

# **Revitalizing The Sunset Strip**

Learning from Rock 'n' Roll on Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard

by

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## **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

Since the set-up of major motion-picture productions, Los Angeles County has been regarded as the entertainment capital, with West Hollywood at the forefront of the music industry. Beginning in the 1960s, a revitalized music scene filled the nightlife of a 1.5-mile segment of Sunset Boulevard, commonly referred to as the Sunset Strip, with Rock 'n' Roll. Songs written in the Hollywood Hills and first performed at Strip venues would be discovered, recorded, packaged, promoted and sold all along the same boulevard. Although this period of Rock 'n' Roll should be heavily criticized for its inequality in regard to gender, sexuality and race, it was through its civic purpose and integration into the local vernacular that Rock 'n' Roll found its success on the Sunset Strip. It encouraged the counterculture of this urban boulevard by considering the pedestrian scale and blending commercial content with Strip specific artistry. Today, as proposals for development along the Strip are submitted to the City of West Hollywood, citizens are infuriated by their lack of relevance or homogeneity to the local vernacular. What these designers are failing to realize is that successful architecture on the Sunset Strip understands the Strip's existing environment by examining the everyday, the particularities, and the ecologies, which do not fit traditional urban tropes.

This thesis investigates the key contributors to the Rock 'n' Roll era of the Sunset Strip's overall success. It considers how Rock 'n' Roll provided a foundation for the architectural and urban ecological renaissance of the Sunset Strip using the attraction of popular culture, print media, and capital flows. Building on research and previous work done by Ed Ruscha, Reyner Banham, and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown this thesis will follow learning from ordinary and everyday architecture. By revisiting Reyner Banham's *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, this thesis identifies and analyzes this period of the Sunset Strip's urban environment through the reinterpretation of three new ecologies: Billboards, Flyers, and the Musician's City. Each ecology is accompanied by an architectural case study, and interview with a relevant Los Angeleno. These ecologies are followed by a brief note on the challenge of staying relevant in the dynamic landscape of the Sunset Strip. Through a nonjudgmental investigation, this research intends to help inspire a renewal of architectural practice out of the everyday landscape and the commercial vernacular.

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This thesis is dedicated to the residents of West Hollywood, and the many people who made the Sunset Strip rock (literally).



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Figure 7.1	121	An aerial photograph of the Sunset Strip today. <i>Retrieved July 30, 2020 from Los Angeles Magazine, <a href="https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/sunset-experience/">https://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/sunset-experience/</a>.</i>



# Prologue

I discovered the rich cultural landscape of the Sunset Strip while working for an architectural practice in Los Angeles in 2018 and 2019. As I was raised on Rock ‘n’ Roll music and continue to perform as a semi-professional stand-up comedian in my spare time, I felt immediately drawn to the Strip upon my arrival to the City. I would spend my evenings venue-hopping down Sunset Boulevard watching live performance after live performance. I had never experienced an environment as nostalgic, irreverent, and so obviously intertwined with the counterculture as the Sunset Strip. I began to recognize the familiar faces of the musicians and comedians that frequented its popular venues and learned of the many cultural revivals that contributed to the Strip’s notoriety. So, in the summer of 2018, when my architectural firm was presented the opportunity to participate in a competition for the redesign of the city block on which the famous Sunset Strip nightclub *The Viper Room* currently sits, I was elated. Although I had no clue what I was about to get myself into (nor did I consider it would lead me down a path to which I would write an entire thesis dissertation on the matter), even then I considered The Viper Room to be a significant historical site.

Today known as The Viper Room, 8852 Sunset Boulevard is a 250-person capacity nightclub that was opened in 1993 by Johnny Depp and Tom Waits. The venue takes pride in featuring America’s favorite underground artists while also rotating an array of internationally renowned musicians such as Johnny Cash, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Bruce Springsteen, Lenny Kravitz, Pearl Jam, The Strokes, Weezer, Maroon 5, and John Mayer<sup>1</sup>. Despite the death of childhood actor River Phoenix occurring along the sidewalk in front of the venue from an apparent drug overdose the same year as its opening, The Viper Room became a regular hangout spot for young actors and musicians. Prior to hosting The Viper Room, the location of 8852 Sunset Boulevard opened in 1921 as a grocery store that remained into the early forties. As the Sunset Strip continued to grow in popularity, the storefront was then replaced by a series of short-lived ventures like the Cotton Club, the Greenwich Village Inn, the Rue Angel, and finally The Last Call, a drag bar that was forced to close due to a new law forbidding “lewd or indecent shows”. Rumored to have served as an illicit gambling den for the Mafia from 1951-1969, the location was fronted by The Melody Room, a jazz club that was hot on the Los Angeles music scene. Picking up on the latest trend to hit the Strip, radio host Filthy McNasty purchased the venue in 1969, to open Filthy McNasty’s – an early Rock ‘n’ Roll venue that had a no photo, low key environment where celebrities like Elvis Presley, Mick Jagger and Jim Morrison frequently visited<sup>2</sup>. Rebranded in the 1980s, The Central, was a music venue that featured open night jams with people like The Who’s John Entwistle. Performing once a month for several years during the eighties, Billy Vera spoke of The Central saying, “It was straight up Rock ‘n’ Roll. The place was very dark and dingy, the kind of joint where drunken roadies would hang out.”<sup>3</sup> As The

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1 The Viper Room, “History”, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.viperroom.com>.

2 Gerry Gittelson, “RIP...Legendary Hollywood club owner Filthy McNasty of FM Station,” *Metal Sludge*, April 20, 2016, accessed July 23, 2019, <http://metalsludge.tv/rip-legendary-hollywood-club-owner-filthy-mcnasty-of-fm-station/>.

3 Alison Martino, “The Viper Room Turns 21,” *Los Angeles Magazine*, August 11, 2014, accessed July 16, 2019, <http://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/the-viper-room-turns-21/>.

Central came close to shutting down in the early nineties, Chuck E. Weiss, an American songwriter and vocalist, suggested to Johnny Depp that he revitalize the venue with the intent of retaining its Rock 'n' Roll history, and rename it The Viper Room.

But today The Viper Room faces potential closure as its city block was sold for \$80 million for redevelopment. Jim Cooper, a director at REM Finance Inc. who represents the buyer stated, "There's not a development plan in place. They're looking to see what the highest and best use would be."<sup>4</sup> When this was presented to my firm, I only felt comfortable participating in the design competition if The Viper Room was to remain programmatically intact and revamped, rather than removed completely. To my content, the firm I worked for agreed with me. With a clear understanding of the venue and the existing landscape to which it belongs, our design response to the competition seemed obvious. Much like the greatest musical artists, the best architecture is an ambassador to the past, and also the future. So, although Rock 'n' Roll no longer dominates the Strip per-se, its architecture should be the bridge that makes younger generations want to find out more about its history. By blending commercial content with site specific artistry, our design acknowledged the Strip's unique use of billboards, its ties to the music industry, and understood the likely visitors to the site's anticipated hotels and condominiums that were to be created above the commercial ground level. By the end of the competition, our firm presented a project design that we consider an architectural object of place.

As the opening lines of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's *Learning from Las Vegas* state, learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect. It questions how we look at things<sup>5</sup>; it's how we create architecture of substance. Unfortunately, designing for a sense of place, is a foundational reality that is all too often missing from our discussions when it comes to architecture and design. It's impossible to do great architecture unless you are heavily invested in the place you design. But many designers, Los Angeleno or otherwise, seem to have a convenient episode of historical amnesia as soon as they enter the professional world. We must consider how our work impacts our innate sense of place. We should have a personal connection to the communities we contribute to and be personally affected by our work. Our role should be to act an urban pulse taker and investigator.

Sadly, our design submission for this city block did not win this competition and the project was awarded to the Los Angeles firm Morphosis, run by Thom Mayne. Morphosis' design was monumental, eye-catching, big and bold. I understand how it would be perfect in the eyes of any sensible developer, whose priorities rely on increasing a rate of revenue. But this design had nothing to do with the Sunset Strip. It responded in no way to the existing landscape. It ignored the human aspect of the site completely and focused purely on form (this can be most obviously seen in the complete eradication

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4 Rhian Daly, "Legendary Los Angeles rock club the Viper Room sold and possibly closing," *NME*, August 6, 2018, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.nme.com/news/music/legendary-los-angeles-rock-club-viper-room-sold-possibly-closing-2363875>.

5 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (United States of America: Kingston Press Inc., 1972), 1.

of The Viper Room from their submission). When Morphosis' schematic design was revealed to the public, the citizens of West Hollywood were understandably enraged. Similar to the time the same Thom Mayne was criticized just a couple years prior for bulldozing the Cheviot Hills home where science fiction author Ray Bradbury wrote all of his seminal works for over fifty years<sup>6</sup>, the preservation community was up in arms over the impending demolition of the cultural site of The Viper Room. After many months of speculation, to public knowledge, not much has pushed forward in terms of the development timeline for this project.

For many years now, the emphasis in our world's cities has been on iconic buildings and stagnant public spaces – a concept so especially wrong for a strip built on the idea where dynamism and event eclipse monumentality and even architecture. It's easy for our works of architecture and urban design to be judged as objects in space, rather than places where meaningful, unique and often unusual social interactions occur. So, although they look interesting, many well-intended designs fail. Designers and planners need to advocate for the responsible integration of new buildings into the existing environment and, in order to do that, we must first examine the everyday, the particularities, and the ecologies, which do not fit traditional urban tropes. Although my original intention was to return to the City of Los Angeles to complete this thesis dissertation, as a result of global events, archival research, virtual interviews and observational drawings and animations became important tools to my investigation into the renewal of architectural practice out of the everyday landscape. Such global events like COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have provoked valuable insight into my research and forced me to rethink the architecture and monumentality of public space. Post-pandemic, the live entertainment industry will be forced to completely rebuild itself. This thesis stresses street life; it wants designers to break free from the rules of traditional urban thinking and familiarize themselves with the world outside of architecture and urbanism. It wants us to observe more, and straddle urban design, architecture and planning imaginatively and responsibly. So, in order to do that on the Sunset Strip, we must first learn about Rock 'n' Roll.

This research investigates the key contributors to the Rock 'n' Roll era of the Sunset Strip's overall success. It considers how Rock 'n' Roll music provided a foundation for the architectural and urban ecological renaissance of the Sunset Strip at a particular time, using the attraction of popular culture, print media, and capital flows. The term "urban ecology" is used in this thesis to refer to the relationship between people and their surroundings in the context of this specific urban environment. Building on research and previous work done by people like Reyner Banham, Ed Ruscha, and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown this thesis will follow learning from ordinary, everyday architecture and the existing landscape. In revisiting Reyner Banham's *The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971), this thesis finds its structure by identifying and analyzing this period of the Sunset Strip's urban environment through the reinterpretation of three new ecologies: Billboards, Flyers, and the Musician's City. In *The Architecture of Four*

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6 Frances Anderton, "What would Ray think? Thom and Blythe Mayne's house in Cheviot Hills is almost ready to call home," *KCRW*, Design and Architecture (April 25, 2017), accessed June 21, 2020, <https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/design-and-architecture/what-would-ray-think-thom-and-blythe-maynes-house-in-cheviot-hills-is-almost-ready-to-call-home>.

*Ecologies*, Banham provides both a history of Los Angeles and a checkered survey of its previously ignored Modern and Postmodern architectural virtues. He classifies four “ecologies” that are clear subdivisions of the City’s chorography and car-based culture<sup>7</sup>. Although there is little in his analysis that is ecological in present terms, for Banham, ecology is intended in the sense that certain infrastructures create specific growth patterns and architectural objects are best understood in relation to their larger condition<sup>8</sup>. Although the identified ecologies in this thesis are not geomorphic subdivisions of the Sunset Strip, their subsequent growth patterns are intended to be understood much like Banham’s. Each identified ecology in this research is accompanied by an architectural case study in relation to their larger condition, and an interview with a relevant Los Angeleno. These ecologies are followed by a brief note on the difficulties of staying relevant in the nightlife entertainment industry and dynamic landscape of the Sunset Strip. Drawings and maps within this thesis are inspired by Ruscha’s *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), and Venturi and Scott Brown’s *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972), but use new tools to tell a different story. Through a nonjudgmental investigation, this research intends to inspire a renewal of architectural practice out of the everyday landscape along a boulevard that finds its success by failing to follow any rules.

7 Australian Design Review, “Book Review: Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies.” *Architecture*, last modified October 1, 2013, accessed August 06, 2019, <https://www.australiandesignreview.com/architecture/book-review-los-angeles-the-architecture-of-four-ecologies/>.

8 “Book Review: Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies.”



*Figure 1.1: A photograph of 8852 Sunset Boulevard as the Melody Room, located to the right of Turner’s Liquor, 1956. Retrieved from Los Angeles Past.*



Figure 1.2: A photograph of 8852 Sunset Boulevard as Filthy McNasty's. Photographed by Ed Ruscha in 1976.

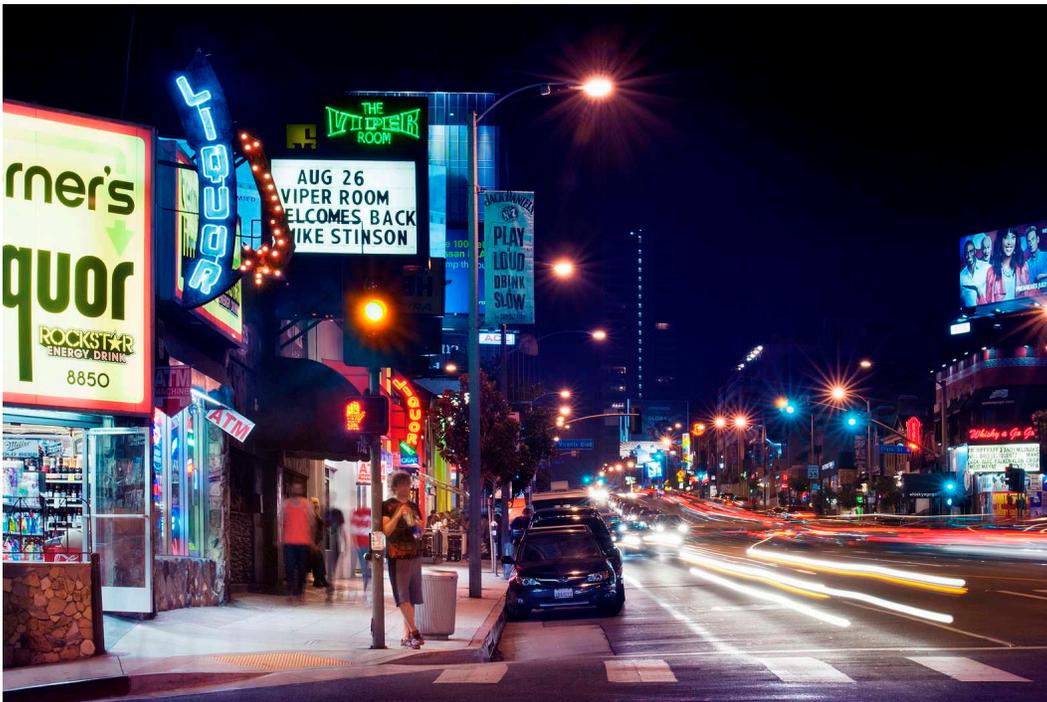


Figure 1.3: A photograph of 8852 Sunset Boulevard as The Viper Room, still located beside Turner's Liquor. The notorious Rock 'n' Roll venue the Whisky-a-Go-Go can be seen across the street in the background. Retrieved from The Viper Room.

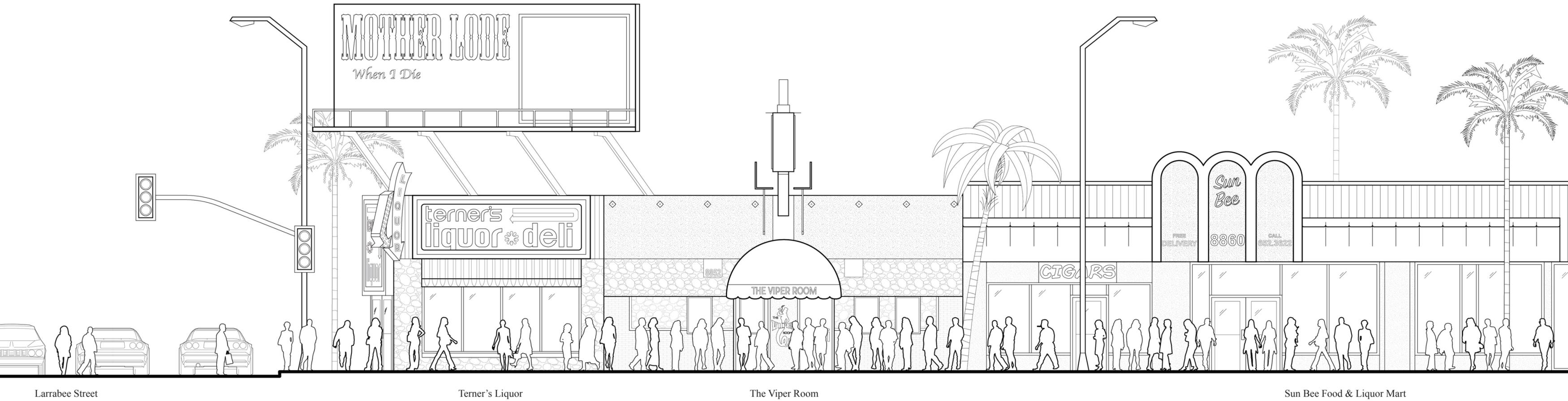
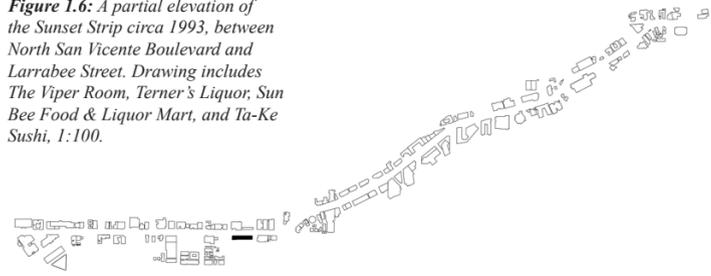


*Figure 1.4: A photograph of 8852 Sunset Boulevard as The Viper Room. A line of young adults wait to enter the venue to see a performance. Turner's Liquor is now called Terner's Liquor. Photographed by Vidalia, October 8, 2007.*



*Figure 1.5: An interior view of 8852 Sunset Boulevard as The Viper Room. Unlike other Sunset Strip clubs, The Viper Room uses low ceiling heights to create a more intimate atmosphere. Photographed by Vidalia, October 8, 2007.*

Figure 1.6: A partial elevation of the Sunset Strip circa 1993, between North San Vicente Boulevard and Larrabee Street. Drawing includes The Viper Room, Turner's Liquor, Sun Bee Food & Liquor Mart, and Ta-Ke Sushi, 1:100.

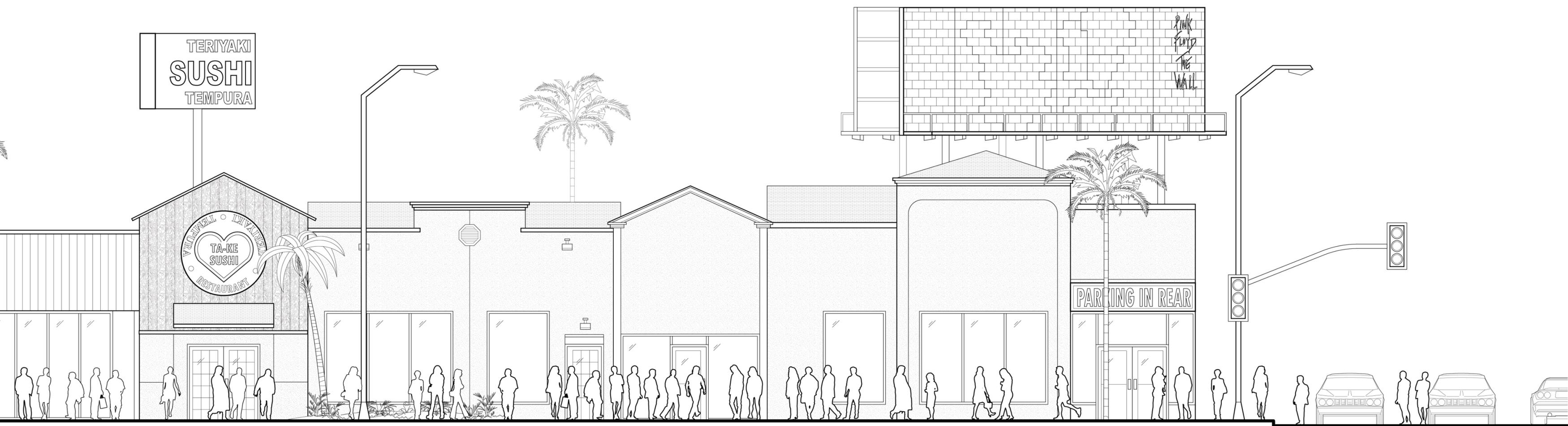


Larrabee Street

Turner's Liquor

The Viper Room

Sun Bee Food & Liquor Mart



Ta-Ke Sushi

Retail

Retail

Retail

Retail

North San Vicente Boulevard



*Figure 1.7: A rendering of 8852 Sunset Boulevard's city block renovation proposal by Morphosis. Not only does the proposal completely remove The Viper Room, it also removes Turner's Liquor, Sun Bee and Ta-Ke. The proposal's eye-catching design towers over its surrounding context and dominates in form and materiality. Retrieved from dezeen.*

**An  
Introduction:  
There's  
Something  
Happening  
Here**



**Figure 2.1:** A perspective drawing locating the city of West Hollywood and Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles County.

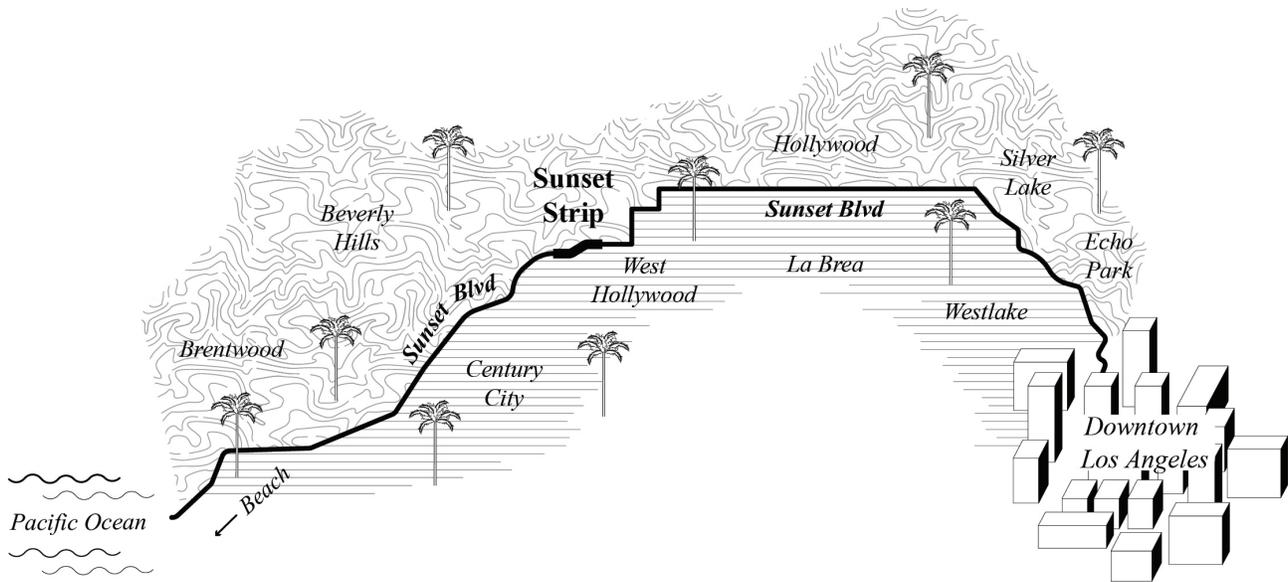


Figure 2.2: A diagram of the 22-miles of Sunset Boulevard, locating the 1.5-miles of the Sunset Strip.

