

Sunset Boulevard

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The Long & Winding Road. The Beatles' aptly described a road that "always leads me here—leads me to your door." That road—my road—is Sunset Boulevard.

It is said that all roads lead to Rome, thus placing the focus on the eventual destination. But I prefer to contemplate the trail to be traveled and to reflect upon its sinuous course as I traverse Los Angeles. Whether I am headed for a visit to a luxurious residence in Bel Air or seafood in Malibu or a preview screening at the Director's Guild, I make it a point to take Sunset. I offer transparent excuses and make major detours just to navigate the boulevard.

My favorite section runs west of Doheny to the Pacific Ocean. Here, the road winds through exclusive neighborhoods. Palaces perched atop knolls overlook immaculately maintained lawns shaded by broad elms and encircled with brilliant ornamentals. The vegetation is indeed so lush that I can claim the *air* in Beverly Hills is *greener* than anywhere else in LA. Other parts of Sunset snake through commercial districts with towering high-rises and low-rent zones with dilapidated bungalows. That's not *my* part of Sunset.

The 25-mile serpentine course begins in downtown just west of the Los Angeles River—a concrete ditch designed to channel occasional rain waters from the San Gabriel Mountains to Long Beach. Like the riverbed that offers fertile ground for gangland graffiti rather than riparian vegetation, Sunset's ignominious start is colorful but not attractive.

The road journeys westward through the Spanish pueblo, bypasses Chinatown, and ambles into Hollywood, now a run-down shadow of its former glory. Here tourists head for Grauman's Chinese, the Pantages, Egyptian, and El Capitan theaters, none actually located on Sunset. Further west, the clubs and bars of The Strip are overshadowed by billboards touting the latest cinematic releases. Sunset skirts the trendy sidewalk cafés of the Plaza and finally heads for tranquility. Entrepreneurial roadside vendors hawk outdated maps to the stars' homes which are no more accurate than my mother who good-naturedly ferries out-of-town visitors from manor to mansion, randomly assigning famous ownership to each.

Sunset continues its lazy path towards the evening sun which melts luminously into the sea. It is truly a long and winding road that passes from dreary desolation to exalted exuberance.