by Anita Rosenberg);  
Vintage Hollywood (photo courtesy of 7060 Hollywood/Thomas P. Cox Architects).





Pictured, clockwise, from top:  
The classic Musso and Frank's Grill (photo by Anthony Nelson);  
Neon transforms Hollywood at night; Night and Neon (photo by Anthony Nelson); Signs (photos by Anita Rosenberg)

**If you live and work in Hollywood you are forever living a film noir moment.**

road car in red lacquer Chinese décor once served as the center of a thriving bookmaking operation. Counted among its regulars were Humphrey Bogart, Lana Turner and her gangster boyfriend Johnny Stompanato.

So after Hollywoodland and Black Dahlia recently hit the silver screen and audiences were talking about Hollywood in the 1940's, I had to ask myself "where does film noir live?" Can I find it driving down Hollywood Boulevard? Is it on Selma or Wilcox? Is it in my own backyard under the Hollywood sign? Pondering this question while hiking up Runyon Canyon I stopped to catch my breath and take in the view. As I pondered this question on a hike up Runyon Canyon, I looked out over the city and saw film noir spread out in front of me wrapped in a blanket of thick hazy fog. The Broadway Hollywood building, Musso and Frank's, and the Observatory are some of the landmarks cloaking Hollywood in legend. This is where the stories of *Chinatown* and *Double Indemnity* were invented. If you live and work in Hollywood, you are bound to experience a film noir moment; there's no escaping it because things have not changed all that much. Sure the buildings have been revamped and there's a new generation flocking to the boulevard, but a casual stroll past notorious landmarks transports you back in time.

If you lived in L.A. in the 1940's, after a long day on the set of your latest detective thriller, you would head over to soak up the Chandleresque ambiance of Musso & Frank Grill, Hollywood's oldest restaurant since 1919. You would slide into an oversized booth where Manny or Sergio would greet you with a martini, chopped salad and lamb chops sizzling hot off the grill. To your right would be seated Dashiell Hammett and to your left Raymond Chandler or Humphrey Bogart. A notorious writer's hangout and Hollywood haunt, these days you might spot Johnny Depp, Christopher Walken, or Nicolas Cage at the next booth.

What I have learned from my brief adventure into film noir Hollywood is that you create your own Hollywood experience. It could be filled with tawdry love affairs and a thirst for fame and fortune or it could be purely nostalgic where history lurks at

every corner. It's up to you.

**Note:** Explore this rich cinematic heritage when American Cinematheque holds its 8th Annual Film Noir Festival (see Film). In May, Hollywood Heritage, an organization dedicated to preserving old Hollywood, will sponsor a one day historic sites tour "Raymond Chandler's Hollywood" It will start at the quintessentially Raymond Chandleresque corner of Franklin Avenue and Tamarind and visit apartment buildings and other landmarks where scenes were classic film noir scenes were shot.. ([www.HollywoodHeritage.org](http://www.HollywoodHeritage.org) or call: (323)467-0287).

Vintage Hollywood Neon photo courtesy of 7060 Hollywood/Thomas P. Cox Architects.

Meanwhile to explore the locations where the stars walked, here are a few spots to visit:

**H Classic film noir movies to get you in the Hollywood mood:**

- Double Indemnity** 1944
- The Big Sleep** 1946, remake in 1978
- Sunset Boulevard** 1950
- Chinatown** 1974
- LA Confidential** 1997

**H Film noir locations to visit:**

- Crossroads of the World Center** 6671 Sunset Boulevard (LA Confidential)
- Alto-Nido Apartments** 1851 N. Ivar St. (Sunset Boulevard and Black Dahlia)
- Musso & Frank Grill** 6667 Hollywood Blvd. (323) 467-7788 (Raymond Chandler ambiance)
- Formosa Café** 7156 Santa Monica Blvd. (323) 850-9050 (LA Confidential)
- Boardner's of Hollywood** 1652 N. Cherokee Ave.
- Church of the Blessed Sacrament** 6657 Sunset Blvd.
- Frolic Room** 6245 Hollywood Blvd.
- Chateau Marmont, The Hollywood Bowl,** and 6301 Quebec St. in the Hollywood Hills (Double Indemnity)

**H Film Festivals:**

8th Annual Festival of Film Noir at American Cinematheque at the Egyptian and Aero Theatres – April 8th through 16th featuring special guest James Ellroy (LA Confidential)

**H Websites:**

[www.LA.Nocturne.com](http://www.LA.Nocturne.com) – Los Angeles Film Noir  
[www.seeing-stars.com](http://www.seeing-stars.com) – The ultimate guide to Hollywood



"Double Indemnity"  
Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck.  
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