### 1.1 An Introduction to the Sunset Strip

Since as early as 1910 with the arrival of major motion-picture productions<sup>9</sup>, Los Angeles County has been regarded as the entertainment capital with West Hollywood at the forefront of the music industry. Set in the heart of the “land of perpetual spring”<sup>10</sup>, Los Angeles continues to attract an unparalleled community of outlandish, highly skilled and unique individuals. Through its many eras West Hollywood’s Sunset Strip has acted as the epicenter for show business and a one-stop-shop for musicians to write, record, package, perform, sign and sell their records. Extending from West Hollywood’s western border at Phyllis Street with Beverly Hills, to its eastern border at Marmont Lane with the City of Los Angeles, this 1.5-mile segment of the approximate 22 miles of Sunset Boulevard has placed West Hollywood and the City of Los Angeles at the front of every entertainer’s mind. Tracing the foothills to its north and the flatlands to its south, with at least four lanes of traffic for its entire route, the language of movement and event on the Strip has encouraged an everchanging architecture, and developed an urban environment that leads visitors to believe that anything is possible within its boundaries.

Named after the famous evening view of Los Angeles<sup>11</sup>, Sunset Boulevard has shaped the dynamic face of the City since as early as the 1780s as a cow trail for the original residents of El Pueblo de Los Angeles, and all ranches westward towards the Pacific Ocean<sup>12</sup>. In 1869 the development of railroad lines financed with public money began significantly altering the emerging face of the Los Angeles region by laying the foundations on which the region was to be built<sup>13</sup>. Starting as the town of Sherman, West Hollywood contained the main railroad yards for the Los Angeles Railroad. Named after Moses Sherman who built the line, the Sherman line was a suburban line of the Pacific Electric Railway, built in 1896 as part of the Pasadena and Pacific

9 Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 35.

10 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 31.

11 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 24.

12 Christopher Hawthorne, “For Sunset, a new dawn,” *Los Angeles Times*, Entertainment & Arts (July 2012), accessed July 17, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-ca-sunset-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmlstory.html>.

13 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 77.

(recognized today as Santa Monica Boulevard)<sup>14</sup>. According to Reyner Banham, these railways outlined the form of the City and sketched the pattern of movement that was to characterize its peculiar style of life that we are familiarized with today. Working closely with railway promoters, land sub-dividers created townsites along the tracks, contributing to the irregular sprawl of Los Angeles that does not rely on a central nucleus. By the late 1920s these rail lines provided some of the first evidence of the motor age in Los Angeles as they were surfaced and duplicated by freeways<sup>15</sup>. 14-by-48-foot hand-painted billboards began to appear along the freshly paved Sunset Boulevard that acted as a primary traffic corridor to Sherman residents. These billboards resembled “great propaganda art” and typically advertised for household staples such as hamburgers, Pepsi-Cola and cigarettes<sup>16</sup>. With its unique urban setting, pedestrians walking on Sunset Boulevard experienced a scale of signage that was accustomed to the automobile.

During Prohibition years, the town of Sherman gained a reputation for its loose regulations by refusing to incorporate into the City of Los Angeles and fall under the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles Police Department. The part of Sunset Boulevard which was unincorporated became notorious for its easy availability of liquor as the Los Angeles Mafia gained power bootlegging alcohol<sup>17</sup>. The town of Sherman soon became a suburban nighttime satellite for the emerging movie industry in Hollywood and, seemingly just like that, the Sunset Strip was born. Sherman became known as West Hollywood (though not its official title until 1984), emphasizing its relationship to its neighbor<sup>18</sup>. With ill-defined land-use regulations the Sunset Strip fostered a whole generation of glamorous nightclubs favored by the film industry, such as the Trocadero (1934), Players (1940), Ciro’s (1940), and the Mocambo (1941). It emerged a sophisticated urban, residential, and shopping district home to many of Los Angeles’ elite<sup>19</sup>. However, by the 1950s the hotels and casinos of Las Vegas began to overshadow the grandeur of the nightlife on the Sunset Strip. Las Vegas, just a few hours’ drive from Los Angeles, offered the kind of liberated adult entertainment scene that the Sunset Strip only implied. The Strip’s many billboard advertisements started to shift from promoting household items, to featuring airline travel to and from Las Vegas, as well as its headlining acts<sup>20</sup>. The Sunset Strip lost favor with the majority of the film industry but continued to serve as an attractive destination for locals. The regressive policies of Los Angeles and other county-administered lands encouraged many lesbians and gays, as well as Russian Jewish immigrants to find refuge in West Hollywood<sup>21</sup>. According to a report by *WeHo by the Numbers*, based on recent U.S. census data and City survey, the City of West Hollywood continues to act as a haven for the LGBTQIA+ community, with only 43% of the current population identifying as heterosexual<sup>22</sup>.

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14 Nathan Masters, “How the Town of Sherman Became the City of West Hollywood,” *KCET Lost LA, History & Society* (December 2011), accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/how-the-town-of-sherman-became-the-city-of-west-hollywood>.

15 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 77.

16 Robert Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2016), 44-51.

17 Law Library – American Law and Legal Information, “Organized Crime - American Mafia,” *American Mafia – York, Families, Mob, and Family -JRank Articles*, accessed May 19, 2020, <https://law.jrank.org/pages/11944/Organized-Crime-American-Mafia.html>.

18 Masters, “How the Town of Sherman Became the City of West Hollywood”.

19 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 32.

20 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 34.

21 Masters, “How the Town of Sherman Became the City of West Hollywood”.

22 David Warren, “Just How Gay Is West Hollywood?” *WEHOville*, last modified February 9, 2018, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.wehoville.com/2018/02/09/just-gay-west-hollywood/>.



*Figure 2.3: An aerial view looking northeast towards the town of Sherman (now, West Hollywood), 1922. The area in the foreground has not yet been developed and consists of open fields divided by large roads. Streets in view include Sunset Boulevard, Holloway Drive, Santa Monica Boulevard, La Cienega Boulevard, Melrose Avenue. Retrieved from the California Historical Society Collection.*



*Figure 2.4: An aerial view looking northeast towards the town of Sherman, 1931. Santa Monica runs from the foreground at left into the distance at right. There are many closely spaced buildings around the street and the urban sprawl extends into the distance at right. A large railroad yard can be seen in the foreground at center. Retrieved from the California Historical Society Collection.*

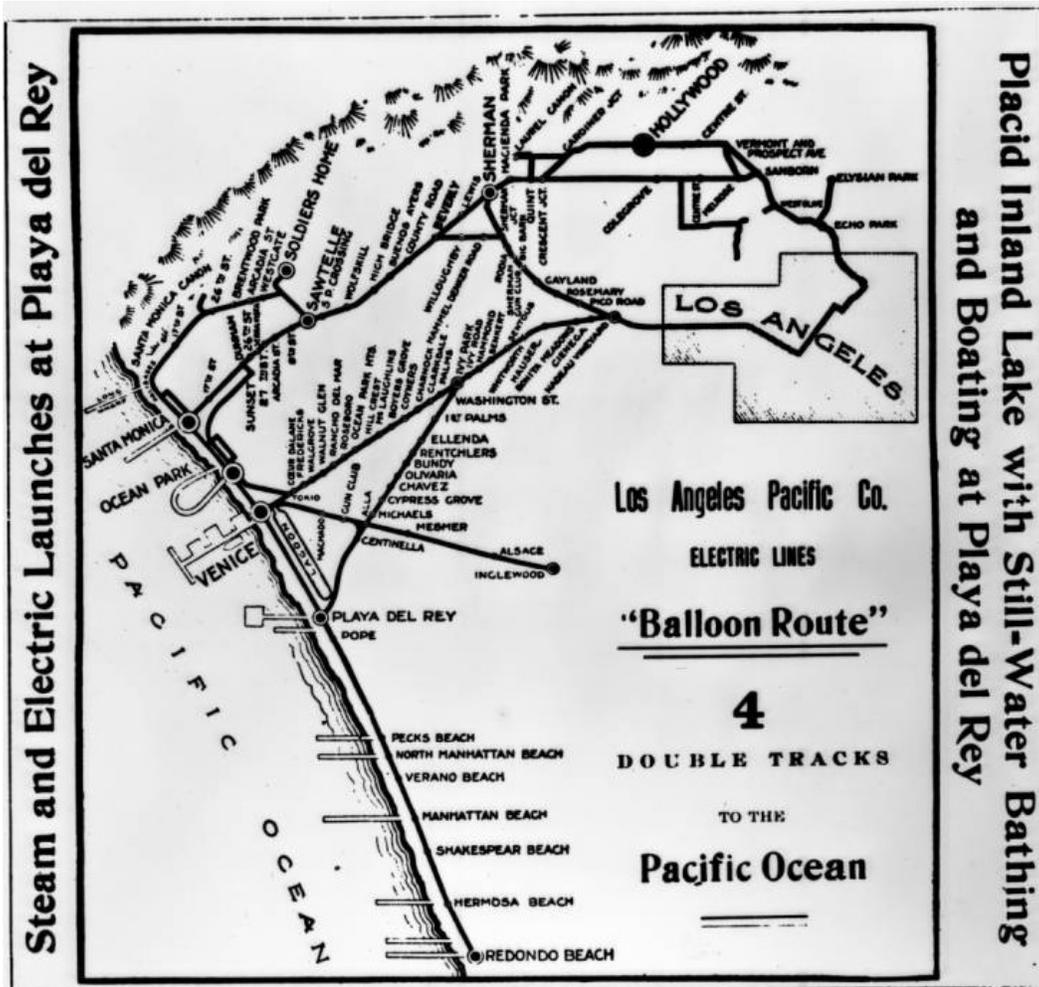


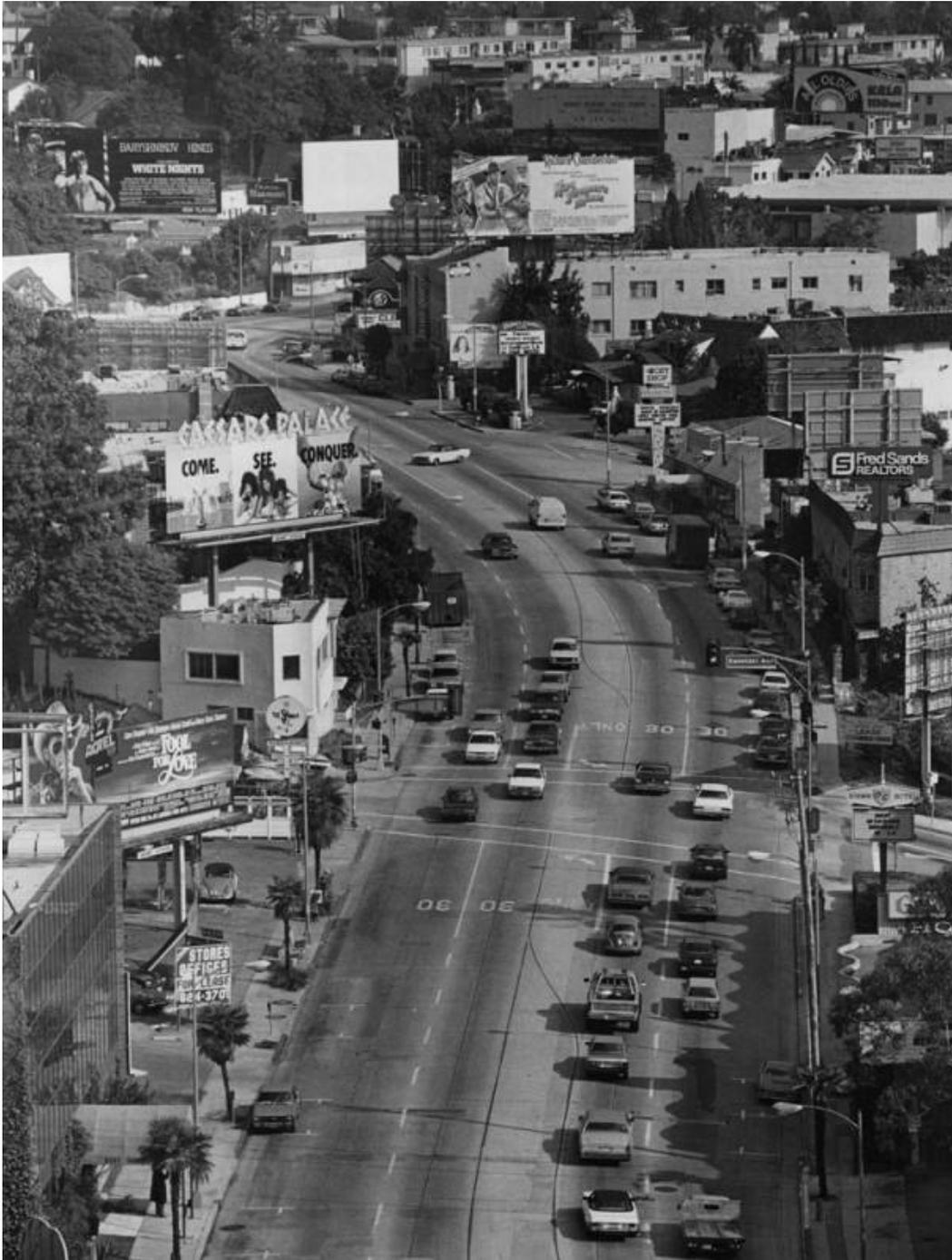
Figure 2.5: A photograph of a map of the Los Angeles Pacific Company Electric lines around Los Angeles, including the "Balloon Route", 1910. The map shows the City of Los Angeles in the upper right corner with the Pacific Ocean in the bottom left. Stops on the lines include, from left to right, top to bottom, Santa Monica, Santa Monica Canon, 26th Street, Brentwood Park, Arcadia Street, Westgate, Soldiers Home, Sawtelle, S.D. Crossing, Wolfskill, High Bridge, Buenos Ayers, County Road, Beverly, Lewis, Sherman, Hacienda Park, Laurel Canon, Gardiner Junction, Hollywood, Centre Street, Vermont and Prospect Ave, Sanborn, Elysian Park, 17th Street, Sunset, Arcadia Street, 9th Street, Willoughby, Big Barn, Crescent Junction, Colegrove, Melrose, Ocean Park, Venice, Coeur D'alane, Fredericks, Walgrove, Walnut Glen, Rancho Del Mar, Roseboro, Ocean Park Mtns., Hill Crest, McLaughlin's, Boyers Grove, Coyners, Charnock, Clarksdale Palms, Mammel Dewer Road, Ivy Park, Ivy Road, Hammond, Bennert, Sentous, Whitworth, Mauser, Bonita Meadows, Cienaga, Nadeay Vineyard, Torio, Machado, Gun Club, Alla, Centinella, Michaels, Cypress Grove, Chavez, Olivaria, Bundy, Rentschlers, Ellenda, 1st Palms, Washington Street, Alsace, Inglewood, Playa Del Rey, Pope, Pecks Beach, North Manhattan Beach, Verano Beach Manhattan Beach, Shakespear Beach, Hermosa Beach and Redondo Beach. Retrieved from the California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California, digitally reproduced by the USC Digital Library.



**Figure 2.6:** The exterior of *Ciro's* nightclub in West Hollywood, at 8433 Sunset Boulevard on the Sunset Strip, 1941. During Prohibition years, the ill-defined land-use regulations on the Sunset Strip fostered a whole generation of glamorous nightclubs favored by the film industry. *Ciro's* featured many notorious musicians like Tina Turner, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and Sammy Davis Jr. Among the galaxy of celebrities who frequented *Ciro's* were Marilyn Monroe, Ronald Reagan, Frank Sinatra and James Dean. Retrieved from *The World Famous Comedy Store's Flickr*.



**Figure 2.7:** A group of friends enjoying the glamorous nightlife of the Sunset Strip of the thirties and forties. Opening in 1939, *Ciro's* combined an overdone baroque interior with an unadorned exterior and became a famous hangout of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s. It was one of "the" places to be seen and guaranteed being written about in the gossip columns. Retrieved from the *Shades of L.A. Collection*.



*Figure 2.8: A Sunset Strip billboard promoting the Las Vegas hotel Caesar's Palace, 1985. Photographed by Paul Chinn.*

## 1.2 Rock 'n' Roll Takes Over the Sunset Strip

With the new and enlivened youth of the sixties, a revitalized music scene filled the void left in the nightlife of the Sunset Strip with Rock 'n' Roll. This began in 1964 as Jac Holzman, head of Elektra Records, sat in his West Hollywood office considering Los Angeles' unique car culture - especially that of the Sunset Strip<sup>23</sup>. Founded in 1950, and once considered a small Folk label, the vision, creativity, and ingenuity of Jac Holzman propelled Elektra Records into the electric age of the sixties. In Mick Houghton's *Becoming Elektra: The true story of Jac Holzman's visionary record label*, Holzman is quoted, "We were considered a label that was definitely on the come, and I was always considered a guy who was on the make. I have a hard time seeing myself that way, but I would go after opportunities if I was committed to something, and I just wouldn't let up."<sup>24</sup> Intrigued by the west coast music scene Holzman added a Los Angeles branch to the New York City based Elektra Records in 1964<sup>25</sup>. While searching for a unique way to show his commitment to his artists in a City of corporate giants, Holzman noticed that the colossal hand-painted billboards along the Sunset Strip were advertising "everything but records."<sup>26</sup> At the time this east/west running urban boulevard was predominantly used to support the California dream by bringing the Beverly Hills elite into Hollywood in the morning and driving them off into the Sunset in the evening. Holzman sensed that the billboards of this main transportation corridor could be useful to his record company, especially in a City built on transportation and entertainment. The Los Angeles Psychedelic Rock band *The Doors* led the way with Elektra Records in January of 1967, as the first Rock 'n' Roll billboard appeared on the Sunset Strip near the Chateau Marmont promoting their debut record album. Towering over the Strip for one month, this billboard displayed the faces of Jim Morrison, Ray Manzarek, Robby Krieger, and John Densmore;<sup>27</sup> It signaled a new direction for the Sunset Strip. Suddenly every musician (Elektra or otherwise) wanted to promote themselves along the Strip. Many new billboards appeared, leading to dozens of new faces on the Strip including international bands like The Beatles, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. The Sunset Strip would be changed forever as Rock 'n' Roll had undeniably sparked something in West Hollywood. These billboards were quickly followed by the opening of world-famous Rock 'n' Roll venues, bars, and recording studios (not to mention the celebrated lyrics that would come from them).

The glamorous nightclubs of the thirties and forties were replaced by a new generation of clubs such as the Whisky-a-Go-Go (1964), Gazzarri's (1967), and the Roxy (1973) that began to introduce many of the world's greatest Rock bands like Van Halen, Mötley Crüe, and Guns N' Roses. Late-night traffic congestion continued to increase, and local residents and businesses grew tired of the crowds of young people going to clubs and music venues along the Strip. It became a major gathering place for the counterculture and was the location of the Sunset Strip curfew riots in November of 1966, involving the police and crowds of young people. The Sunset Strip curfew riots inspired the Los Angeles band Buffalo Springfield's song *For What It's Worth*, where Stephen Stills famously sings, "There's something happening here. What it is ain't exactly clear."<sup>28</sup> But what was happening is now perfectly clear: the youthful and revitalized music scene of Rock 'n'

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23 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 23.

24 Mick Houghton, *Becoming Elektra: The true story of Jac Holzman's visionary record label* (London: Jawbone Press, 2010), 11.

25 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 23.

26 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 23.

27 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 21.

28 Danny Hajek, "A Thousand People In The Street: 'For What It's Worth' Captured Youth In Revolt," NPR, February 20, 2019, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/20/693790065/buffalo-springfield-for-what-its-worth-american-anthem>.



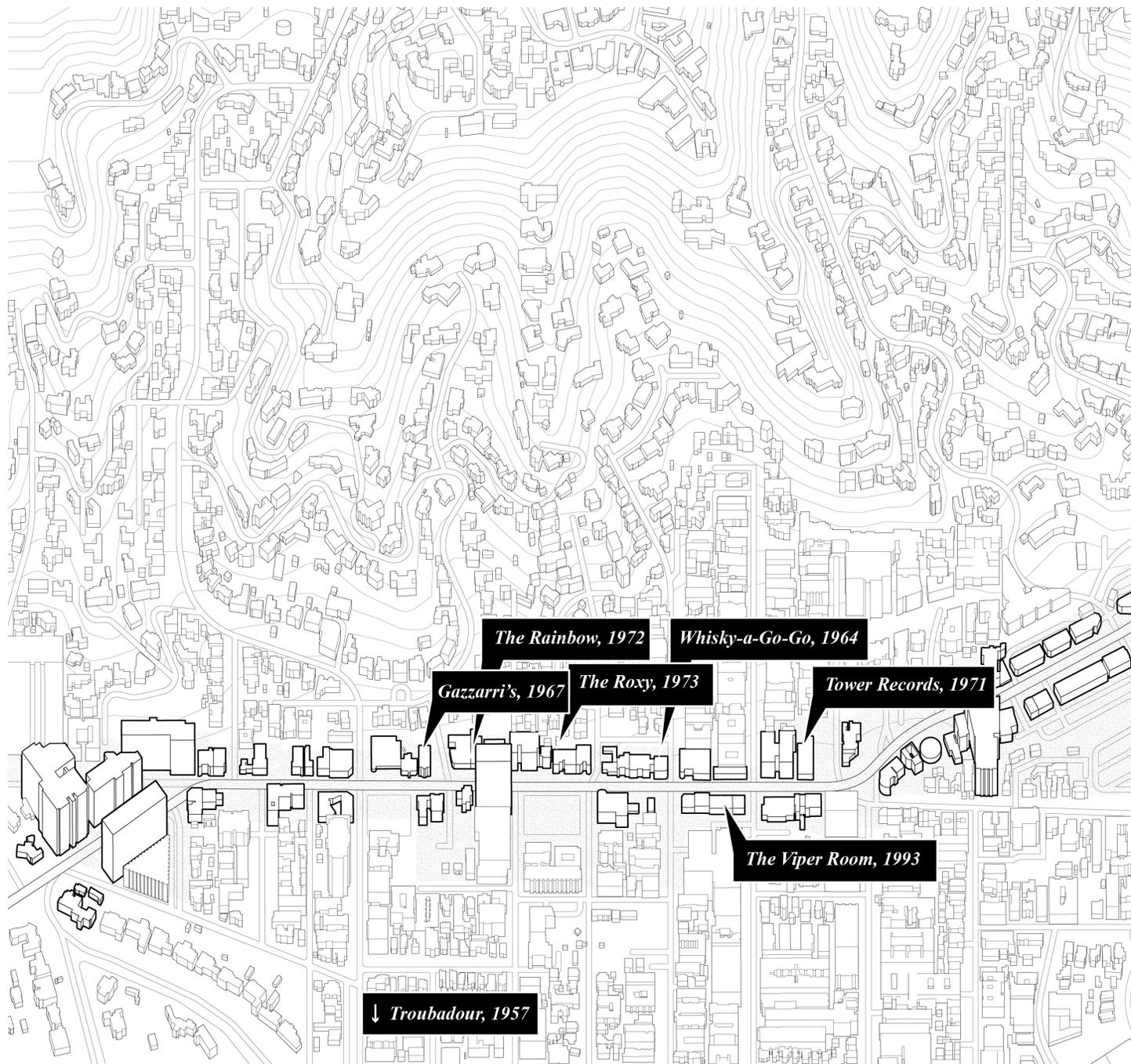
*Figure 2.9: Members of The Doors perched on top of the first Rock 'n' Roll billboard, promoting their debut record album "Walk On Through", January 1967. Photographed by Bobby Klein.*



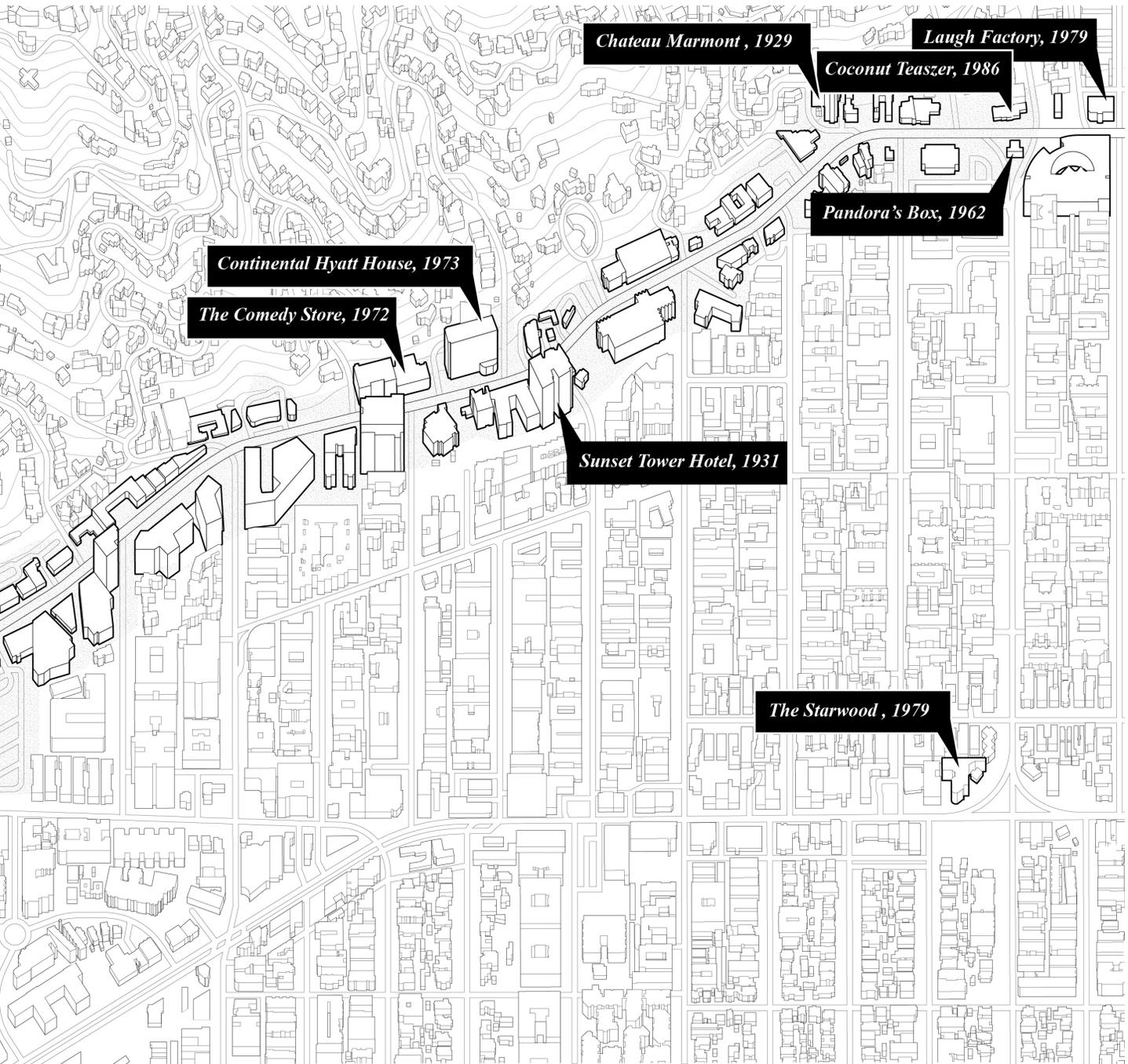
**Figure 2.10:** A rally of teenagers and young adults on the Sunset Strip just before curfew on November 15, 1966. A speaker who identified himself only as Bryan, 26, addresses the gathering in front of the nightclub Pandora's Box (8118 Sunset Boulevard), the center of the Sunset Strip curfew riots. Photographed by Howard Ballev.



**Figure 2.11:** Even after the Curfew Riots, kids continued to fill the Sunset Strip. This image shows a young man jumping on a car, as another young man leans on the hood, celebrating New Year's Eve on the Sunset Strip. Photograph dated January 1, 1968. Retrieved from the Herald Examiner Collection.



*Figure 2.12: An oblique plan of the Sunset Strip as per its Rock 'n' Roll revival between the late sixties and early nineties, 1:3000. The residential neighborhoods of Laurel Canyon and Beverly Hills are located North of the Strip, while commercial flatlands are found just South of it.*



*Chateau Marmont , 1929*

*Laugh Factory, 1979*

*Coconut Teaszer, 1986*

*Pandora's Box, 1962*

*Continental Hyatt House, 1973*

*The Comedy Store, 1972*

*Sunset Tower Hotel, 1931*

*The Starwood , 1979*

**Figure 2.13:** U.S. record sales for sixteen notable Los Angeles Rock 'n' Roll house bands, based on data retrieved from the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America®), accounting for a total of 669,000,000 units sold at approximately \$4.00 per unit.



Frank Zappa  
*Jazz-Rock, 1955-1993*



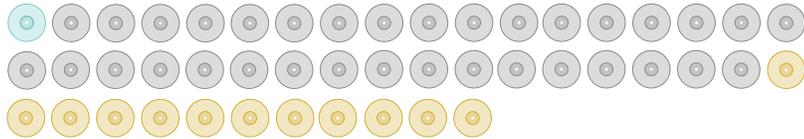
The Byrds  
*Folk Rock, 1964-2000*



The Mamas & The Papas  
*Folk Rock, 1965-1968*



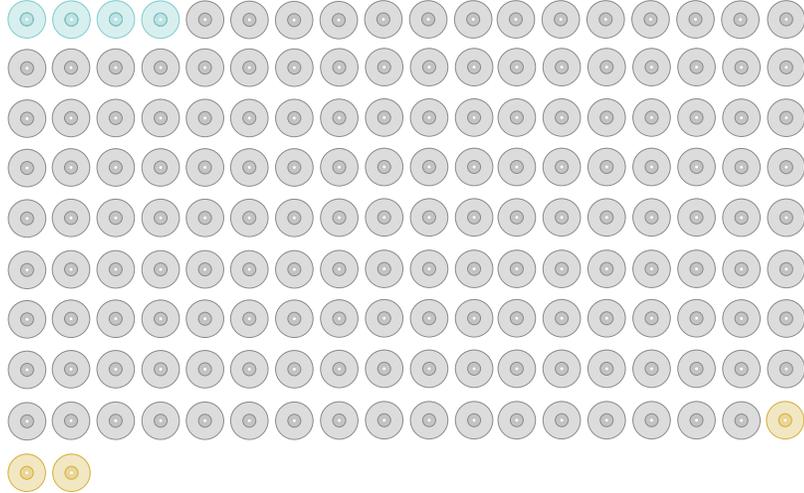
The Doors  
*Psychedelic Rock, 1965-2016*



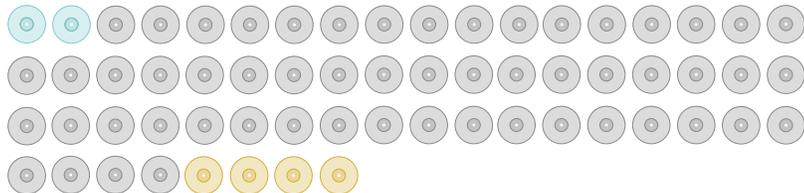
Buffalo Springfield  
*Folk Rock, 1966-1968*



Eagles  
*Soft Rock, since 1971*



Van Halen  
*Hard Rock, since 1972*



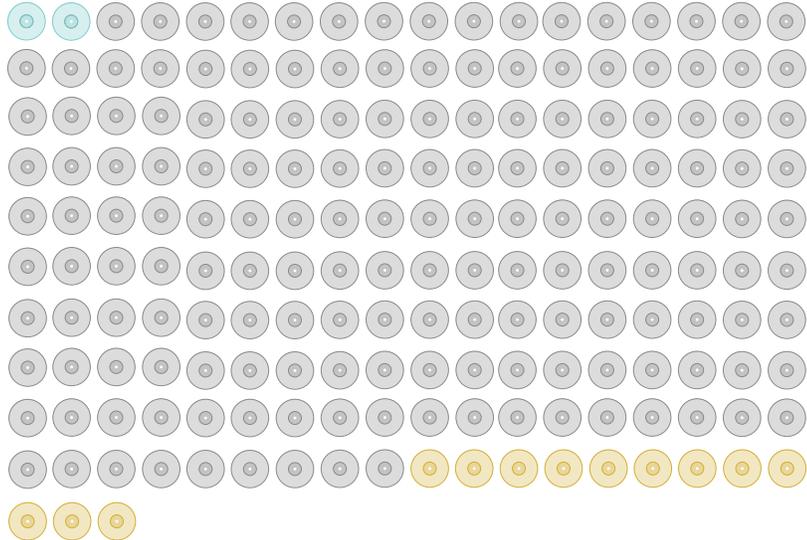
Quiet Riot  
*Hard Rock, since 1973*



Ratt  
*Glam Metal, since 1976*



Metallica  
*Thrash Metal, since 1981*



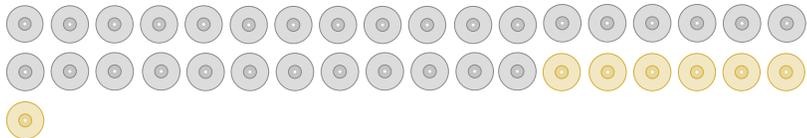
The Bangles  
*Pop Rock, since 1981*



Slayer  
*Thrash Metal, since 1981*



Mötley Crüe  
*Glam Metal, 1981-2015*



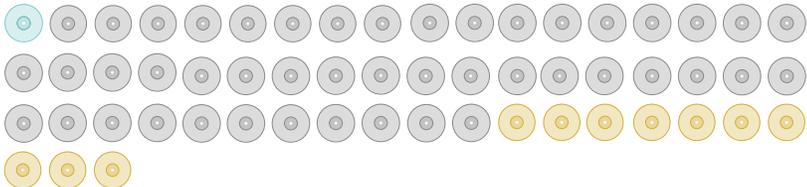
Megadeth  
*Speed Metal, since 1983*



Warrant  
*Glam Metal, since 1984*



Guns N' Roses  
*Hard Rock, since 1985*



Roll<sup>29</sup>. By day the Sunset Strip was where the business of the music industry was conducted by record companies, talent scouts, business managers, advertising agencies, and recording studios. When considering just sixteen of the most notable Rock 'n' Roll Strip house musicians, without accounting for inflation, approximately \$2,676,000,000 in record sales can be found within the US alone (see Figure 2.13). Contracts would be signed, and congratulatory celebrations would be held at any number of restaurants or lobbies and suites of the Sunset Strip hotels. Songs written in the Hollywood Hills and first performed at Strip venues would be discovered, recorded, packaged, promoted and sold all on the same Boulevard. By night the Strip was Hollywood's dreamland, where all came to party and see or be seen at its venues, bars, lounges, and comedy clubs<sup>30</sup>. West Hollywood became the home (or second home) to hundreds of musicians who trickled in from all across America and the rest of the world.

### 1.3 The Fall of Rock 'n' Roll

As the wet blanket of Grunge music made its way down the Pacific coast from Seattle to Los Angeles in the early nineties, unfortunately, a wave of nearly instantaneous change fell over the Sunset Strip; an end to a 30-year-long era. The shift from hair bands and men in stilettos to plaid and oversized denim left a hole on the Strip that, to this day, has not been replaced. Bands like Nirvana along with the personal Walkman encouraged listening to music with headphones in solitary, and soon the crowds of kids started to disappear from the Strip. Billboards stopped promoting Rock 'n' Roll and with low attendance numbers, Strip venues struggled to keep their doors open. Once listed as the Guinness Book of World Records' "largest record store in the world,"<sup>31</sup> the closure of Tower Records' Sunset Strip location in 2006 seemed to be the final nail in the coffin. For now, it seems the Sunset Strip remains a shell of what was once the hottest boulevard in the music industry.

Although this period of Rock 'n' Roll should be heavily criticized for its inequality in regard to gender, sexuality and race, it was through its civic purpose and integration into the local vernacular that Rock 'n' Roll found its success on the Sunset Strip. It considered the pedestrian scale, and blended commercial content with Strip specific artistry to create a new urban environment<sup>32</sup>. Today, as proposals for redevelopment along the Strip are submitted to the City of West Hollywood, citizens are infuriated by their lack of relevance or homogeneity to the local vernacular. What these designers (planners, architects, etc.) are failing to realize is that successful architecture on the Sunset Strip represents an architecture of place. It acknowledges the Strip's existing landscape and the rich cultural history of this urban boulevard without being too nostalgic. Today as architects, urbanists and designers attempt to revitalize this boulevard while grappling with global events like COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, one must understand that the Sunset Strip should be treated differently than the many other traffic corridors in Los Angeles. The Strip has always been a safe place for the counterculture. It encourages protesting, questioning, and above all - event. Designers must recognize that historically movement and event on the Strip have eclipsed architecture and consider new ways to blend out-of-home advertising with architecture.

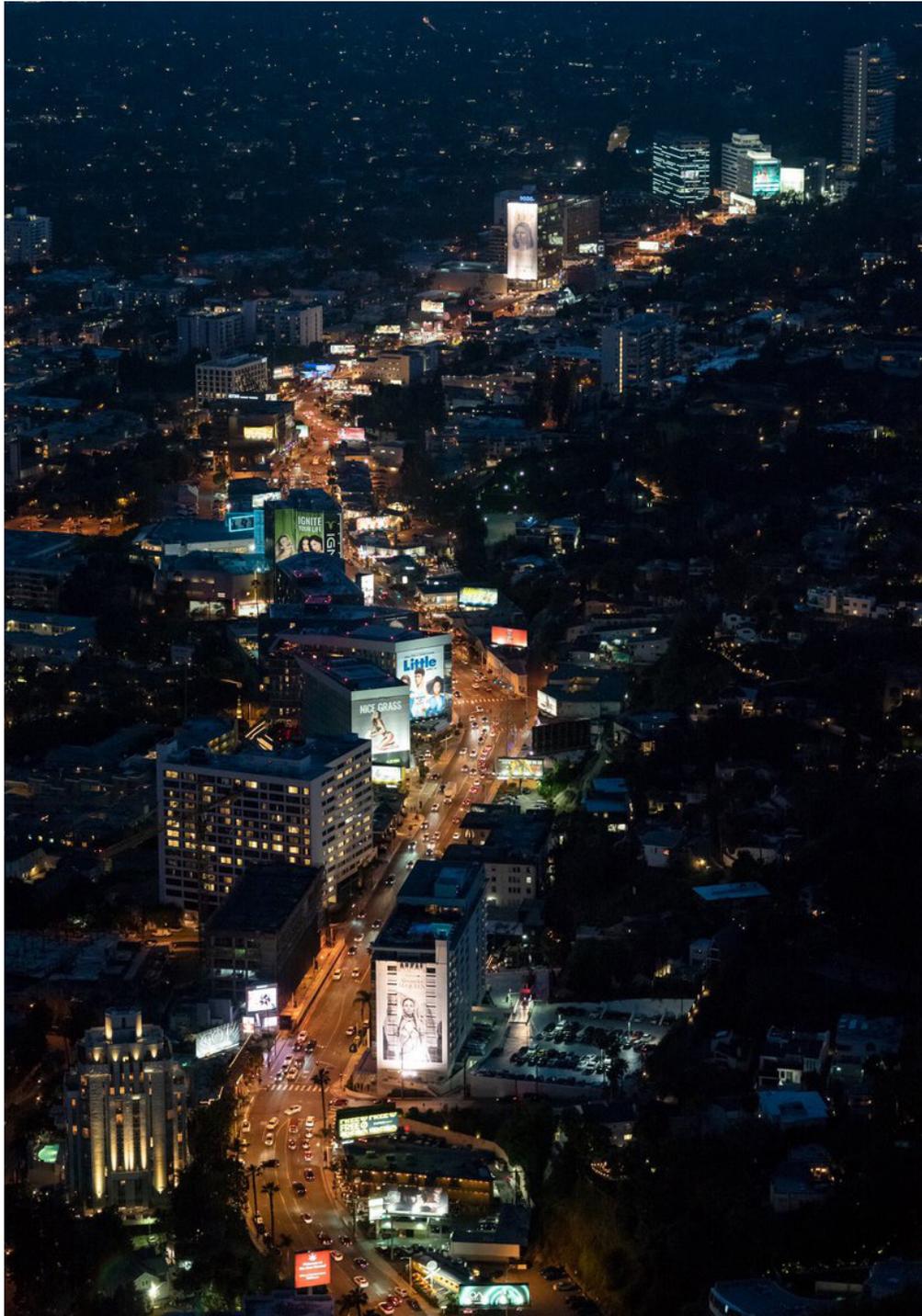
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29 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, second cover.

30 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 30.

31 James F Mills, "Tower Records Site History: From the First Car Stereo to 'Largest Record Store in the World'," *WEHOville*, October 25, 2016, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.wehoville.com/2013/03/27/tower-records-site-history-from-the-first-car-stereo-to-largest-record-store-in-the-world/>.

32 Architect, "West Hollywood Belltower," *Architect Magazine*, November 01, 2017, accessed August 10, 2019, [https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/west-hollywood-belltower\\_o](https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/west-hollywood-belltower_o).



*Figure 2.14: An aerial photograph of the Sunset Strip at night looking West. The curvature of the boulevard traces the foothills to its North. This curvature clearly impacts the positioning of architecture and billboards along the Strip. Retrieved from Visit West Hollywood.*



*Figure 2.15: A daytime photograph of Tower Records going out of business. The final nail in the coffin to the death of Rock 'n' Roll on the Sunset Strip. Photographed by Dave Whelan on November 5th, 2006.*



Figure 2.16: A photograph of the final Tower Records signage after closing reads almost like a tombstone to the death of Rock 'n' Roll on the Sunset Strip. Photographed by Dave Whelan on January 1st, 2007.

#### 1.4 The More You Know: The Doors

On an early morning in January of 1967, the members of The Doors showed up to the Foster and Kleiser studio to see their newly completed billboard promoting their debut album, *Break On Through*, before it was assembled on the Sunset Strip. Jac Holzman later commented that, “The group thought it was clever. The idea of Jim hanging as a specter over the Sunset Strip certainly tickled him.”<sup>33</sup> Later that morning the billboard panels were disassembled and brought to the Sunset Strip. Rock ‘n’ Roll photographer Bobby Klein documented the members of The Doors’ as they climbed the scaffolding and sat atop of their 14-by-48-foot billboard as it was reassembled. Holzman reserved the billboard beside the Chateau Marmont hotel situated at the eastern entrance of the Strip for \$1200 a month. He reasoned that it was a calling card for the band, that Los Angeles disc jockeys would see on their way to work<sup>34</sup>.

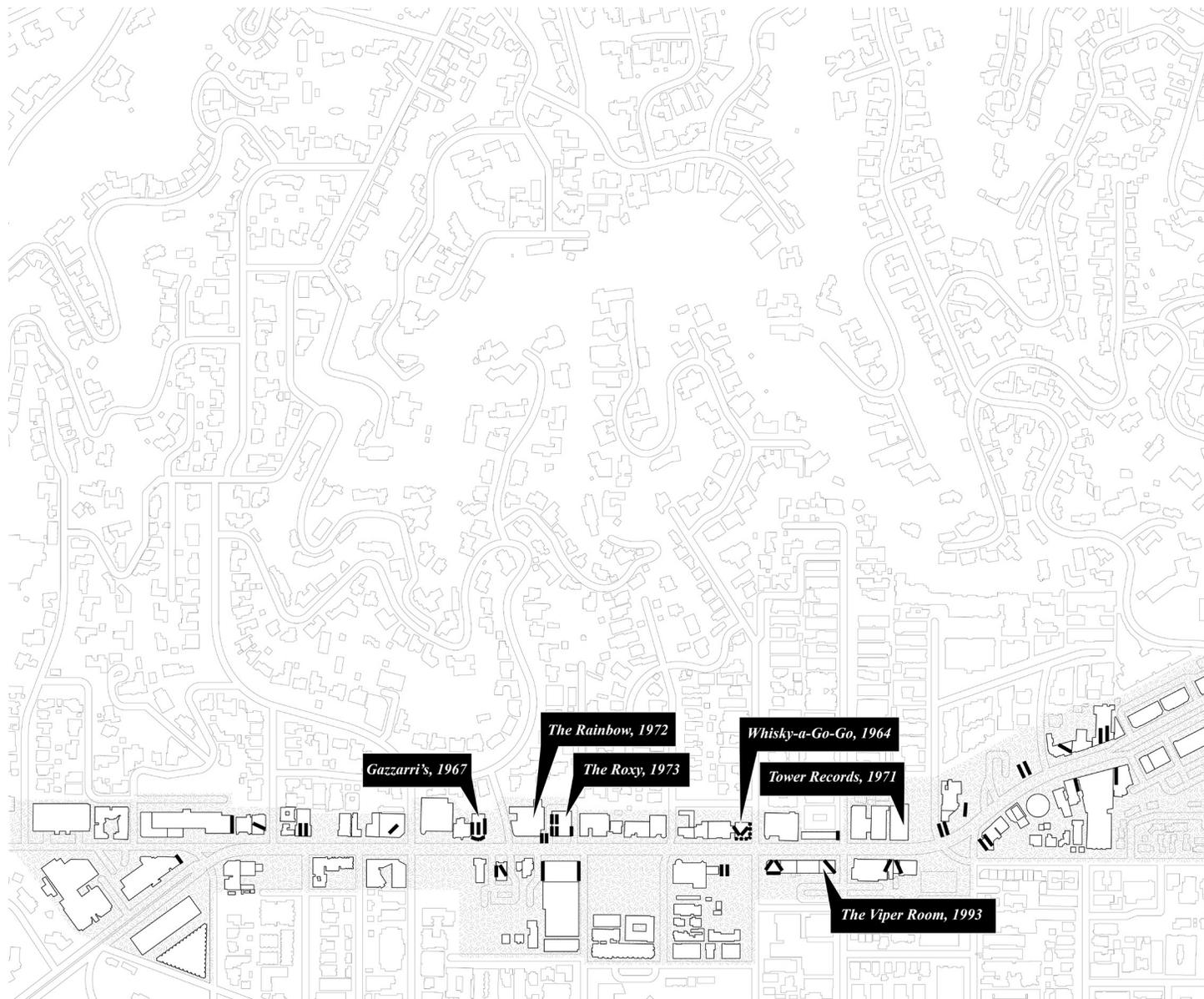
<sup>33</sup> Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 25.



**Figure 2.17:** Members of The Doors standing in front of the first Rock ‘n’ Roll billboard, promoting their debut record album “Walk On Through”, January 1967. Photographed by Bobby Klein.

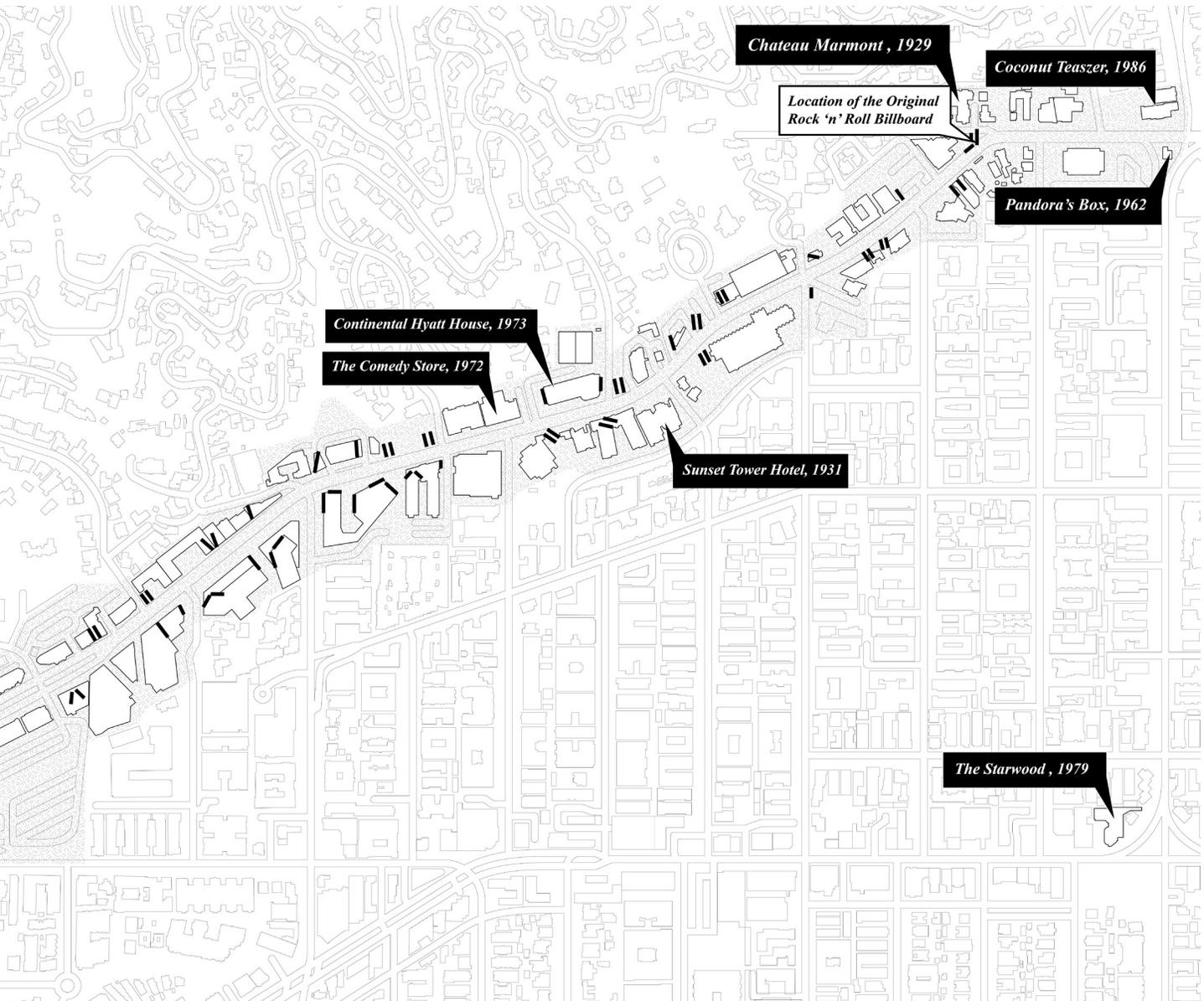
**Ecology**  
**One:**  
**Billboards**



— Recorded Sunset Strip billboard

**Figure 3.1:** A plan of the Sunset Strip showing billboard locations along the curved boulevard. The billboards are placed at angles that relate to the architecture and curvature of the Strip to maximize exposure to pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Venues such as the Whisky-a-Go-Go and the Roxy have leased their facades to off-site advertising companies, 1:3000.





## 2.1 Advertising On-Site

The Sunset Strip has always been associated with driving, both for people passing through and for visitors going to, from and between destinations along the urban boulevard. By the late 1960s there were two primary outdoor advertising companies dominating the Los Angeles region – Foster & Kleiser and Pacific Outdoor. Both companies employed a talented team of illustrators, stylists, typographers, retouchers, printers, technical advisors, billboard painters, quality control experts and installation crews to collaborate in hand-painting the temporary billboards in local warehouses<sup>35</sup>. They would take approximately ten days to produce and range from \$1,200 to \$10,000 in expense<sup>36</sup>, only to be admired along the Strip for one month. The Rock ‘n’ Roll billboards would then quickly be replaced and painted over for newer and fresher record debuts. The appearance of a new billboard seemed almost like a work of magic to Sunset Strip visitors as they were often rotated in the early hours of the morning. Unlike ever before the Rock ‘n’ Roll billboards of the Sunset Strip provided context for an advertisement based on location, which evidently led to their major success. When examined alone, these tributes to the music industry can be described as a unique economic form of art, but when placed in such a dynamic urban landscape, they are able to speak for the unique pulse of their surroundings<sup>37</sup>. For the first time, the advertisements along the Sunset Strip reflected the counterculture of the boulevard rather than the consumer culture of mass produced household items. Although billboards may seem outdated in a now digital age, this has also always been their selling point. The Rock ‘n’ Roll billboards were unavoidable, drawing your gaze as you sat in traffic, promoting records for the same bands playing in the venues the billboards sat atop. These hand painted works of artwork could not be turned off, scrolled past, or have their channel changed.

Billboards along the boulevard often towered over the spacious neighboring low-rise vernacular architecture and dominated their environment. As they were forced to compete with the exciting visuals of their surroundings, the outdoor advertising industry on the Sunset Strip understood that the design of a successful billboard had to leverage its enormous size by being brief, clear and seen. For text, they would simply include the recording artist’s name, title of the record, and record label, and chose to focus on captivating artwork<sup>38</sup>. As mentioned in the previous chapter, prior to the first appearance of a Rock ‘n’ Roll billboard, promotional material along the Strip focused primarily on household items and airline travel. Billboards along the Sunset Strip were treated no different than the billboards on any number of the many popular traffic corridors within Los Angeles county. With no correlation to the happenings on the Strip itself, these advertisements lacked to maximize on the potential that the Strip had to offer. During the Rock ‘n’ Roll era however, these same billboards utilized their location, and began promoting Sunset Strip specific events such as record release dates, and upcoming Rock concerts. They took advantage of the unique circumstance of being able to advertise on-site, allowing fans to discover a new record via the billboard, head to a Strip venue to listen to the record, and even later purchase the record at one of the Strip’s many record stores. The potential of the Sunset Strip was recognized, setting advertisements along the boulevard apart from the rest of Los Angeles. To quote John Van Hamersveld, an American

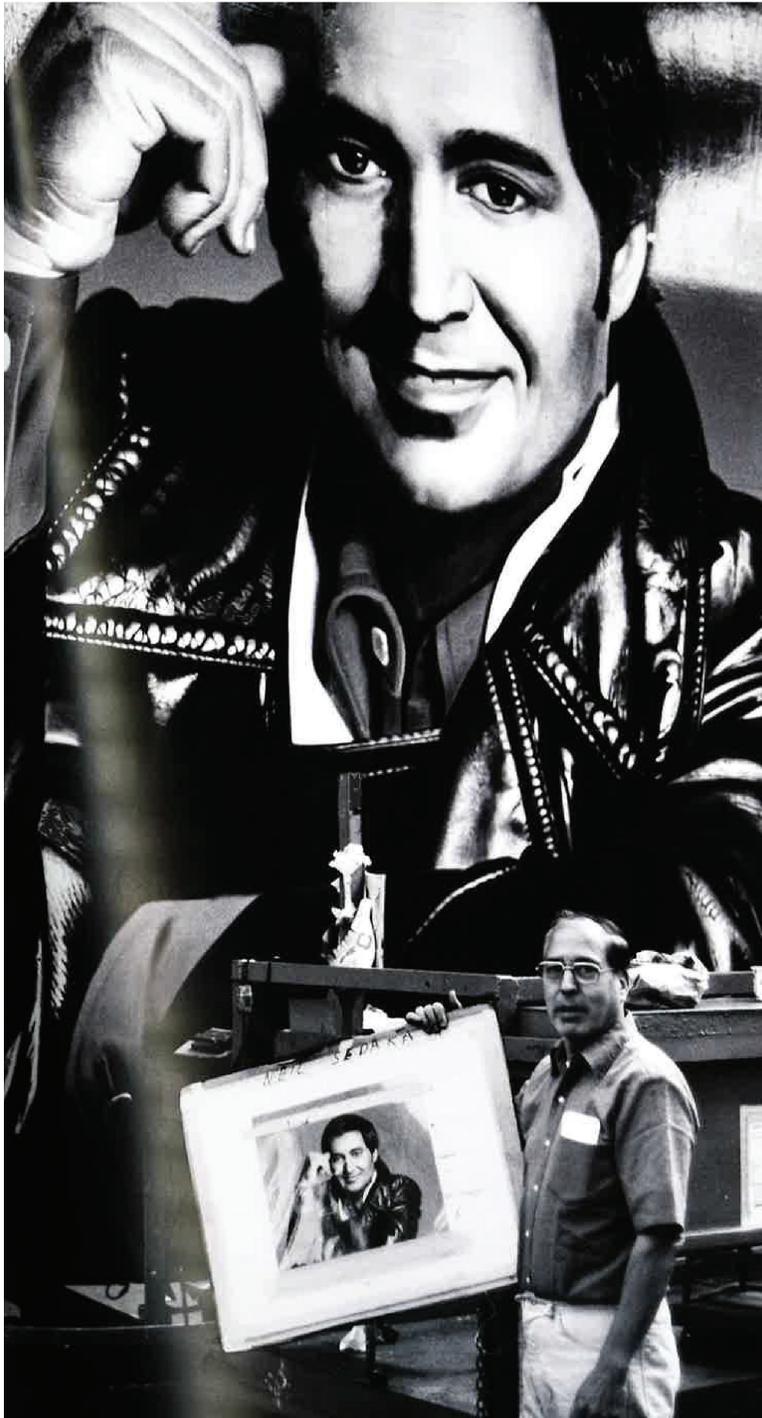
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35 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 3.

36 Chris Epting, “The Sunset Strip’s Historic Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards,” *Visit West Hollywood*, April 6, 2020, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.visitwesthollywood.com/stories/rock-n-roll-billboards-sunset-strip/>.

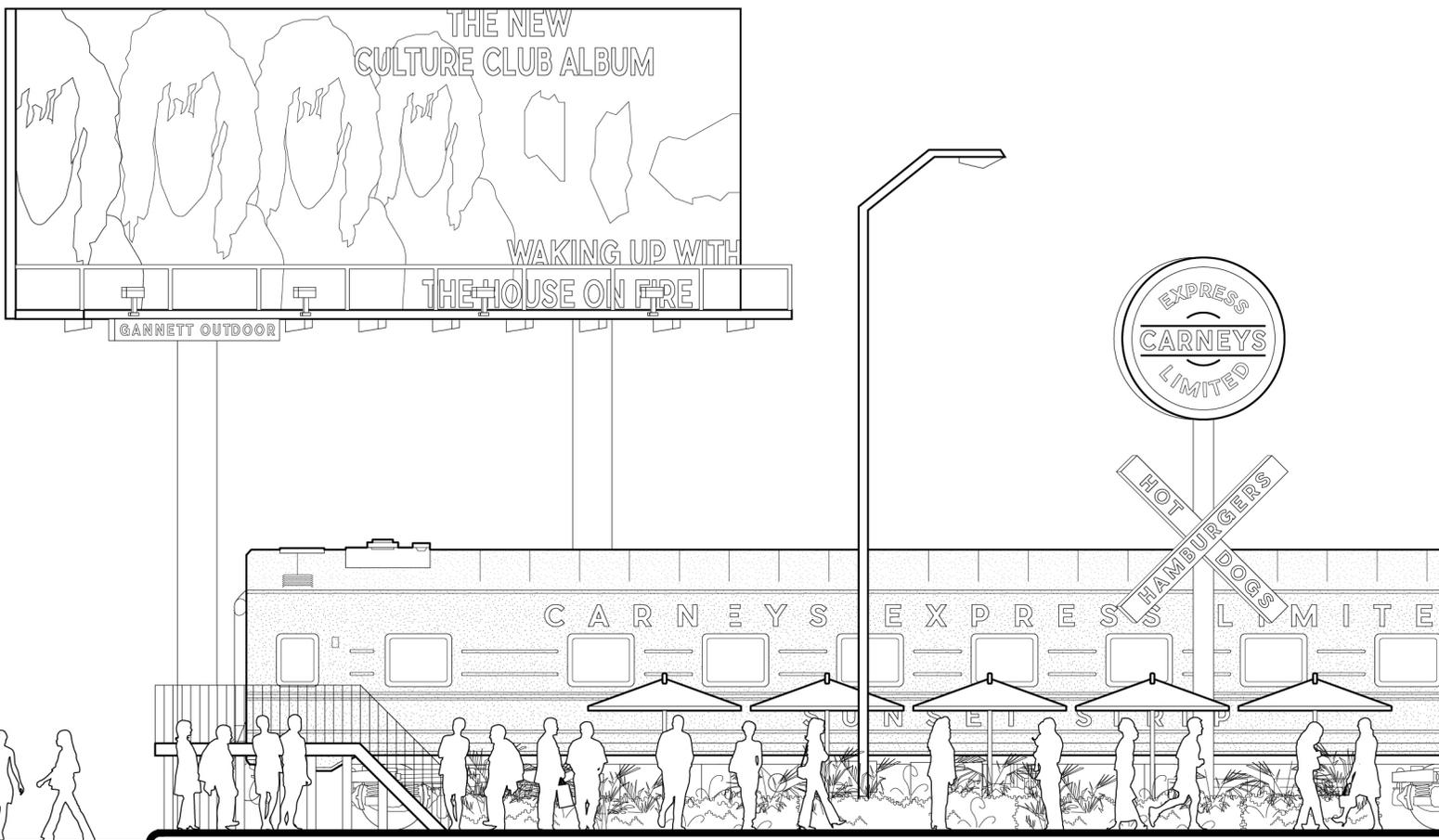
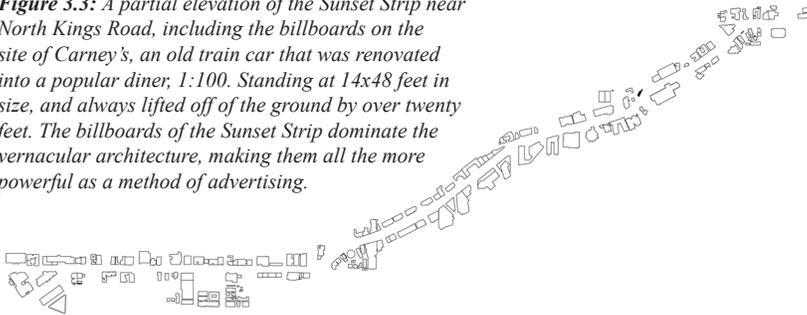
37 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 21.

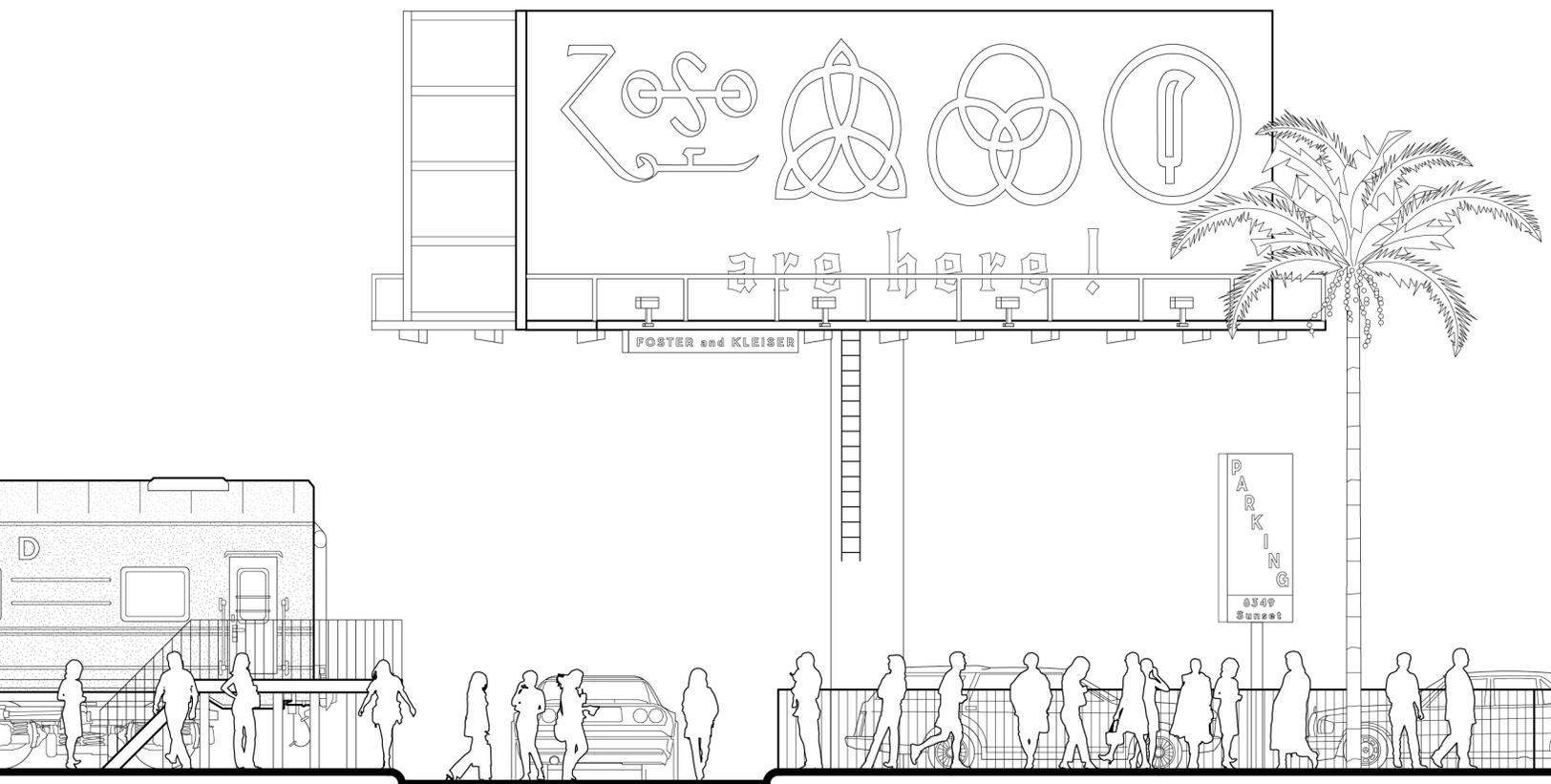
38 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 57.



*Figure 3.2: Billboard artist Mario Rueda uses a reducing glass (opposite of a magnifying glass) to reduce a copy of the original artwork, as well as broad brush strokes to paint his 14-by-48-foot billboard for pop musician Neil Sedaka, 1976.*

**Figure 3.3:** A partial elevation of the Sunset Strip near North Kings Road, including the billboards on the site of Carney's, an old train car that was renovated into a popular diner, 1:100. Standing at 14x48 feet in size, and always lifted off of the ground by over twenty feet. The billboards of the Sunset Strip dominate the vernacular architecture, making them all the more powerful as a method of advertising.





graphic artist and illustrator who designed album covers for Pop and Psychedelic bands from the 1960s onward, “The billboards were part of the cultural swirl that was happening then. The music was playing, and the culture was attaching itself. Every one was a unique concept that a good art director came up with, so they were all very particular to the times... They were never intended to be anything more than fleeting advertisements. But the images of the Rock 'n' Roll billboards became icons.”<sup>39</sup>

39 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 80.



*Figure 3.4: A photograph of the hand-painted billboards of the Sunset Strip for musicians Eddie Money, Cher and Judy Collins. The billboards of the Sunset Strip dominate the vernacular architecture, making them all the more powerful as a method of advertising. Photographed by Fred Seibert on June 15, 1979.*

## 2.2 Advertising Off-Site

In the 1980s the force of MTV and VH1 seemed to make Rock ‘n’ Roll billboards along the Sunset Strip less important, as promotional money was spent less on outdoor advertising and more on music videos<sup>40</sup>. Billboards on the Strip reverted back to the promotion of ordinary consumer culture items like alcohol, automobiles and fashion products, with the occasional music advertisement<sup>41</sup>. Although today the pedestrian public condition of the Sunset Strip has faced massive change due to COVID-19, the unique number of people driving down the urban boulevard has remained extremely active. With over 50,000 people driving down the Sunset Strip daily<sup>42</sup>, in 2020 the approximate one hundred billboards along the Sunset Strip continue to promote consumer products, choosing to focus mainly on technology, entertainment and fashion brands like Apple, Netflix and Prada. In fact, with twenty-eight existing billboards along the Strip, Netflix has recently offered to buy a billboard company for \$300 million. Outside of New York’s Times Square, the Sunset Strip is the most expensive area for billboards in the United States. A 14-by-48-foot billboard costs between \$35,000 to \$100,000 per month, with the most expensive being the location of the original Rock ‘n’ Roll billboard beside the Chateau Marmont hotel<sup>43</sup> (quite a large difference when compared to the \$1,200 Jac Holzman spent). Unlike most cities that are based on a grid, as the Sunset Strip traces the edges of the Hollywood Hills, each billboard is placed at a unique angle to compliment the winding boulevard. The location of the billboard situated beside the Chateau Marmont is placed perfectly at the eastern entrance of the Sunset Strip, where the bend of the street causes vehicles to drive directly towards the face of the billboard for a longer period of time. With advancements in digital technologies, the carefully crafted hand-painted billboards of the Rock ‘n’ Roll era have been replaced by digitally printed images on large sheets of material (sometimes spanning across entire building facades in the form of tall walls) and electronically transmitted images on video screens<sup>44</sup>.

Regardless of COVID-19, the impact of the loss of these on-site billboard advertisements has largely affected the social condition and cultural urban environment of the Strip itself. Although billboard companies recognize that the Strip’s counterculture nightlife (even going so far as to acknowledge venues like the Whisky-a-Go-Go, the Rainbow, and The Viper Room), and the proximity to the homes of the stars are the largest contributors to the Sunset Strip being the most expensive area for billboards<sup>45</sup>, they fail to recognize that by placing consumer focused billboards along a counterculture boulevard, they are inadvertently closing the doors of these venues, driving stars further back into the Hollywood Hills, and killing the nightlife of the Sunset Strip altogether. By treating the Sunset Strip like just another traffic corridor to advertise irrelevant products, the actual venues, restaurants, and bars of the Strip that gave it its notoriety in the first place, seem less important and secondary to the overwhelming number of unrelated advertisements. Venues find it difficult to attract and promote their own events, as most sublet their facades to off-site advertisements to compensate for the Sunset Strip’s high-operating costs. The City of West Hollywood has even gone as far as requesting Dudek Engineers to prepare an initial study that proposed a “Sunset Strip off-site Signage Policy” to amend the City of West Hollywood’s Zoning Ordinance and the Sunset Specific Plan in 2017. This amendment would revise regulations for

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40 Epting, “The Sunset Strip’s Historic Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards.”

41 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 193.

42 Staff, “Clear Channel Announces 11 New Billboards on Sunset Blvd.,” *WEHOville*, April 23, 2016, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.wehoville.com/2016/04/23/clear-channel-announces-11-new-billboards-sunset-blvd/>.

43 Sonari Ginton, “On LA’s Sunset Strip, A New Golden Age of Billboards,” *NPR*, April 21, 2018, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2018/04/21/602833949/on-las-sunset-strip-a-new-golden-age-of-billboards>.

44 Landau, *Rock ‘n’ Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 51.

45 Ginton, “On LA’s Sunset Strip, A New Golden Age of Billboards.”



*Figure 3.5: A photograph highlighting the location of the original Rock 'n' Roll billboard, now promoting Apple's iPad 2, with the Chateau Marmont to its right. As the Strip's most expensive billboard, it is situated at the eastern entrance of the Sunset Strip just before the boulevard sharply winds left, attracting the attention of drivers as they seemingly drive straight towards it. Photographed by Friscocali on March 17th, 2012.*



*Figure 3.6: The Jeremy Hotel, situated at 8490 Sunset Boulevard along the Sunset Strip. The hotel has eleven billboards across its facade, seven of which stand at 80 to 87 feet tall, as well as four vertical bulletins that are 60 feet tall and 20 feet wide. Retrieved from Google Maps, Image Capture May 2019, © 2020 Google.*

digital billboards and new off-site signage along the Sunset Strip, allowing an increased number of new billboards to be integrated into new development and façade remodels along the Strip. It would also permit modifications to existing billboards, specifically to increase changes in height, orientation of sign faces and pole locations<sup>46</sup>. The City of West Hollywood takes a quantity over quality approach, as billboards along the Strip continue to increase in number as well as size. Clear Channel Outdoor Americas has recently added eleven new signs to the Jeremy Hotel, situated at 8490 Sunset Boulevard on the Strip, seven of which stand at 80 to 87 feet tall, as well as four vertical bulletins that are 60 feet tall and 20 feet wide<sup>47</sup>. At what point should the City, developers and designers start to question when is too much? In order to retain the unique urban qualities of the Sunset Strip and reinforce its identity, the City of West Hollywood should consider billboard content legislation that limits the size of a billboard on the Sunset Strip in relation to the content it is advertising.

### 2.3 A Case Study: The Whisky-a-Go-Go

A great architectural example along the Sunset Strip that reflects the success of advertising on-site occurred at the Whisky-a-Go-Go during its Rock 'n' Roll era. As what is considered the Strip's most famous music venue, and the first to make its mark on Rock 'n' Roll, the Whisky would use the large 14-by-48-foot post and railing billboards on top of the venue to promote Rock 'n' Roll records. It would also use its soft and changeable façade billboards to promote the many notable upcoming bands performing within the venue such as The Doors, *Mötley Crüe*, and Guns N' Roses. Situated on the corner of North Clark Avenue and Sunset Boulevard, the three stories of the façade would be scattered with Rock 'n' Roll flyers, each fighting for attention with the venue's corner marquée (otherwise known as a hoarding billboard)<sup>48</sup>. With the venue's name in red cursive illuminating the corner, the Whisky would promote the names of the venue's upcoming acts in big bold black lettering across the marquée. With a capacity of 500, it was typical for the Whisky to sell out every night of the week, as well as maintain a large line waiting just outside the door during the Rock 'n' Roll era. Due to the lack of space in the filled venue, female DJs would hang from the ceiling in cages spinning records between live music sets, creating what we now know as Go-Go dancers.

Unfortunately, today the consequence of disconnecting the Sunset Strip billboard advertisements from its many venues can also be seen at the Whisky-a-Go-Go. With high operating costs, succumbing to the pressures of leasing the venue's valuable and highly desirable building façade and post and railing billboards to companies like Netflix, almost seemed inevitable. The names and dates of the upcoming performances on the venue's marquée fade into the background of the façade, seeming like a whisper compared to the loud shouts of the overwhelming off-site advertisements plastered across the building. Despite the Whisky's efforts to once again fill the inside of the venue by appealing to a wider audience through non-Rock 'n' Roll based performances, in 2020 on even a Friday or Saturday night, the Whisky fails to meet capacity on a regular basis. Once lively with crowds of musicians and visitors smoking and chatting, the streets outside of the venue remain bare, with only the flicker of the Whisky sign against the pavement indicating any form of life below its marquée. Although the doors of the venue remain open for now, what was once the hottest club in the music industry has, sadly, started to vanish into the background of its surroundings.

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46 Dudek Engineers, *Initial Study/Negative Declaration: Sunset Strip Off-Site Signage Policy*, (Pasadena: April 2017), 1, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.weho.org/home/showdocument?id=31160>.

47 Staff, "Clear Channel Announces 11 New Billboards on Sunset Blvd.."

48 Landau, *Rock 'n' Roll Billboards of the Sunset Strip*, 38.

## 2.4 The More You Know: Mötley Crüe

Mötley Crüe rose to fame on the Sunset Strip performing as the Whisky-a-Go-Go house band for the majority of 1981. Nikki Sixx, the Glam Metal band's bassist, still recalls selling out the 500-person capacity venue three nights in a row, "That was one of the highlights of our career." It was while playing at the Whisky one night that the band was discovered after Elektra Records executive Tom Zutaut noticed hundreds of kids waiting in line. It wasn't long after that Mötley Crüe was one of the biggest bands in the world and considered the new kings of the Sunset Strip. In their outrageous autobiography *The Dirt*, Mötley Crüe's vocalist Vince Neil looks back at his time meandering the Strip stating, "We'd get drunk, do crazy amounts of cocaine and walk the circuit in stiletto heels, stumbling all over the place." More than anyone else, Mötley Crüe would refer to the Sunset Strip in their music, with lyrics mentioning Strip hot spots like the Body Shop in their song "Girls, Girls, Girls", as well as filming their music videos within Strip venues like the Whisky-a-Go-Go for their song "Kickstart my Heart"<sup>49</sup>.

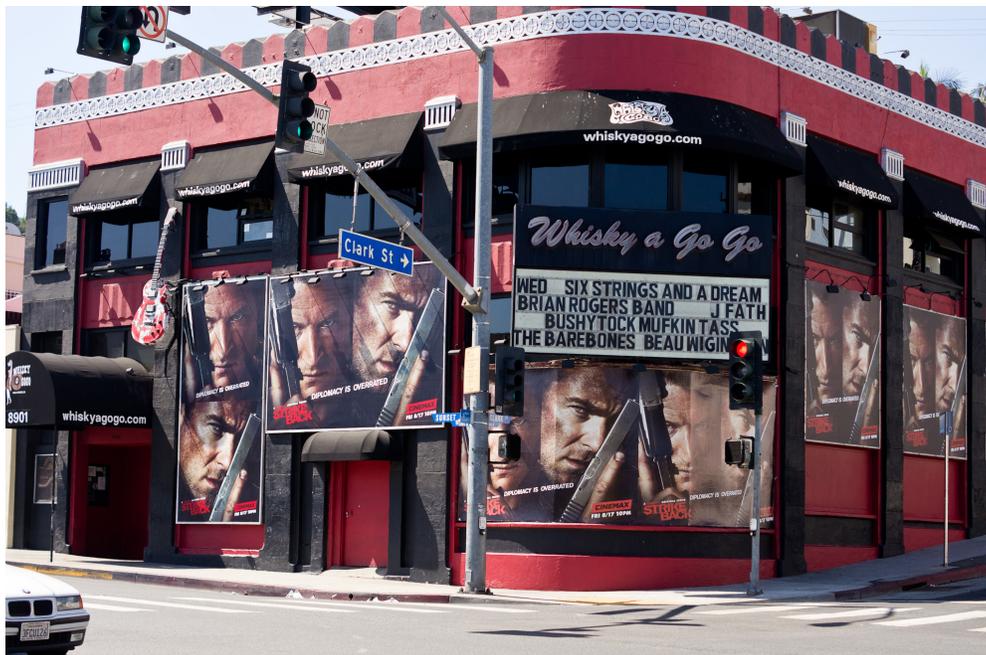
49 "The World Famous Whisky a Go Go – Part 4 (Mötley Crüe, 1981)," History, Whisky a Go Go, accessed May 24, 2020, <https://whiskyagogo.com/calendar/the-world-famous-whisky-a-go-go-part-4-motley-crue1981/>.



*Figure 3.7: Mötley Crüe performing at the Whisky-a-Go-Go, 1981. Retrieved from the Whisky-a-Go-Go.*



*Figure 3.8: An exterior night view of the Whisky A-Go-Go on the Sunset Strip, 1980. The facade of the venue is used to promote Rock 'n' Roll, and the names of upcoming performances on the venue's corner marquee stand out. Photographed by Roy Hankey. Retrieved from the Roy Hankey Collection at the Los Angeles Public Library.*



*Figure 3.9: A daytime view of the corner marquee of the Whisky-a-Go-Go surrounded by off-site advertisements, for the television series Strike Back, on December 21st, 2008. The names on the marquee fade in to the background. Photographed by Thomas Hawk.*



*Figure 3.10: A photograph highlighting the off-site advertising, and post and railing billboards from Sunset Boulevard at the Whisky-a-Go-Go. The post and railing billboards are promoting for entertainment in Las Vegas, similar to that of before the Rock 'n' Roll era. Photographed by Caltex98 on January 16th, 2015.*



*Figure 3.11: An interior view of the Whisky-a-Go-Go stage. Skid Row performed live May 17, 2014. Screen capture taken from Joe Dolan's YouTube channel.*

- 1 Post and Railing 14' x 48' Rooftop Billboard
- 2 Hoarding Billboard
- 3 Soft & Changeable Facade Billboard

**Figure 3.12:** A billboard analysis of the Whisky-a-Go-Go circa 1967, including façade advertisements for the Los Angeles bands The Doors and The Byrds that played at the venue on September 1-11th, and February 12-16th respectively. The rooftop billboard displays the Los Angeles band Love.





the  
third  
coming  
of

LOVE

DU  
ELEKTRA

Whiskey a Go Go  
BYRDS  
THE  
DOORS

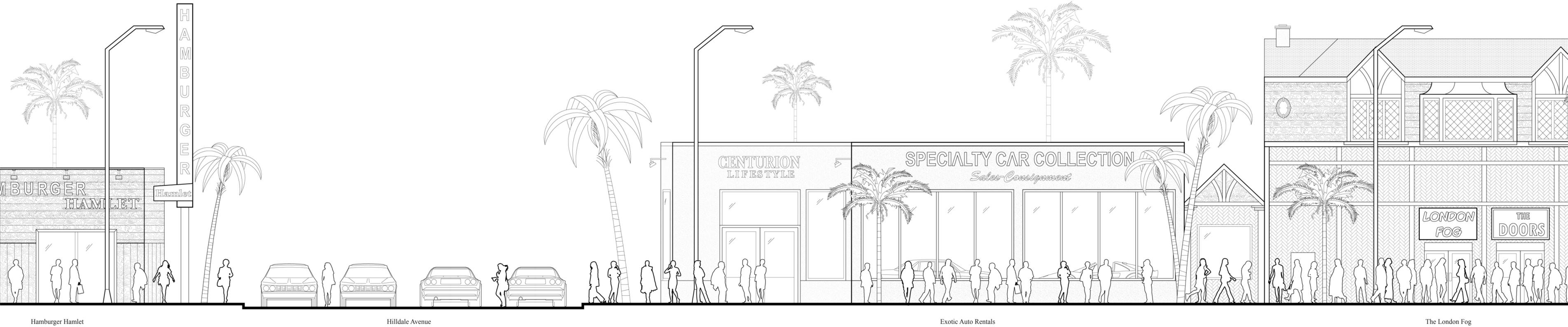
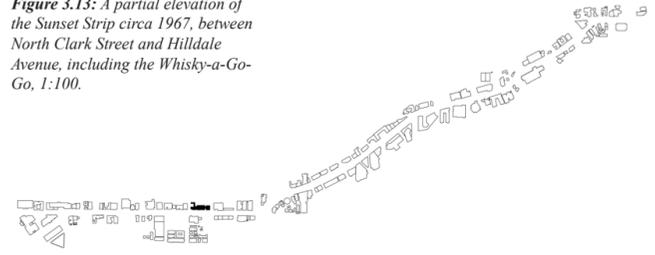
2

THE DOORS  
THE CHAMBERS BROTHERS

3

47

Figure 3.13: A partial elevation of the Sunset Strip circa 1967, between North Clark Street and Hilldale Avenue, including the Whisky-a-Go-Go, 1:100.



Hamburger Hamlet

Hilldale Avenue

Exotic Auto Rentals

The London Fog



The Unicorn

The Galaxy

Sneaky Pete's

Whisky-a-Go-Go

North Clark Street



**Figure 3.14:** A photograph of Jamie Wall in 2020. Image provided by Jamie.

## **2.5 An Interview with Jamie Wall: Previous Head Doorman of the Whisky-a-Go-Go**

Kelsey: Where were you born and when did you first move to Los Angeles?

*Jamie: I was born in the UK and I moved out to Los Angeles in, I believe, 1991 or end of 1990. I was 17 years old then. I had met an American girl in the UK and flew back to California with her. We ran off to Vegas to get married and ended up staying there.*

Once you were in California, when did you first know that you wanted to get involved with the entertainment industry?

*I loved metal. I loved Poison, Mötley Crüe, Guns N' Roses, Iron Maiden... I just loved Rock 'n' Roll. Growing up in the UK, and watching Hollywood on the telly, I loved the music scene. After I moved to Los Angeles, my first job was working for an agency, working security. They would send me to different places. One of my first jobs was at the Roxy. I was SO excited, you know, West Hollywood. I couldn't believe*

*that I was going to work somewhere that I had only seen on TV. I'd gone up there, to Sunset, and I was just mesmerized. There were girls wearing next to nothing, blokes with long hair wearing more make up than the girls. It was just fantastic. I told my boss at the agency that I loved working there and if there was ever any work going on there, I'd take it. They needed somebody down at the Whisky, so I started working there. I became really good friends with the manager of the Whisky, Sean. I was working there for twelve months through the agency, then one of his inhouse security guys got a job down at Seventh Veil, the strip club. Sean asked me if I would be interested in a permanent job at the Whisky. That's how I got my foot in the door there. That would have been about 1993 or '94. I was like a kid in a candy shop. I grew up in a really small town. Coming from such a small town to rubbing elbows with the rich and famous, and meeting all of these celebrities...I just couldn't believe it.*

How long did you work at the Whisky for?

*I worked there (pretty much) seven nights a week. I worked there non-stop until about 2005 or 2006. Then I had a job driving so I started slowing down. I would work weekends, the odd night, or a busy show until about 2007 or 2008. Even afterwards I would drop by just to say hello to everybody, work the odd shift and make a few extra bucks. I started working inside the club, but when the main door man would take two or three nights off a week, I would start doing the door. I did that for about two years and then after he quit, I got permanently placed at the front door and would do the front door every night. There would be five bands a night, seven nights a week. It is a pay-to-play venue, so before the club even opened back then, they would have already made \$4000.00 or \$5000.00 on presale tickets. Goldenvoice did a lot of shows there. They would bring*

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*a lot of big acts there like, Mötley Crüe, Oasis, and Rod Stewart. But for five nights a week usually, it would be local bands buying tickets and selling them. When I started working there, the Grunge scene had just started. I HATED Grunge. I was so upset because it was the end of the hair bands. Now it was people wearing jeans and beanies. I preferred the Rock 'n' Roll side of it.*

Could I get your opinion on the pay-to-play requirement?

*I think it's putting your money where your mouth is. You've got to understand that it's a business. It's all good saying that you have a following and, "Oh yeah, we will pack the place!" I've stood in that club with only twenty people there. If the bands hadn't given the club any money, you know, they're not going to make any money at the bar when there's only twenty people. Although we know it's pretty harsh to ask for two-grand from the bands for a night, because each band gets about fifty tickets, if you can sell your fifty tickets at \$10.00 a ticket, you can get the money back. I think it's because it's such an iconic place. Everybody wants to play there. It's like going to Disneyland for a little kid. If you're a musician, it's getting to play the Whisky. I think a lot of bands aren't too worried about paying for it. It's something to put on your resume. If they have to do pay-to-play and they do bring in a really big crowd, they don't have to pay again. So, I have mixed feelings about it.*

When you first got there were there still musicians passing out flyers to promote for their pay-to-play shows?

*Yes! Flyering has always been a massive, massive part of promotion. There were flyer wars as well. You'd have a band playing the Whisky on Friday and promoting that, but there would be another band playing*

*the Roxy at the same time. They'd end up fighting! They'd be like, "No, no! You have to come and see our show!" I've witnessed so many fist fights between bands playing different venues. There was a lot of competition. That's how the bands got the word out that they were playing somewhere, was flyers. On a Saturday night at 2:00 am, you couldn't see the sidewalk because there were so many flyers from so many different venues. It was mad. If you were smart and had some good-looking women, you would have them dress up and pass out the flyers for you (laughter).*

At the time that you were there, what do you think made the Sunset Strip so successful?

*It was just sex, drugs and Rock 'n' Roll. Everything about it was just so fantastic. The music scene, the Rainbow bar... I just loved it. There was just so much going on. People ran away from home just to be there. I saw people outside of the club crying just because they finally made it there. It was like their life was complete. It was just such a good scene. Cocaine was everywhere. You would go into the Rainbow and people would be doing it on the dinner table like it was nothing! There would be people having sex in the bathrooms, or outside the clubs. Girls would be walking from the Rainbow to the Whisky trying to see how many kisses they could get. Everyone was partying. Everyone was running around misbehaving. It was just debauchery. There's no other way to put it. I mean, I was there the night River Phoenix overdosed in the line for The Viper Room. I was on the door that night at the Whisky. We could see something going on. But people were stepping over him because they didn't want to lose their place in line to get into the club! There was a poor bloke dying on the floor and the people were more concerned about not having to wait in line for twenty minutes! The Strip was so busy*



*Figure 3.15: A photograph of Jamie overlooking a crowd while working at the Whisky-a-Go-Go. Image provided by Jamie.*

*back then. There was a lot of foot traffic. We had lines all the way up to the apartments. Two hundred or three hundred metres long. The night Van Halen played a riot broke out! They did a gig, and they announced the first five hundred people in line would get to see them. By about three o'clock in the afternoon there were about seven thousand people waiting already. The line went from the Whisky-a-Go-Go all the way down past even The Comedy Store! But then, just as we had the sheriffs arrive and the riot squad arrive, some knucklehead decided they weren't going to give the first five hundred tickets to the people by the Whisky, but they were actually going to give them to the first five hundred at Ticketmaster. Which was down by Vine. So, everyone turned around and started running down Sunset Boulevard! People were jumping over cars and stopping traffic. I had never seen anything like it. The club almost got shut down and the manager almost went to jail for that, for insinuating a riot. The West*

*Hollywood Police were not happy.*

*When you lived there did you live in close proximity to the Strip? I mean, you had a family, so maybe not (laughing).*

*I lived in the City of Pico Rivera. Which is about 27 miles away. So, I would have to make the drive every night. I had a day job as well, so depending on how much time I had, I would always like to take the 101 and drive up Sunset. I liked the look of the girls, seeing the flashy cars... If I didn't have time, I would take the 10 and La Brea, which was about forty minutes. The 101 and Sunset was about an hour and a half. It depended on how much time I had.*

*That's interesting. You would rather drive an hour and half to take Sunset, instead of the forty minutes on La Brea?*

*Yeah, just to see what was going on, if I recognized anybody who was out. Yeah. 100%.*

*When did you start to notice Rock 'n' Roll leaving the Strip?*

*As the Grunge scene started, I mean, it was still busy. But, by the late nineties the scene just changed. And I blame Grunge man (laughing). There just wasn't as many people out on the Strip anymore unless there was a big band playing. For me, it was becoming a little bit boring. Before, a lot of people would come to the Strip not even necessarily to go into the clubs. They would come to the Sunset Strip just for the atmosphere. People would drink out on the streets. You didn't have to be in a club to have a good night. You could literally just hang out, outside of the clubs and talk to people. That all stopped happening by '98, '99, early two-thousands. The street scene stopped. On Sunset Boulevard the more outrageous you were, the more positive attention you got. Whether you*

were Punk with your big spikey hair, or a Glam Rocker, or liked your Heavy Metal, everyone came together. What did Mark Mahoney used to say... "Sunset Boulevard: where the underworld and the elite meet." You could go there and be anybody... And I think Grunge killed it.

There are photos of the Whisky where the entire façade and rooftop billboards were promoting music. But now, that no longer seems to be the case. I actually think the venue has leased its entire façade to Netflix. The billboards no longer seem representative of what is happening inside the club. Did you notice that at all while you worked there?

Yeah. When I started working there originally, most of the time they would advertise albums that were going to be released. I think Tower Records had, at one point, one permanently booked. The big two billboards on top, they were usually national acts. A big, big artist. I first noticed the change when the Sony PlayStation came out. They took an advertisement out at the Whisky. I remember coming into work and looking at it thinking, "What the \*\*\*\*? That's weird." It wasn't a picture of a band. It was an advertisement for a game console! We would have, you know, Iron Maiden, Thrash Metal, Thrash Metal, and then the Sony PlayStation advertisement (laughing). It was very weird. I can't remember what year that was, but it was for the first Sony PlayStation. That was the first time that I noticed things starting to change. Like I said, it would usually be a band that was going to do a tour, or albums, or CDs that would be available at Tower Records... It seemed like after the PlayStation we started getting more advertisements like that. I know the two billboards up on the roof go for a hell of a lot of money. So, I'm sure Netflix can afford to pay a lot more money than, unfortunately, bands. Which

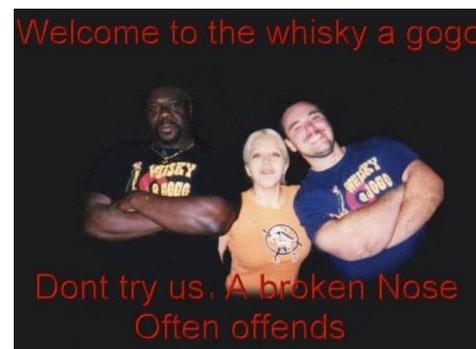
is a crying shame. Oh, they would also advertise a lot of Jack Daniels too. Which I don't have a problem with, I think it's quite Rock 'n' Roll. But Netflix? Nah, I don't like it.

What would you hope for the future of these clubs?

I just hope for live music. I hope live music continues forever. Perhaps we need to see bands out there flying again. I guess it all boils down to the general public. If you like live music, you should make an effort to support it. I hope the clubs are open forever. I hope kids get back into the live music scene, because it is one hell of a scene. It's part of Southern California's history! Monday night was our free night by the way. You didn't have to pay-to-play on a Monday because when I got there, the club would be dead on a Monday. It worked fantastic. It was only \$3.00 to get in. Just by dropping the price and letting bands play there for free. A lot of bands got discovered from that. So, I don't know, if they're still doing free shows but maybe that would tempt people to come out. I'm getting quite nostalgic now. I really enjoyed working there. They were all like family to me. It was such a great time.

\*Please see appendix for more details

Figure 3.16: A photograph of the security team at the Whisky-a-Go-Go. Jamie can be seen on the right. Image provided by Jamie.



# **Ecology Two: Flyers**

### 3.1 How Pay-to-Play Animated the Sunset Strip

Beginning in the 1980s with Mario Maglieri (famed part owner and/or manager of numerous Sunset Strip hot spots such as the Whisky-a-Go-Go, the Rainbow and the Roxy<sup>50</sup>), the requirement of presale tickets for musicians was instituted throughout Strip venues<sup>51</sup>. Although booking agents have claimed the ambition behind this institution was to fill venues with the friends, family and/or fans of their bands, musicians harbored hostility towards these venues and claimed this institution was a “pay-to-play” law that ensured the musicians would come in last<sup>52</sup>. Even one of the Strip’s most successful bands Mötley Crüe famously claim in their song *Down at the Whisky*, “We never made a dime,” at the Whisky-a-Go-Go. Unlike presale tickets, despite having a confirmed fanbase and/or enduring a series of intense auditions at the Strip’s many venues, pay-to-play required all musicians to assure a (quite outrageous) minimum attendance through pre-show ticket sales. It can be understood quite literally: if a musician wanted to play a specific venue, the venue would request a certain amount of money in advance, the band would pay for these tickets at a reduced rate and only then would they be permitted to play<sup>53</sup>.

Rather than preparing for their performances, bands were responsible to promote their own gigs ahead of time in order to recompense the money they spent booking the venue and obtain an audience. In the eighties it was typical that venues would often request anywhere between fifty to one-hundred ticket sales in advance. As tickets would sell on average for \$10.00 each, bands had to be prepared to hand over hundreds of dollars to booking agents. As most Strip venues had an occupancy of approximately 500 people, in order to see any return on this, bands were forced to stand on the sidewalks of the Sunset Strip passing out letter size flyers to promote their performances. This forced many musicians to spend more time on advertising (or in the office supply store) than songwriting, practicing and performing combined. But for most, being able to say you played at a notorious Strip venue was worth being exploited for. Musicians would tape, staple and glue their flyers to any and all surfaces along the urban boulevard, and place them under the windshield wipers of parked vehicles to continue to promote their band’s performance when they were unable to do so in-person themselves, “The whole Sunset Strip was a big confetti factory, from the Whisky all the way up to Gazzarri’s,” recalls Faster Pussycat lead singer Taimé Downe. “We’d be putting our posters up on telephone poles, (and) the next band would come along a couple hours later, rip yours down, put theirs up,” adds Dokken guitarist George Lynch, “It was a very competitive scene.”<sup>54</sup> Youthful and hungry bands like Mötley Crüe, Van Halen and Guns N’ Roses became early masters of self-promotion as a result of this requirement, serving them in the future as their success grew. But in the eyes of most, the undisputed kings of advertising in this format were the members of the band Poison<sup>55</sup>. Forming in 1983 in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Poison, the infamous Glam Metal and Hard Rock band, made the decision to move to Los Angeles in March of that same year<sup>56</sup>. Lead singer Brett Michaels told

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50 Richard Sandomir, “Mario Maglieri, Who Coddled Rockers at His Clubs, Dies at 93,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 2017, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/09/arts/music/mario-maglieri-dead-ran-whisky-a-go-go.html>.

51 Diamond Bodine-Fischer, “To Pay or not to Pay to Play the Sunset Strip,” *LAWeekly*, November 4, 2010, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.laweekly.com/to-pay-or-not-to-pay-to-play-the-sunset-strip/>.

52 Bodine-Fischer, “To Pay or not to Pay to Play the Sunset Strip.”

53 Bodine-Fischer, “To Pay or not to Pay to Play the Sunset Strip.”

54 Richard Bienstock, “Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip,” *Rolling Stone*, October 23, 2015, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/decade-of-decadence-a-timeline-of-the-eighties-sunset-strip-157726/1986-the-flyer-wars-42242/>.

55 Bienstock, “Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip,” 1986: The Flyer Wars.

56 Bienstock, “Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip,” March 1984: Look What the Cat Drags In.

Rolling Stone Magazine, “We were workaholics with a dream. We would go out at midnight, paper the City and disappear by morning. You staple ‘em up and you’re gone. We’d find hot girls walking around the Rainbow parking lot and ask them to do a photo session up against a brick wall, and then we’d put ‘em on a flyer.”<sup>57</sup>

Although considered tasteless by all musicians and heavily criticized for contributing to the frequent exploitation of musicians in the industry in general, the institution of the pay-to-play requirement attracted not only fans but all kinds of people to the Sunset Strip. The urban boulevard would be animated with its many visitors who frequented the Strip as much as every night, without having any plans in mind. Visiting the Strip and grabbing a copy of one of these flyers was an excellent way to learn of upcoming events on the boulevard, that could later be taped to your fridge and used as a reminder. Some flyers even offered a discounted ticket rate if you brought the flyer to the venue door while purchasing your ticket. On the most basic level, if you were a Guns N’ Roses groupie, and knew Axl Rose would be in front of the Whisky-a-Go-Go passing out and posting flyers until 2am (that is, if you happened to miss him during his shift at the Strip’s Tower Video Rentals in his early days), why not pay the Strip a visit? It seemed a never-ending cycle: girls would come to see the musicians, and guys would come to see the girls. Some would come simply to show off their hair. Alice Cooper was quoted in the 2012 film *Sunset Strip*, saying that during this period, it was more fun to be in front of these venues than inside of them, “It was so packed with kids you couldn’t walk down Sunset Strip. You had to actually walk down the street on a Friday and Saturday night. It was so alive”<sup>58</sup>. To avoid foot traffic on the boulevard’s sidewalks and the risk of being shoved into the vehicular traffic, Sunset Strip parking lots were treated like impromptu gathering places for kids to hang out, pass out flyers, and people watch. Even long after the 1966 curfew riots, police were forced to continue attempting to remove kids off of the Strip to stop problems caused by the disturbance of traffic, loitering, and alcohol and drug abuse.

57 Bienstock, “Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip,” 1986: The Flyer Wars.

58 Hans Fjellestad, *Sunset Strip*, (United States: Vision Films, 2012), DVD.

*Figure 4.1: Photograph caption dated May 12, 1989 reads, “But do these girls really care? This band tries another new way - stripping down - to get attention Saturday night on the famous Sunset Strip.” The blade sign for the Rainbow is partially visible. Photographed by Lucy Snowe.*



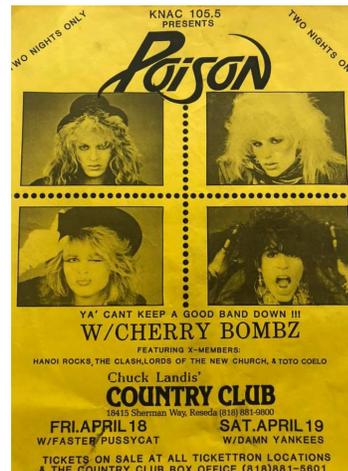
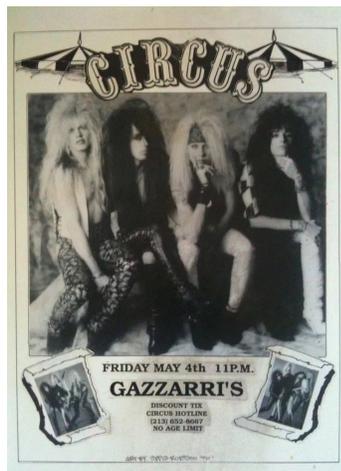
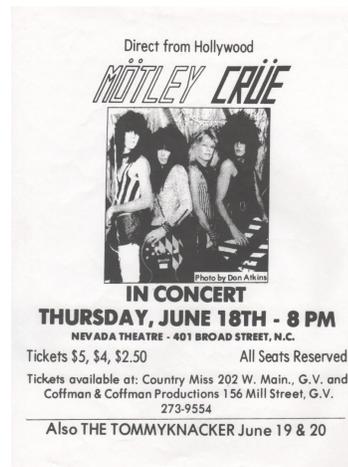
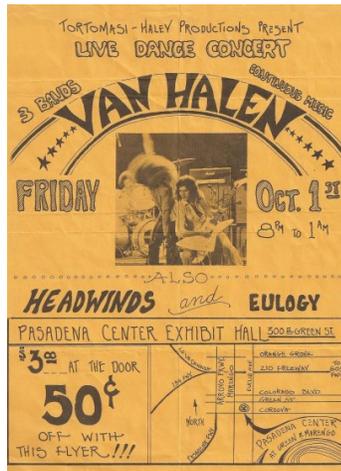
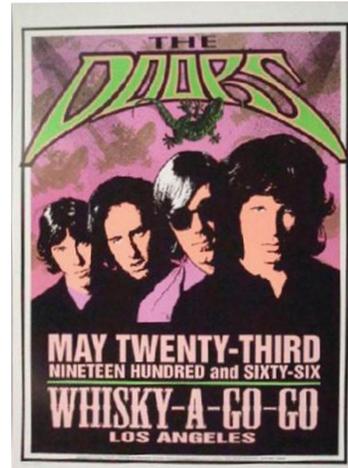


Figure 4.2: Flyers from Los Angeles based Rock 'n' Roll bands Guns N' Roses, The Doors, Van Halen, Mötley Crüe, CIRCUS and Poison. Some flyers offer discounted ticket rates. Images retrieved from Facebook Group, "I Survived the Sunset Strip in the '90s."



*Figure 4.3: A photograph of Mike Schneider in 2020. Image provided by Mike.*

### **3.2 An Interview with Mike Schneider: Author of Flyers of the Sunset Strip**

Kelsey: Where were you born and when did you move to Los Angeles?

*Mike: I was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I was born August 4<sup>th</sup> of 1965. I moved to Orange County in the Spring of 1987. I lived in Orange County for maybe three or four months and started auditioning for a band. I got the gig. It was probably late 1987 when I moved to Hollywood. My first band was called Stagger Lee. The band came down and met me for my audition, and they wanted me. So, I just packed up my stuff and moved in with them in West Hollywood.*

What drew you to the Sunset Strip specifically from Wisconsin?

*Being a musician and knowing that the bands that I followed were coming out of LA, it seemed the appropriate place to go. It was either New York or California. Knowing that the clubs out there were pushing these bands like Mötley Crüe or W.A.S.P.... It was definitely the place to be. I thought, "Hey if these bands can*

*make it out there, I know I can as well."*

Once the band was formed, did you guys get to play the Sunset Strip?

*Yes! In fact, at the Whisky they had what was called the "No Bozo Jam." You did not have to sell any tickets, you just signed up for that night's gig which was usually on Tuesdays. There would probably be ten, twelve or fourteen bands that played. You would play three or four songs and then you were done. It was an easy way to get a show without really having to promote or sell tickets. But we played them all! We played the Roxy, Gazzarri's, the Troubadour. Those were all with ticket sales.*

When you played those shows that required ticket sales, were you on the Strip passing out flyers for your shows?

*Yep... We would make our flyers, and design them at the apartment. Our apartment, when I moved in with the band, there was actually seven of us living in a one-bedroom. Our singer, his wife, our drummer, his girlfriend, our guitar player, his girlfriend, and me. We had another guitar player, but he was actually from California, he lived in Fullerton. So, he would drive up to LA whenever we rehearsed or had shows. I slept on a couch for three and a half years. Our guitar player and his girlfriend would sleep right by the door, in between the couch and this little hallway. Our drummer and his girlfriend would sleep on the living room floor. The singer and his wife had the bedroom. The apartment was off of North La Brea, in between Hollywood Boulevard and Melrose. That's probably only about a mile or two from all of the main clubs. So, we'd sit there and design the flyers, and then we would take them down to the print shop to have the flyers made by a lady named Barbara. Barbara happened to be*

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*the mother of her son Bruce; whose stage name was C.C. DeVille.*

From Poison! Did you guys have a process of how you would hand out these flyers?

*Yeah, we would go down to the Strip and it was sort of funny because there was a no loitering law there. You couldn't stand in front of the club that you were going to play for hours just passing out flyers. A lot of times the cops would come by and shuffle people around. So, a couple of us would go to one end near the Whisky, and a couple of the other band members then would start at Gazzarri's. We would walk, cross paths, and then they would continue up to the Whisky and we would go down to Gazzarri's. That's all we would do, go back and forth.*

What is your opinion on the institution of the pay-to-play requirement?

*It sucked. It was pretty much a scam. To try to operate a club seven nights a week, you couldn't do it if people weren't coming in. The clubs never really helped in any way to get people in their own doors - the bands were doing it. They were having maybe three or four bands playing a night. If they were bringing those people into the clubs, and they're buying beer and booze, that just helped the club. So really, they were just taking money from the bands just to support the club. That's all it was. It wasn't doing anything to help the band; they didn't promote. The clubs would tell the bands, "Well we will give you food and some beer." Usually it didn't even turn out like that. It was really a scam. In 1989 though, there was a local musician named Mark Mason. He started an organization called the Rockers Against Pay-to-play or RAPP. Right around Labour Day, things got really slow because people would go on vacation.*

*It was difficult to fill the clubs and still have to pay-to-play. So, Mark started this organization and wanted to picket the clubs along the Strip from Gazzarri's, the Roxy and all the way up to the Whisky. Guitar Center in Hollywood actually supplied a lot of the picket signs for him. I believe there was about two hundred bands that picketed and said, "We're not going to do this anymore. We're not going to pay-to-play. You guys are just taking our money. It's tough already." You know, trying to feed seven people in a one-bedroom apartment... It was tough. So, they picketed. Many of those bands actually got blacklisted from playing any of those clubs that they picketed.*

Pay-to-play still exists on the Sunset Strip. I can see how maybe in the eighties it was okay for pay-to-play to exist, because the street was so filled with kids. But now...

*If you don't have a fan base, you're not going to have anyone there. So really, you're just renting the stage for thirty minutes or forty-five minutes. It's sad. But back in the day, that's how it was, so that's what had to be done. Anything you could do to put yourself out there or be more outrageous. I mean that's why they call it "Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll". It was debauchery at its best. A band would do whatever they had to do to gain fans or to be the craziest. When W.A.S.P. came out, Blackie would throw raw meat off the stage and people would go home saying, "This dude threw bloody meat all over! It was crazy! Look at me, I'm all bloody!" Then other people would go, "Oh my Gosh, I have to go see that!" Those bands probably weren't even paying to play because they were selling all their tickets no problem. But if you were a fresh band it was pretty tough. These days, I'd still say it's a scam. They're just using the bands to pay bills. The clubs aren't helping them draw fans; there's no promotion that you*

see. They don't put ads out in the fanzines or magazines. They don't do anything. They might say, "Oh yeah, this week we have this band and this band," on their website. But that's it. I mean, back in the day, there were thousands of kids everywhere. Just to walk up and down the Strip you were literally in between people, dodging back and forth. People would hang out at the parking lot at the Rainbow, grab a drink, and then hit the streets again. It was a little easier to gain some notoriety during that. But that was the eighties. The bands built the lifestyle for all the kids... If it wasn't for the fans, the bands wouldn't have success. That's what really drives the whole thing. These days, I don't think fans are going to walk the Strip back and forth because there's no one hanging out there.

What do you think contributed to that change? From there being hundreds of kids on the Strip to no kids at all?

I think it was by '91 or '92 when Grunge set in. Every guy before then that was walking down the street, I mean, they dressed to the nines. Their hair was huge, they would be wearing cool stage outfits and jewelry, their makeup, their lipstick. For that time, that was the draw. And then, all of the sudden, when Grunge set in they were wearing jeans and flannel shirts. I mean... Come on. That was the change of the times. There were a lot of bands that sort of swayed into that a little bit, just to try and carry them through. But it was really that genre of music that I think shut everything down. Bands couldn't really hold it together because now the record companies were going for Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Alice In Chains and Chris Cornell. Those guys weren't into those types of clubs. They didn't even care if they were "Rockstars." They just wanted to play their music. So, everything drifted away from the Strip. Once the

glam era, the hair bands disappeared, so did all the rest. All of the kids, all of the fans, everybody walking back and forth. It just basically put an end to it.

At one point the entire Strip was using its billboards to promote things that were happening on Sunset Strip. But now, when you look at the Whisky's façade, it will be promoting some random action movie. Do you think that this transition between types of advertisements is affecting the animation and the lifestyle of the Strip at all?

I would say yes. I would say yes because if you really want to draw people... You could take the Whisky's recent promotion of Netflix's film *The Dirt* about Mötley Crüe as an example. People wanted to go there and see that stuff. They wanted to get pictures of all that promotion that was going on. Knowing that the Mötley House is just half a block up the street on Clark Street... If you wanted to, you

**Figure 4.4:** A photograph of Mike performing with his first band, Stagger Lee. Image provided by Mike.



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could go get pictures of *The Dirt* sign, the *Whisky* itself, walk up and try and find the *Mötley* apartment. So, if all of the sudden now you're promoting something else, what does that really do for your club? It doesn't do anything. I think a lot of those clubs, to be honest, are in survival mode no matter who played there, whether it was *The Doors* or *Elton John* or whoever. I think they're trying to make any money that they can. If they have to promote it, it's to keep money coming in. They're not even having any bands now at the clubs because of *Coronavirus*. So, that is a huge impact. They're doing whatever they can do... Even though I think they should be placed as historical landmarks. That's just me being a musician and being in that time though. But, my gosh, some of the bands and people that have gone through those places. I'm lucky enough to say that I have played all those stages. I think they should be historical landmarks, but people want to buy up property and build parking lots and storefronts. They see it all as money.

Did you guys ever throw afterparties or attend some of these crazy afterparties?

Yes (laughter)! Eventually we did start to gain a fan base. The afterparties were crazy. Talk about debauchery at its finest. Even just on my own going to other bands' afterparties. A lot of them had them at their rehearsal studios, their apartments, hotels. They were pretty crazy.

Was that common for bands to go to other bands' afterparties?

Yeah. Even though a lot of those guys were your "enemy" in a way, we were all out there trying to do the same thing. It didn't really matter if you were in other bands. Also, you could always do some schmoozing and you might end up with

some fan base or make a good connection at another bands' party. So sure, you would go and support. You have to be able to promote yourself and your band.

Did you ever go to any afterparties at any of the Strip hotels?

I was at the *Hyatt*, what they called the *Riot House*. One specifically that I can remember, there were some strippers that came down from *Seattle* and we ended up going to a couple of the parties at the *Riot House*. We would go room to room and mingle. I never got to see *Rockstars* throwing *TV's* out of the windows, but the parties were... Parties. Usually there were a couple of rooms full and you would just go from room to room and make contacts and party.

What made you want to put together your book *Flyers of the Sunset Strip*?

I think it is very important for others to know that we were all out there pedaling our band flyers and walking the *Strip*. When I kept these flyers, I didn't even have the forethought to think, "I'll keep all of these and put out a book someday!" It was just more or less, just in case something happens, I would have all of these flyers as good memories. I kept them all in good shape and I was actually speaking with *Nadir D'Priest*, the singer of *London*, and he said, "You should do something with those! Don't just post them up on *Facebook*. Put together some type of book!" That was probably 2010 or 2011. Four or five years later I started to put together the idea of the book and the write ups on the bands. I reached out to my friend *Gerry*, who is a writer, (he put together the fanzine *Rock City News*) to put together a bio about each flyer. So, he did the bios and I picked which flyers I wanted in there. I made the actual books all from scratch. I ordered everything that

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*I needed, had 65 metal book covers made, glued all the bios and all the flyers in. I reached out to a bunch of my friends like Stevie and Riki from the Cathouse and had everybody sign and send things to me. The first one that I sold back in 2015 went to Madrid, Spain. I made sixty limited edition copies of those books.*

How do you think that Rock ‘n’ Roll provided a foundation for the architectural and cultural revival of Sunset Boulevard?

*That area between Doheny Drive and Santa Vincente/North Clark Street... That would be from Gazzarri’s to the Whisky, that was the heart of the architecture right there. I mean, that was the epicenter for what was going on. So, how I would consider that is all those clubs in that area between Doheny and Santa Vicente, that was the heart. The bands then were the pulse that provided the culture for the Strip. That’s what was driving; all these bands, all glammed out, we provided the music, the lifestyle, the party. We drew the fans. The bands provided that pulse, that beat for what was going on. Then the fans, obviously in my mind, were the life’s blood. Without the fans we didn’t have anything.*

Before there was this Rock ‘n’ Roll era, in the twenties, thirties and early forties it was really common for Hollywood’s elite to come to the Strip. During prohibition years, that was the only place people could get alcohol. So, that started this image of the Sunset Strip being this place where you go to be “bad”. That’s why I think, architectural proposals today like Morphosis’ or Gwyneth Paltrow’s SoHo House, that support the consumer culture, are contributing to the death of what the Sunset Strip is actually about.

*Yeah. It is! It’s becoming counterproductive to what they should be doing. They*

*are taking away from what built this Strip. I think if they concentrated more on the history of what went down there, it may attract more. When I first went out there, the Whisky was just gray for some reason. But when The Doors movie came out with Val Kilmer, they painted the Whisky red, because that’s how it was back in the sixties. AND, in about 1990 the Zeros were putting out their album 4-3-2-1 Zeros, and let’s remember it was unprecedented for any club to support a band. But it just so happened that the Coconut Teaszer and the Whisky painted their building’s purple because all of the guys from the Zeros had purple hair. No other band, I think, in history except for The Doors and their movie, got that treatment. I think if these venues held more on to their history it might draw more. But like I said before, I think they’re in survival mode. I mean there were some pretty infamous billboards that they had out there too. Do you remember the Marlboro man? So, some of it sort of sticks out in your mind. They should do more of that.*

*\*Please see appendix for more details*

**Figure 4.5:** A copy of Mike Schneider’s, “Flyers of the Sunset Strip.” Image provided by Mike.



### 3.3 A Rock ‘n’ Roll Subculture

In the early nineties the City of Los Angeles was heavily segregated by race and language. The majority of Latin Americans didn’t feel welcome or have acceptance in whiter areas like the Sunset Strip.<sup>59</sup> In response, these communities of inspired musicians had no choice but to create their own sense of place - the underground music scene of *Rock En Español*, Rock music featuring Spanish vocals. Rock En Español thrived all over Los Angeles in transitory music forums like auto shops, quinceañera shops, and backyards, where they would draw crowds of hundreds of people<sup>60</sup> - similar to that of the Strip. Although pay-to-play was not instituted at such forums, Latinx musicians would use flyers for practical use, that included numerous hand drawn maps pointing to the locations of their Rock En Español shows. Today, these maps tell a much more layered story of the many communities that were active participants in the Los Angeles Rock ‘n’ Roll scene. They reveal how Latinx youth built their sense of community within greater Los Angeles<sup>61</sup>. Although these maps zoomed in to grids of just a few city blocks, familiar landmarks such as the Interstate 110, or downtown skyline gave context to their place within the City. While white Los Angelenos would consider the Sunset Strip to be the center of the Rock ‘n’ Roll gravitational pull, these maps suggest otherwise as they left clues to people within their own communities. Today, Jorge Leal, a professor of Mexican American and Chicano history at the University of California, Riverside, and founder of Rock Archivo L.A., believes these maps could be valuable within contemporary conversations about community and place in South and East Los Angeles - especially as some traditionally Latinx neighborhoods gentrify and force longtime residents to move away<sup>62</sup>.

59 Laura Bliss, “MapLab: Rocking An L.A. Subculture,” *Bloomberg*, July 2, 2020, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2020-07-02/maplab-rocking-an-l-a-subculture>.

60 Marcos Hassan, “This Instagram Is An Archive of Rock En Español’s Golden Years in Los Angeles,” *Remezcla*, May 9, 2018, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://remezcla.com/features/music/rock-archivo-la-instagram/>.

61 Bliss, “MapLab: Rocking An L.A. Subculture.”

62 Bliss, “MapLab: Rocking An L.A. Subculture.”



*Figure 4.6: Map for a “Rock en Español” backyard party at a Huntington Park home, July 1993. The map was printed on the back of a flyer promoting the event. The note at the bottom translates to “Don’t dare skip this!” Photographed by Jorge N. Leal/Rock Archivo L.A.*

CELEBRACION

**GRATIS**

# DE CINCO DE MAYO

COMIDA Y ENTRETENIMIENTO  
TODO EL DIA

SABADO 1, 1993  
3:00pm-5:00pm

**ROCK EN ESPAÑOL**

**GRATIS**

GARDENA RECREATION PARK  
CALLES: NORMANDIE Y 158th

CON:

**MARIA FATAL**  
**JUANA LA LOCA**  
**LOS OLVIDADOS**

MAP OF CINCO DE MAYO PARADE ROUTE

PROMOVIDO POR  
**NOSTALGIA**

Figure 4.7: Flyer with a detailed Cinco de Mayo parade route in the city of Gardena in May 1993. The map signals a park as the end location of the parade. The park was the site of a Rock en Español concert that took place after the parade in Gardena, a city which at the time had a small but growing Latinx community. Photographer: Courtesy of Jorge N. Leal/Rock Archivo L.A.

### 3.4 An Empty Street with Empty Venues

In 2020 now in a digital world with the influence of e-mailing lists and social media, the presence of this urban ecology fails to exist on the Sunset Strip despite the continued institution of the pay-to-play requirement. With the exception of a few flyers taped along the boulevard, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are used to instantly reach thousands of fans with the mere effort of typing 280 characters from the comfort of your own home. As Americans are now typically exposed to 4,000-10,000 digital advertisements a day,<sup>63</sup> it is not surprising that by removing the in-person element of these interactions, fans feel less obligated to visit the Strip not only the night of the performance, but the preceding weeks as well. Since pay-to-play is not instituted at venues elsewhere in Los Angeles (where venue operating costs are less expensive), some up and coming bands choose to avoid the Sunset Strip altogether, reserving Strip venues for the rare visit of an established artist that can easily recompense these upfront costs. It seems that although the pay-to-play requirement once contributed to the animation and overall success of the nightlife of the Sunset Strip, it now does the exact opposite, resulting in an empty street with empty venues. In the midst of a global pandemic, the live music industry has completely halted altogether while these venues had no choice but to close their doors temporarily until further notice. Perhaps this is an opportunity for live music to completely rebuild itself post-pandemic.

### 3.5 A Case Study: The Rainbow Parking Lot

A great example of the animation of the Sunset Strip that the competitive nature of the pay-to-play requirement created existed in the parking lot between the Rainbow Bar & Grill and the Roxy Theatre. Founded by Elmer Valentine, Lou Adler, and Mario Maglieri, the Rainbow Bar & Grill opened on April 16, 1972 with a party held for Elton John. The Rainbow soon became the hangout spot for Rock musicians and their groupies and was often referred to as the “Lair of the Hollywood Vampires” because of its red incandescent lighting. Notable regulars of the Rainbow included Alice Cooper, Keith Moon of The Who, The Beatles, Mötley Crüe and C.C. DeVille of Poison. Warren Zevon refers to both the Rainbow and the Strip’s notorious Hyatt House hotel in his song *Poor Poor Pitiful Me* singing, “Well O met a girl at the rainbow bar. She asked me if I’d beat her. And she took me back to the Hyatt house. I don’t want to talk about it.” Prior to becoming the Rainbow, the venue was known as the Villa Nova restaurant from 1944-1968. It was owned by film director Vincente Minnelli who proposed to Judy Garland there. Some even suggest the name of the Rainbow is an homage to Garland’s song *Over The Rainbow* in the film the Wizard of Oz.<sup>64</sup> Located just next door, Elmer Valentine and Lou Adler then opened the Roxy Theatre the following year. After hitting capacity any night of the week, this venue always had a huge line waiting at its door for notable performances by musicians like **Frank Zappa**, Neil Young, and Guns N’ Roses. Due to the level of foot traffic between the two locations, this area proved to be a prime spot for upcoming musicians to post and distribute their flyers as Sunset Strip groupies bounced between the venues. Stevie Rachele the front man of Tuff, who moved to Los Angeles from Wisconsin in the spring of 1987 told Rolling Stone, “Within one-to-three square miles on a Friday, Saturday night, there were probably 50 to 75 bands playing...I mean, on one corner you had Gazzarri’s, and then there’s, like, a bank, and then the Rainbow and then the Roxy.

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63 Jon Simpson, “Finding Brand Success In The Digital World,” *Forbes*, August 25, 2017, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/08/25/finding-brand-success-in-the-digital-world/#79dfcfde626e>.

64 Seth, “The Legacy of the Rainbow Bar & Grill,” *West Hollywood*, January 24, 2020, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.visitwesthollywood.com/stories/feature-rainbow-bar-grill/>.



*Figure 4.8: The Rainbow, the Roxy, and Gazzarri's, 1982. On-site signage specific to these venues and their performers is clear. Photographed by Paul Chinn.*



*Figure 4.9: Groups of young adults hanging out between Gazzarri's and the Rainbow, May 12, 1989. During the Strip's Rock 'n' Roll era, people would come to the boulevard just to hang out, outside of the clubs. Photographed by Lucy Snowe.*



*Figure 4.10: Rock fans waiting in line outside of the Roxy. Photographed by Paul Chinn.*

If somebody lights off a pack of firecrackers, anyone standing in front of any of those clubs might get hit. They're that close."<sup>65</sup> Hundreds of people would stand in the Rainbow's parking lot each night socializing, hoping to spot their favorite celebrity.

Today, though now less notable for its relationship with Rock 'n' Roll and more so for its unique atmosphere, the Rainbow continues to serve as a bar and grill on its lower level while opening an exclusive club on its second level called *Over the Rainbow*. Similarly, in an attempt to stay relevant, the Roxy has reshaped its business plan to now feature any type of performance that will attract an audience (though primarily still music based) and has even opened its venue doors to be rented for special events like holiday parties for corporate companies. Comparable to how the venue would feature an upcoming performance on its marquee during the Rock 'n' Roll era, the Roxy attempts to assist its performers digitally by promoting and selling tickets on their venue's website. Despite these efforts, today it seems the only people roaming the bar and grill's parking lot at night, are the couple of fans left nostalgic of a time when Rock 'n' Roll was at the forefront of the music industry.

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65 Bienstock, "Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip," 1987: The Battle of the Sunset Stars.



*Figure 4.11: Rock fans line up to see bands at the Roxy, 1983. Photographed by Paul Chinn.*



*Figure 4.12: The empty sidewalk in front of the Roxy Theatre with the Rainbow seen behind, photographed by WeHoCity, uploaded to Flickr on May 26th, 2010.*

### 3.6 The More You Know: Frank Zappa

Taking over the building previously occupied by the strip club Largo, The Roxy Theatre was opened on September 20, 1973 by Elmer Valentine (co-founder of the Whisky-a-Go-Go and the Rainbow) and Lou Adler (American record producer most notable for The Mamas & The Papas), along with original partners David Geffen and Elliot Roberts of Geffen Records, and British guitarist Peter Asher. Over the span of three nights between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of December of that same year, Frank Zappa performed five legendary Jazz-Rock concerts at the intimate 500-person capacity venue with his band The Mothers<sup>66</sup>. Considered a peak in his career, these five shows included a private invite-only performance, soundcheck and film shoot. As the Roxy is known for its crisp acoustics, these performances would later appear on his album *Roxy & Elsewhere* released in September of 1974. Regarding the album, Zappa's son Ahmet joked, "It's time to get your rocks off for the Roxy."<sup>67</sup>

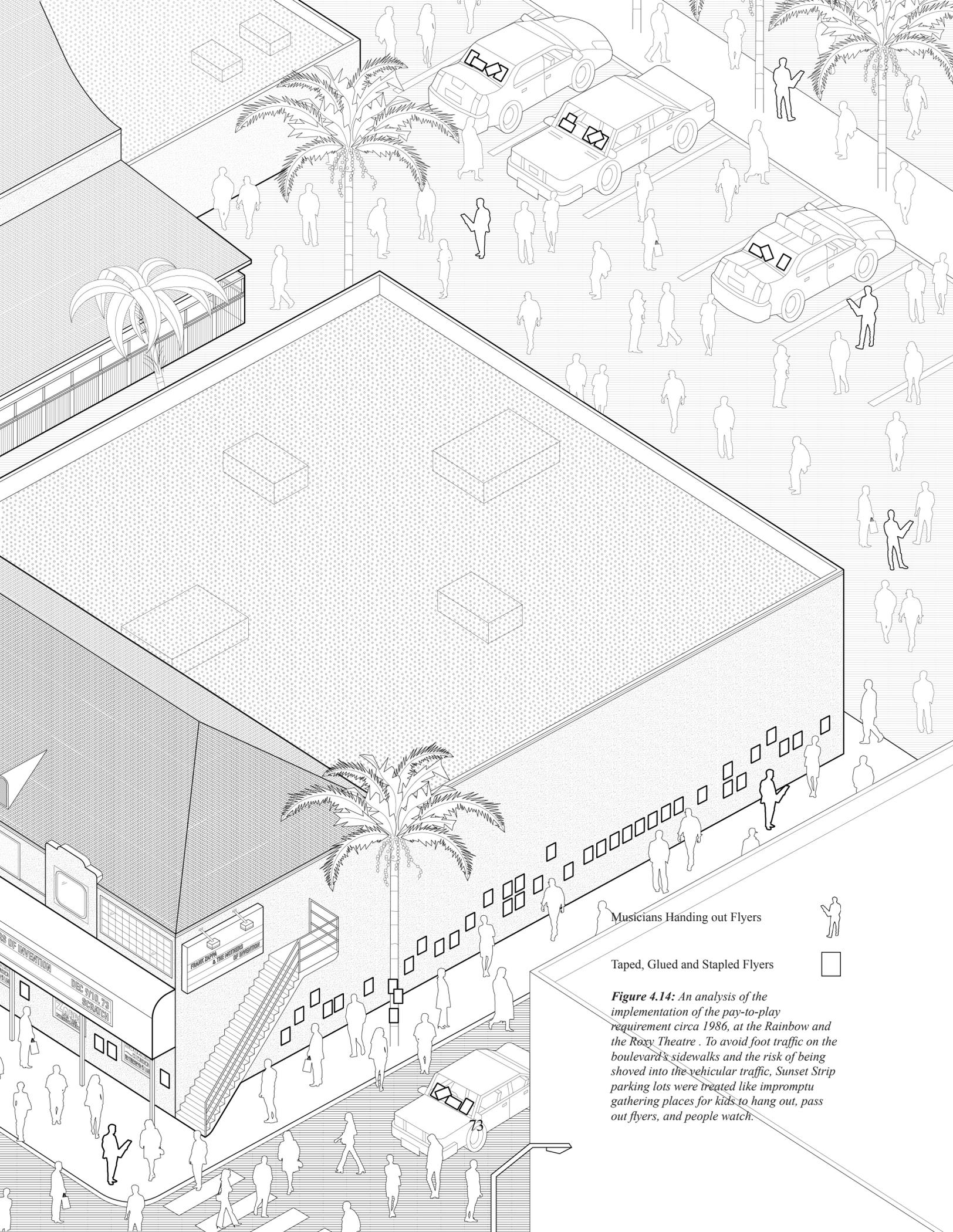
<sup>66</sup> "History," The Roxy Theatre, accessed May 26, 2020. <https://www.theroxy.com/venue-info/history>.

<sup>67</sup> "Frank Zappa's Legendary 1973 'The Roxy Performances' Captured on Definitive Seven-CD Boxed Set," Zappa, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.zappa.com/news/frank-zappas-legendary-1973-roxy-performances-captured-definitive-seven-cd-boxed-set>.



*Figure 4.13: Frank Zappa at the Roxy Theatre, 1973. Retrieved from Rolling Stone.*



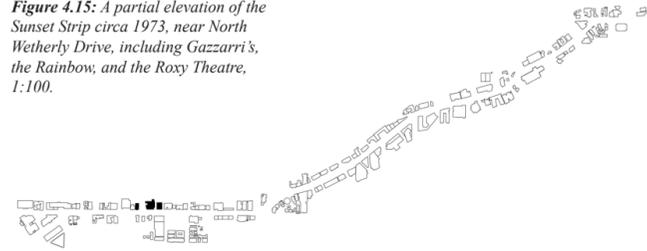


Musicians Handing out Flyers

Taped, Glued and Stapled Flyers

**Figure 4.14:** An analysis of the implementation of the pay-to-play requirement circa 1986, at the Rainbow and the Roxy Theatre. To avoid foot traffic on the boulevard's sidewalks and the risk of being shoved into the vehicular traffic, Sunset Strip parking lots were treated like impromptu gathering places for kids to hang out, pass out flyers, and people watch.

Figure 4.15: A partial elevation of the Sunset Strip circa 1973, near North Wetherly Drive, including Gazzarri's, the Rainbow, and the Roxy Theatre, 1:100.



Gazzarri's

North Wetherly Drive

Bank of America



The Rainbow

The Roxy Theatre



*Figure 4.16: An interior view of the Rainbow. The lighting in the bar and grill is red and dim to create an intimate Rock 'n' Roll atmosphere. Located beside the Roxy, the Rainbow attracted all kinds of celebrities from Rock 'n' Rollers like Robert Plant and C.C. DeVille to comedians like John Belushi and Sam Kinison. Memorabilia hangs from the walls. Photograph retrieved from LA Magazine.*



*Figure 4.17: An interior view of the Roxy. SNOT performs live on January 22, 2009. Photographed by Erik Voake.*



**Figure 4.18:** A photograph of Skum Love in 2020. Image provided by Skum.

### 3.7 An Interview with Skum Love: Promoter, Musician and DJ

Kelsey: Are you originally from Los Angeles?

*Skum: Yeah, I was originally born here in LA. I'm a native, from the Culver City/Venice Beach area. I've lived almost everywhere in LA. I moved to Hollywood when I was about sixteen, thirty years ago... I guess that would be around 1990. I grew up on the Sunset Strip. The Strip was just starting to change from Glam Rock to more of the grungier kind of stuff. I mean, I went there before that when I was thirteen. My friend would "borrow" his father's car and we would drive from Orange County to the Strip. We would pick up a huge stack of flyers with all of the florescent colors. I remember putting them all over my walls in my bedroom. I didn't even know who these bands like Warrant and Guns N' Roses were (laughing). Mario was a big influence on me. When I got to the Strip, he took me in as a kid, and I called him Grandpa. I worked at all of those clubs. I started booking at the Whisky, the Roxy,*

*Gazzarri's back in the day, The Viper Room... I actually have a night at The Viper Room now. I got married at the Rainbow! I'm one of the only people who have done that. But yeah, when I finally started working on the Strip, there was a big, big change happening at that point.*

When did you first know that you wanted to get involved with the entertainment industry?

*My first concert was Ozzy Osbourne with Metallica at the Long Beach Arena. That changed the entire aspect on my love for music. From there, when I moved to the Hollywood area, I met a guy named Henry Spiegel who was a promoter along the Sunset Strip and his roommate ran Rock City News Magazine. I kept going to see shows and he would see me in the slam pit getting crazy. He really took to me. He said, "You really know and follow a lot of these bands. I want to do more Punk and Metal. Could you help me, and I will pay you?" I just wanted to go to the shows for free (laughing). So, I started helping him book bands. A lot of it was the pay-to-play kind of stuff. From there, at sixteen, I ended up writing for Rock City News. For the first year, I had just a column. By the next year, I had two full pages. After that, I started booking the Whisky and the Roxy full-time.*

As I'm completely unfamiliar with it. Could you explain to me exactly how being a promoter works? Do you work independently, for the clubs, for a third party?

*Normally, what we call an outsider promoter (someone that doesn't get a pay cheque from the venue), will come into a club and say, "I'd like to do a night here bi-weekly." And the club will say, "Ok. We need \$1000.00 to rent the place, and the bar will need to make \$2000.00."*

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*If you're at a caliber that I'm at now, you don't have to do that. I've proven myself. I will guarantee a club that the bar will make X amount of dollars, and then I will ask for 10% or 20% from that bar as well as part of the door or the full door depending on where I'm at. So, you want to make sure the people you're promoting to are drinkers (laughing). I use the door money to pay for the bands and my door girl. So, the bar is where I make my money. A lot of promoters will use their name to help them draw people. People will want to come to the clubs because they know you and know what you offer. That's the first thing about being a promoter, you have to have a clientele in advance. The second thing would be offering something unique that people will enjoy and want to come to. You have to know your crowd, and what will draw them to a club. A lot of promoters back in the nineties just did the pay-to-play thing. They didn't care which bands they were putting up. They would put a Rock band with a Death Metal band, a Punk band, and a Folk band. They would try to squeeze in as many bands as they could doing twenty-minute sets, so they could take their money and be gone. That's not a good promoter. A good promoter has a theme. Sometimes I will do all female groups, or darker, harder stuff... People want to come because they want to see each of those individual bands. They relate to each other. When you were a new promoter at the Whisky, the club would make you take three or five weekdays in a row at \$1500.00 a night and ensure the bar made \$3000.00. If you didn't make the \$3000.00 you had to pay the difference. If you did all three or five of those days successfully, then the club would give you a weekend. The weekend was probably twice the amount of money. The rent would be about \$3000.00 and the bar was \$6000.00-10,000.00.*

So, if the bands were paying to play, they would buy the tickets off of the promoter then?

*Yes. We would say, "Ok, our costs right now are \$2000.00, but the bar will probably fall short about \$500.00. If I get five bands to pay me \$500.00. That pays it off." That pays the rental and the bar. Anything else is profit.*

What is your opinion on the pay-to-play requirement?

*I see it from both ends. For me, it's a 50/50 thing, because I'm also a musician. When I arrived to the Strip, I worked for a promoter that did pay-to-play. So, at the time, I just thought that's what you had to do on the Strip. As I got older and started to actually experience it from the musician's side, I was very much against it. When I would have to do pay-to-play, I was smart about it. I wouldn't just jump on every show, and I would never do it for local shows. I would only do pay-to-play for shows that I knew were going to sell out. As a promoter now, I don't do pay-to-play anymore; but twenty years ago, that was the only way you could play. Back then, I would watch lot of bands take one hundred tickets at \$10.00 a piece, pay \$1000.00, and hand all of the tickets out on the street for free. Now, the thing I've figured out is, if you give somebody something for free... They don't value it. It's a free ticket. They don't care. If you actually pay for it, it has value, so they will show up. A lot of bands would pass out their "free" tickets, and only mom and dad would show up. Even now, with high school kids... I love supporting up and coming bands; but I also feel that you need to work your way up. I don't think a band of fourteen-year-olds in junior high or high school, playing their first or second show should even be able to play the Whisky, the Roxy or The Viper Room.*

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*You shouldn't be able to play something that big. But kid's parents are paying for them to come play the Whisky for their first show, and no one will be there to watch them play. People rarely show up to see new bands anymore, they show up for the headliner. So even though these kids are opening for a big band, they will still only play for ten or fifteen people. To me, that's absolutely horrible. I would rather make bands work hard and find out which bands bring more people on their own. Those are the people that I would like to put in a show with the bigger bands, because they earned it... If a promoter didn't make the bands pay but put five small local bands in one show and made people pay the full door-price, there would be very few people who showed up. Then you would have no one drinking at the bar, the club wouldn't make their money, the promoter wouldn't make their money, and bands wouldn't be playing in front of anybody. It isn't fun for anyone. So, yeah, I can see both sides of pay-to-play. The promoter needs to make their money because between the price for rent at those clubs on the Strip, the bar needing to make their money, paying the headlining act... But, me being a musician... I hate it (laughing).*

How are bands promoting for these pay-to-play shows today? When there is no longer that in person interaction of passing out flyers, I imagine it's much harder to draw an audience.

*The way I do it is, when a band wants to be in a show, I will tell them they need to bring twenty people. If they can't bring twenty people to The Viper Room, they'll never play The Viper Room again. I don't mean it to be rude, but if they can't bring twenty people, it kills me. Because then The Viper Room will come to me and say, "We didn't make our bar. We didn't make our door." So, I don't do pay-to-play, but*

*I do it based on people's word. If they tell me they can only bring ten or fifteen people, then I will put them on a different night at an earlier show time. I don't want to make kids pay-to-play. I definitely could. But if they don't have ten or fifteen people that want to come see them play based off their word, how are they going to have twenty-five people if I give them tickets to sell? If these bands just put in the effort and proved to the promoters and clubs that they can bring people, we wouldn't have to do pay-to-play. But there are so many bands who will just pay it off and not bring anyone. All they care about is putting on their resume that they played these clubs. But what they don't understand is, these record labels know that what it actually means is, "I paid \$1500.00 to open up for so and so." But if on their resume they said, "We worked our way up by opening up for so and so, but now we're headlining the Whisky and doing it on our own accord," that looks much better. But they don't get it.*

Did you find that Grunge music affected the Sunset Strip?

*I mean, I liked it. There needed to be a change. But the late '90s and early 2000s were really hard. But then there was an uprising with new metal bands like Korn and Fear Factory. That started a new era on the Sunset Strip, because absolutely no one was coming for a while. It was really hard... There was a big backlash with Grunge. There was a group of bands that were part of a flyer called "Banned on the Sunset Strip." At that time in the early nineties, I was a promoter, and the clubs told us, "No more Heavy Metal bands. No more Punk bands. Nothing extreme." Some bands were literally banned. We could only book Grunge bands or light Rock bands. There were a lot of issues with Punk bands and Heavy Metal bands. There would be fights and things like*

that. I got a lot of flak for it because I was part of those clubs, yet I was very against that kind of thing. So, what we would do, Henry and I, we would put together a show with Grunge bands and Glam bands, but then make the opening band a total death metal band. Then we would tell the club, "Oh, we thought they were a Glam band..." (Laughing). Someone told me this a couple of years ago, and I didn't even realize it at the time, but I actually brought back Punk Rock and metal to the Sunset Strip by doing that. I was just a kid trying to book my favorite bands (laughing). At the time, I was doing hand drawn flyers for Epitaph Records and going on my skateboard to pass them out. One of Epitaph's bands was called NOFX. Since they knew I did promotions, they asked me if I thought I could get them to play on the Strip. I told them, "Totally! Let me see what I can do." So, I went to Henry to try to figure out how we were going to do this. He said, "Well what are they called? NOFX? We will just tell the clubs that they're a Rock band. They're called NOFX because they have no effects in their music. No distortions or anything." We booked Jughead's Revenge and Glue Gun to open for them. The show totally sold out and the bar made tons of money. The manager of the Whisky came to me afterwards and said, "What the hell was that? I thought I told you no Punk bands!" I said, "Ummmm... I didn't know?" He said, "You knew! But we did a great bar, there were no fights and it was sold out." So, he let me keep doing those kinds of shows that Henry and I called "Red Light District". But yeah, that show with NOFX literally brought Punk and Heavy music back to the Sunset Strip. I had never even thought about it until Jughead's Revenge talked about it in an interview. It was actually the day right before the big LA riots in 1992. So, talk about a crazy time (laughing)! But yeah, there was a time there where heavy bands

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**August 1991**

**Full Page**

Figure 4.19: A flyer in Screamer Magazine listing musicians "Banned on the Sunset Strip". Image provided by Skum.

were actually not allowed on the Strip. Heavy Metal, Thrash Metal, Punk.

During your time on the Strip, did you notice any effects from the change in billboard advertisements?

I think it had a lot of effect. There wasn't much money coming in, so clubs had to take an alternative approach to their billboards rather than only promoting with the record labels. Everyone was running to Seattle to see the Grunge bands. So why would labels want to pay for a billboard at the Whisky when they could pay for a billboard in front of the Starbucks in Seattle (laughing)? That's where the bands were, so everyone took their advertisements up there. But these venues had to pay the bills. They had to keep the doors open. For me, there was a big change in the early 2000s when all of a sudden, these big, bright digital billboards went in front of the House

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*of Blues. I remember working at the Roxy, and we just wanted to make our "R" rock back and forth. But we couldn't, because the City said it was a distraction to drivers. Then, all of a sudden, there were these big digital moving billboards advertising movies by The Comedy Store and the House of Blues and I was like, "Where the hell did these come from?" (Laughing).*

The problem with these billboards is they're no longer supporting the counterculture lifestyle of the Sunset Strip. That's who this Strip has always been designed for.

*Yeah. That's kind of what happened even with a lot of these clubs. They'll say, "We love Rock 'n' Roll but it's not the hip or cool thing to do. So now we will do hip hop nights, or dance nights." I will always love the Whisky, but to me, now that I'm at The Viper and I see the vibe, The Viper still has the Rock 'n' Roll essence to it, unlike some of the others. When I walk in there, even though it's a little small, it's like a family. I know everybody there. When I started booking there and doing my Wednesday nights, that was right when the city block got sold and we didn't know what was going to happen. I was freaked out. But they reassured me that everything was going to be fine for the next few years. Even the Rainbow is very different now. It's a lot trendier. People who work at The Viper Room now, used to work at all of the other clubs. It definitely has the last of the Sunset Strip... You always want the Sunset Strip to be Rock 'n' Roll, but Rock 'n' Roll has moved on too. It's cleaned itself up. Now the good Rock bands are in East LA, and they're much cleaner cut and hipster. But there was a certain magic that was there with Rock 'n' Roll on the Strip. It's just not there anymore. Everything is bland. It's happening to*

*this whole City. They're making every part of this City look the same. If you went down the third street promenade in Santa Monica back in the day, it had its own kind of vibe. Same for if you went down Universal CityWalk, Hollywood Boulevard or the Sunset Strip. Now... It's all the same. It's the same five stores, and the same strip mall everywhere. You've got your Chipotle, your Starbucks, your Verizon store and then the next block would have the same exact thing. They want everything to be a carbon copy of each other. Nothing has its own vibe anymore.*

I totally agree. When we design buildings for the Sunset Strip, they shouldn't be the same buildings that could be designed for Melrose or Santa Monica Boulevard. They have their own particular histories and identities.

*Yeah. I'm with you on it. My thing is, they're putting up all of these hotels and stores but... People aren't coming here to see hotels. Or, to see the stores that they can see back home. They come to Sunset to see Sunset. If you make it look just like their hometown, why would they need to come here? You know, you can develop and do more for the Strip but also keep the aesthetics of the Strip, so you don't lose the history. Nobody cares about history anymore! They think, "I'm going to make a new history." But you can't just keep tearing down history. I would hope that the City of West Hollywood would see the value in its history. You can add to it and expand to it, definitely... But don't just bulldoze it and throw a bunch of hotels in there. Otherwise there is nothing to attract people to come see. Why would anyone come to LA if there is nothing there for them? It can't just be the beach and Disneyland. I just hope they see the history that's there, because that's really what people are coming there for.*

**Ecology  
Three:  
The  
Musician's  
City**

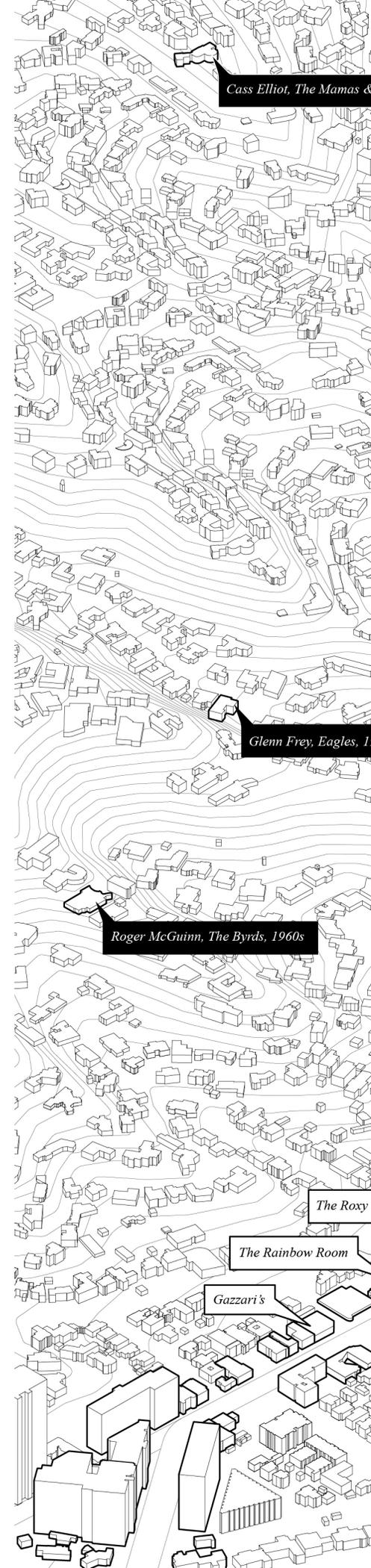
#### 4.1 When the Musicians Took Over West Hollywood

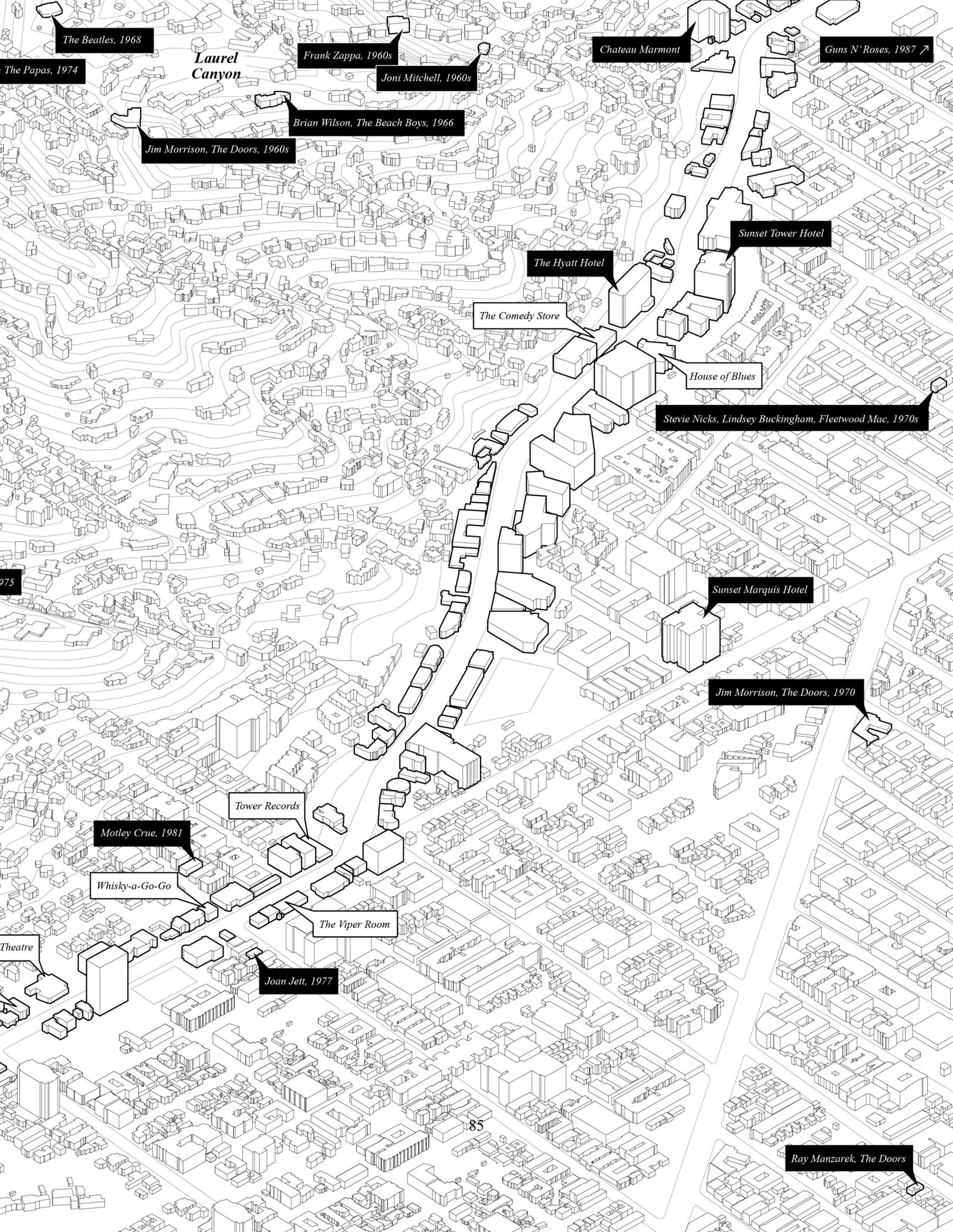
As the Sunset Strip continued to grow in popularity with Rock ‘n’ Roll, musicians worldwide felt the seemingly cosmic pull bringing them to the urban boulevard regardless of industry sponsorship. As a result, it became a staple for musicians like Joan Jett and Jim Morrison to live within close proximity of the Sunset Strip, most being so close that they could walk to and from their gigs. The curvature of the Boulevard itself encouraged the meandering of these musicians between their homes, gigs and afterparties. This intricate relationship between musicians and their proximity to the Boulevard greatly impacted the urban environment of the Sunset Strip culture. Having such popular celebrities residing in West Hollywood evidently increased the overall property value of the City and contributed to the attraction of people, specifically groupies, to the Strip itself. Visitors were able to follow the daily paths of these celebrities and join them in wandering the Sunset Strip.

In addition to musicians living along the Strip, just a few minutes’ drive off of the boulevard, the Laurel Canyon neighborhood became a home base for the counterculture of the Sunset Strip in the mid to late sixties and early seventies. Nestled amidst the Hollywood Hills, dozens of Folk and Surf Rock ‘n’ Rollers including Joni Mitchell, the band Love, The Byrds, and **Brian Wilson** of The Beach Boys resided. Together they wrote and created what would become the easily recognizable California Sound, blending Folk and Rock music using an electric twelve-string Rickenbacker guitar. In the film *Echo in the Canyon*, Lou Adler looks back at his time in Laurel Canyon saying, “To be that close to the Sunset Strip and yet you had a feel that you were in the country and, you know, and totally different feel. It’s beautiful.”<sup>68</sup> Similar to the symbiotic relationship between Beverly Hills and Hollywood, Laurel Canyon was a neighborhood designed for a specific community, and in this case, for Rock ‘n’ Rollers who made their music through collaboration. It was a place where the best of the best would share their latest guitar riffs, only to head down to the Strip’s venues to perform them on stage later that night. Graham Nash of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young (or CSNY for short) later adds in *Echo in the Canyon*, “People would not even call. They’d just knock on the door and go “Listen, hey listen to this!” That’s an incredible

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Slater, *Echo in the Canyon* (2018, United States: Greenwich Entertainment), DVD.

**Figure 5.1:** An analysis of the musicians living within close proximity of the Sunset Strip during its Rock ‘n’ Roll era. View directed Northeast.





*The Beatles, 1968*

*The Papas, 1974*

**Laurel Canyon**

*Frank Zappa, 1960s*

*Joni Mitchell, 1960s*

*Chateau Marmont*

*Guns N' Roses, 1987 ↗*

*Brian Wilson, The Beach Boys, 1966*

*Jim Morrison, The Doors, 1960s*

*Sunset Tower Hotel*

*The Hyatt Hotel*

*The Comedy Store*

*House of Blues*

*Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham, Fleetwood Mac, 1970s*

1975

*Sunset Marquis Hotel*

*Jim Morrison, The Doors, 1970*

*Tower Records*

*Motley Crue, 1981*

*Whisky-a-Go-Go*

*The Viper Room*

*Theatre*

*Joan Jett, 1977*

*Ray Manzarek, The Doors*

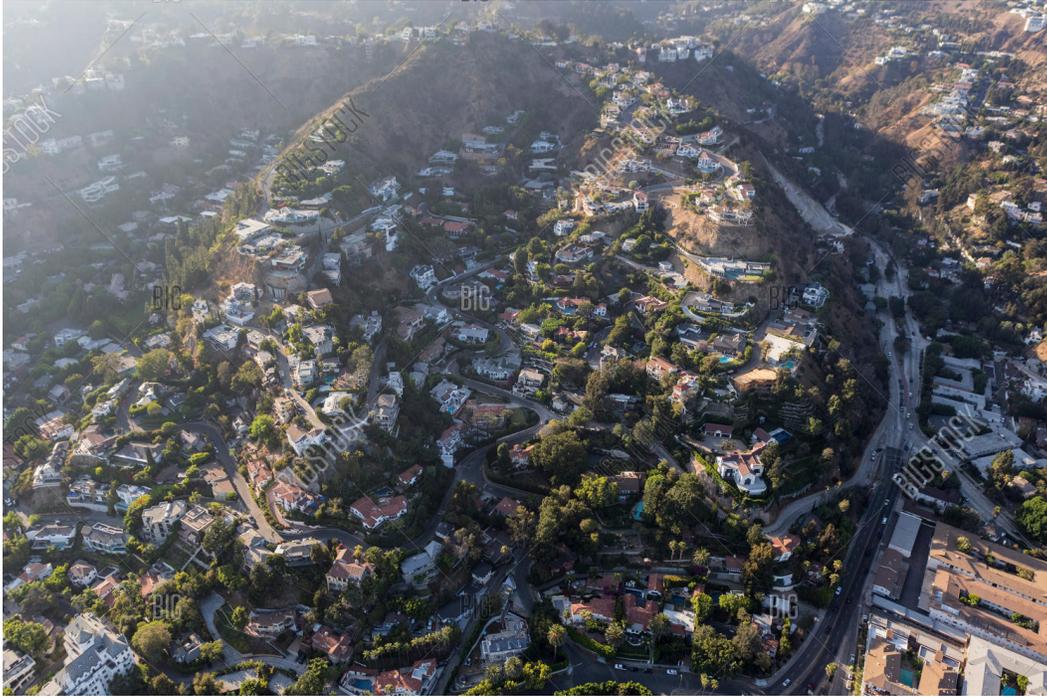


Figure 5.2: An aerial image of Laurel Canyon. Retrieved from BigStock Images.

environment for a musician to be in.”<sup>69</sup> The home of Peter Tork of The Monkees was considered Laurel Canyon’s biggest party house with all-night drug-fueled sleepovers attended by the hippest musicians and movie stars. Laurel Canyon inspired a whole generation of musical writers to think differently, and without it, we may not have had albums like The Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* or The Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. In addition, Laurel Canyon was also the inspiration for the Mamas and the Papas’ *Twelve Thirty (Young Girls Are Coming to the Canyon)*, The Doors’ *Love Street*, and Joni Mitchell’s third album *Ladies of the Canyon*<sup>70</sup>. Mitchell’s home was also immortalized in CSNY’s song *Our House*, written by her then-partner Graham Nash. The band were reported to have first sung together in Mitchell’s living room.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Slater, *Echo in the Canyon*.

70 Jenny Eliscu, “Hot Scene: The Return to Laurel Canyon,” *Rolling Stone*, August 28, 2012, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/hot-scene-the-return-to-laurel-canyon-192504/>.

71 Graham Nash, “Graham Nash Has ‘Wild Tales’ To Spare,” interview by Terry Gross, NPR, October 15, 2013, audio, 00:50, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/234683906?storyId=234683906>.

#### 4.2 The More You Know: Brian Wilson

The first to live in Laurel Canyon, the reluctant and musically gifted front man of The Beach Boys, Brian Wilson, moved to 1448 Laurel Way with his wife Marilyn in 1965, and stayed there through the late sixties. All while living in Laurel Canyon, The Beatles, The Byrds and The Beach Boys influenced and learnt from each other's new and unique sounds. In the film *Echo in the Canyon*, Brian Wilson states that The Beatles were his favorite group, elaborating, "With Rubber Soul, one of my buddies brought it over and played it for me. I said I can't believe this album! You know? That made me write the Pet Sounds Album." To many artists, *Pet Sounds* was the first of an incredibly different and sophisticated sound. Michelle Phillips, one of the vocalists of the all vocal group The Mamas & The Papas who lived in the same neighborhood recalls, "They lived right down the street from us, Brian and Marilyn. One day I went over there and the whole living room was full of sand. There was nothing in the living room but a Steinway and a piano bench and just all sand. And I looked at her and I said what is going on? She said I know it's crazy but he's writing some great songs. He was writing Pet Sounds!" That album, that broke global records, was said to have later influenced one of The Beatles' most notable albums, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Slater, *Echo in the Canyon*.



**Figure 5.3:** The living room of Brian Wilson in his Laurel Canyon home while writing The Beach Boys notorious album *Pet Sounds*.

*Figure 5.4: Homes of musicians living within close proximity to the Sunset Strip during its Rock 'n' Roll era. Images retrieved from Rock & Roll Roadmaps.*



*I. Described as the "Hell House," Guns N' Roses occupied 1139 North Fuller Avenue while working on their 1987 album "Appetite for Destruction". It was a one-room space of 12 feet by 12 feet that was officially designated a storage area. It had no bathroom, kitchen or air conditioning. Anyone needing the toilet had to use the communal facility 50 yards up the street. Izzy described it as "a \*\*\*\*ing living hell."*



*II. Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks moved to 751 North Orange Grove Avenue from the Bay area in the early 1970's before finding fame and fortune with Fleetwood Mac. Stevie worked odd jobs cleaning houses and waiting tables, while Lindsey focused on his music.*



*III. Ray Manzarek of The Doors lived at 232 South Rodeo Drive with his wife and son. He enjoyed living in the City because he could "walk to Barney's any time to hit the seasonal changeover for clothes."*



*IV. When Joan Jett first moved to Los Angeles in 1977, she rented an apartment at 1025 North San Vicente Boulevard, not far from the Whisky-a-Go-Go. Joan was known to host many parties here.*



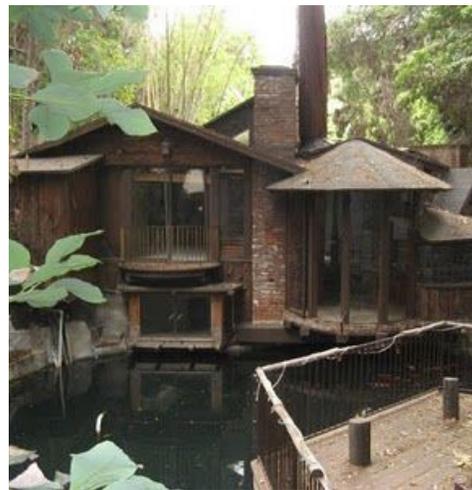
V. Jim Morrison's home located at 8021 Rothdell Trail. When Morrison and his longtime partner Pamela Courson moved into the home in the early 1960s, the building's patio became the backdrop to impromptu jam sessions with neighbors Frank Zappa and Joni Mitchell. It became so dear to Morrison that he immortalized it in The Doors's song, "Love Street" as the "store where the creatures meet."



VI. Cass Elliot of The Mamas & The Papas home at 7708 Woodrow Wilson Dr. This was the last residence that she owned and lived in. She died on July 29, 1974 at the age of 32, while in London to perform a series of concerts as a solo performer at the London Palladium. Beverly D'Angelo is the current resident.



VII. 8216 1/2 Norton Avenue was the last apartment Jim Morrison and Pamela lived in, in the late sixties before he traveled to Paris, where he passed away. Both Jim and Pamela were casualties of heroin use.



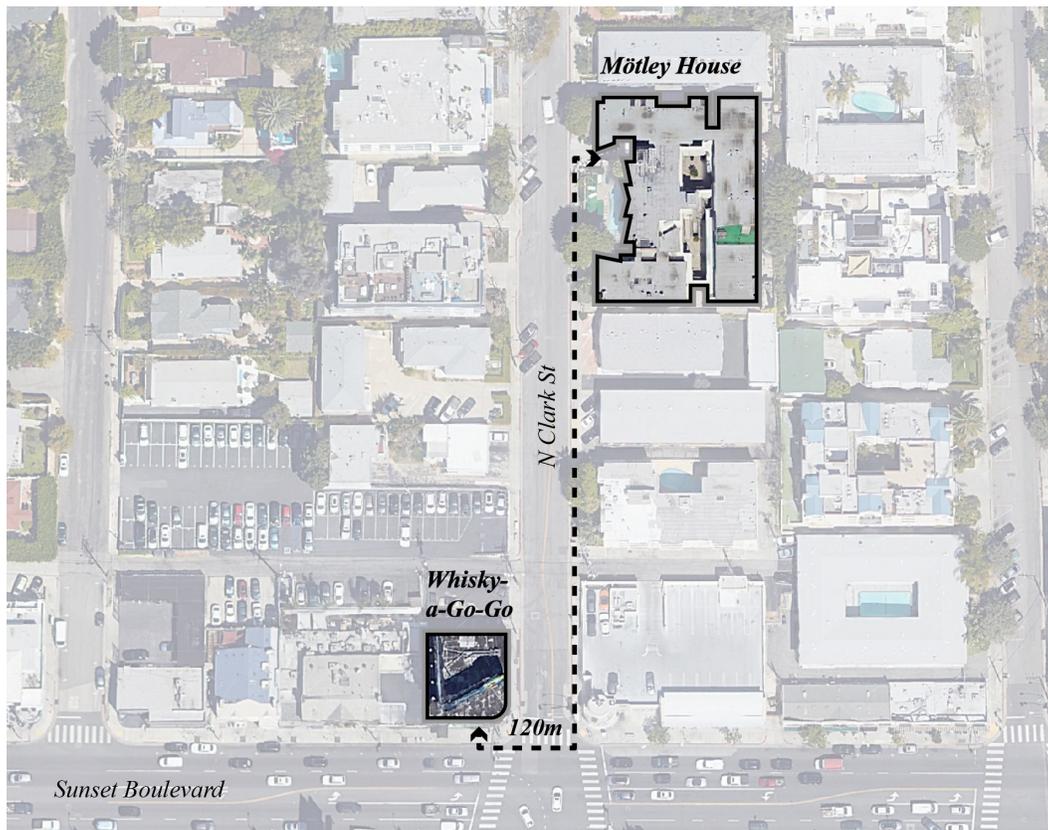
VIII. Frank Zappa's Log Cabin at 2401 Laurel Canyon Blvd. He moved after it became established as the Canyon's "Rock Clubhouse" overrun with freeloaders.

### 4.3 A Case Study: The Mötley House

The most notorious example of this work-live relationship along the Sunset Strip occurred in 1981, as then-manager Allan Coffman of the Los Angeles based band Mötley Crüe financed an apartment for the band at 1140 North Clark Street. Eventually known as the Mötley House, this two-bedroom apartment was just a one-minute walk from the Whisky-a-Go-Go, where Mötley Crüe was the house band (a band hired to regularly perform at an establishment) for the majority of 1981. The band became notorious for the outrageous house parties they would throw after their performances. Vince Neil, the band's lead vocalist recalls, "We played the Whisky, half the crowd would come back to our house... People would pour into the house for afterhours parties. Guys in metal newborns like Ratt and W.A.S.P. spilled out into the courtyard and the street. Girls would arrive in shifts. One would be climbing out the window while another was coming in the door."<sup>73</sup> Considered the Kings of the Sunset Strip, Mötley Crüe would not only attract large crowds to the Strip venues but lead them up and down the Strip to wherever they would move the afterparty. The 120 meters between the Whisky and 1140 North Clark Street had never been so alive.

73 Bienstock, "Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip," 1981: The Mötley House Opens Its Doors.

Figure 5.5: The Mötley House, 1140 North Clark Street, was just 120 metres north of the Whisky-a-Go-Go.





*Figure 5.6: The exterior of the Mötley House located at 1140 North Clark Street. Retrieved from Rock & Roll Roadmaps.*



*Figure 5.7: A photograph of Stevie Rachelle performing with Tuff in the Golden Lounge aboard the MSC Divina during the Monsters of Rock Cruise 2014. Photographed by Brian Ronald.*

#### **4.4 An Interview with Stevie Rachelle: Lead Vocalist of Tuff and Owner of Metal Sludge**

Kelsey: Where were you born and when did you move to Los Angeles?

*Stevie: I was born and raised in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I moved to California in June of 1987 when I was twenty-one.*

When did you know you wanted to get into the entertainment industry?

*I'm going to say the day was March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1984. I say that because I went to see Ozzy Osbourne in concert, and the opening band was Mötley Crüe. At this point, I wasn't really into music. Obviously, I watched MTV, which started in August of 1981. But seeing Ozzy in concert with Mötley Crüe, when they came out and did their set, I was immediately... I don't know what happened. Whatever Mötley Crüe did on stage that night changed my life. I literally went home saying, "I'm going to be a singer. I want to be in a band. I want to go on stage." Shortly after that I saw Van Halen in concert with David Lee Roth in their 1984 tour. Then I*

*saw Ratt after their hit Round and Round had come out. All three of those shows were absolutely the defining moment for me in the summer of 1984, just after I turned eighteen.*

What then drew you specifically to the Sunset Strip from Wisconsin?

*After I saw Mötley Crüe in concert, my friends around town and I started surrounding ourselves with the lifestyle. We would go to these music stores and look through records of different bands and go, "They kind of look like Mötley Crüe. They look scary. They look cool. They have guitars with saw blades on them." At the same time, we were also playing and learning our instruments. Guys were having little jam sessions in their garage, then jam sessions on the weekend turned into, "Hey, we can get the the local arcade that will let us set up our stuff and play on Saturdays. We can sell tickets for \$3.00 a piece." We started doing that at the end of 1984, into '85. We also started reading magazines like Circus, Cream, and Hit Parader. All of these Rock magazines were featuring stories on these bands that were becoming famous and we were fans of Ratt, Mötley Crüe, and Quiet Riot. It seemed like the narrative was that every time I read a story on one of my favorite bands, they were coming from West Hollywood. I would read stories about when they headlined the Whisky-a-Go-Go or they played the Roxy Theatre. I'd see that the videos they filmed were on the Sunset Strip. I realized if I was really serious about what I was doing, I had to move. If I was a professional surfer, I would move to Hawaii. If I wanted to be in the rodeo, I would go to Texas. When it came to saying, "I'm pursuing this to become a "Rockstar", " it was a no brainer that I had to go to West Hollywood to play the Sunset Strip. It*

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was the spring of 1987 when the decision was made. I flew here on a one-way plane ticket, June 25<sup>th</sup>.

Where did you first perform on the Sunset Strip?

*The first show I ever played once I joined Tuff, Tuff was put on a bill August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1987 at the Roxy. Warrant was the headliner and Pair of Dice was the support band.*

You are not the original singer of Tuff (even though you are widely recognized as the singer of the band). How did you get involved with the band?

*Tuff is originally from Phoenix. It was formed by Todd Chase the bass player and Jorge DeSaint the guitarist. They formed it on New Year's Eve of 1984. They were playing locally as Tuff. They were playing around and had gone through a couple of different singers until the lineup they settled on was Todd, Jorge, Michael, and Jim. Jim Gillette was their singer. Jim Gillette is the singer from Nitro who was known for really high screams. It wasn't exactly their style of music. They played with Jimmy for a little over a year. They did move to Hollywood with Jimmy in 1986 and played around some of the clubs. But at that time, Jimmy left the band because he didn't want to do what Tuff was doing. In May of '87 he played his last show with them at Gazzarri's and then they started promoting locally to say, "Wanted lead singer." My childhood friend Al from Wisconsin had come out to Hollywood to basically check out clubs and hang out on the scene. When he came home, he had all of these promotional flyers, magazines, and advertisements. He called me when he got home, and I was excited to hear what happened. I went to Al's house and he showed me all of*

*these flyers, and amongst all of the flyers and advertisements, one of them was the Tuff flyer. It was four boxes on a flyer. One had Jorge, one had Todd, one had Michael, and the fourth box was empty. It said, "Wanted lead singer. Influences like David Lee Roth, Vince Neil, Bret Michaels, Robin Zander, Billy Idol." It was that flyer that instigated me to make the decision, in a few days' time, to pack up and leave my home of Wisconsin and go to LA to find this band to get an audition... And that's exactly what happened. Obviously, I got the gig.*

Did you and the other band members of Tuff live in close proximity to the Sunset Strip?

*Well, no. When Tuff lived here, we always lived in the Valley. As did a lot of bands. I mean, a lot did live on Melrose or Hollywood Boulevard, but we always lived in the Valley. It was always cheaper to live in the Valley, and a little less crazy. But where we lived was probably only ten miles from the heart of Sunset Strip. Once you're in West Hollywood, people are running around the Sunset Strip, going to afterparties. That section where all of the clubs are was kind of like a Mecca. It was the meeting place. If someone said, "What are you doing this weekend?" and you said you were going to Sunset, that meant you were going to that area. Even if you said you were going to Sunset, you could have meant you were going to the Troubadour that was on Santa Monica Boulevard. But a lot of people would go to see so-and-so at the Troub, and then head up to the Rainbow. All of these places made a little hub of activity. The rehearsal places we used were in the Valley as well. Including the places that would host these afterparties. A lot of the time what would happen is the band that rehearsed in the Valley would have to load up all their gear at 3pm on a*

Friday, drive into West Hollywood, set up and play their big show. When their big show finished they would load out, maybe go to the Rainbow, party, and then when all of the clubs closed at 1:00 or 1:30am, the band would have to drive back to their studio, unload all of their gear and throw an afterparty at their studio. Everybody would drive into the Valley, and go to this warehouse party, until 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning. Somebody would bring beer; people would be doing drugs and having sex in storage lockers. The same thing would apply to the guys that lived in West Hollywood, they would say, "Hey we live a few blocks away, afterparty at our house!" They would play the Whisky and then everyone would just walk to their house and there would be 300 people in an apartment doing the same thing: drugs and sex in closets. This was happening all over.

Would you say you guys were a community together? The different bands I mean. Or was it purely competitive?

Yes there is a level of competitiveness, but there is also a level of respect. I can say that when we were on the Strip, becoming the top dog or king of the hill was not an easy task. There were hundreds and hundreds of bands. Probably thousands of bands. So, to get to a level where you can not only be featured as a main draw or a headliner at a main club on the Strip, but to get paid and to pull people in... On any given night Gazzarri's had five bands, the Whisky had five bands, the Roxy had five bands, the Central, the Troubadour, the Coconut Teaszer, the Country Club in the Valley, F.M. Station, the Palamino.... I could keep going, and that's not even counting any of the clubs in Orange County or East LA. If every single one of those places had five bands, that's fifty bands on a Friday night. If you were playing the Roxy, you would have

bands in front trying to get your crowd to come see their show 150 feet away at Gazzarri's, or to the Whisky a block away, or to the Central a block and a half away, or even people saying they were headed to the Rainbow because they heard David Lee Roth was is eating a Pizza there. You are competing with literally dozens and dozens of bands; within the same hour you're playing. Never mind what's going to happen tomorrow night, or Sunday night, or the following Friday night. So, we were trying to do anything and everything to get those kids, those girls, those people to come to show your shows. That is where the competitive level comes in of being on the street, being personable, meeting girls, telling girls you are in love with her (laughter). Anything you could tell these people to convince them to see your band more than they wanted to see the others. Putting up our flyers everywhere. It was very dog-eat-dog so to speak.

So, you were actually passing out flyers on the Sunset Strip then?

Absolutely. We would play a show near the Strip about once every two months.

**Figure 5.8:** A photograph of Tuff in the eighties. Stevie is second from the right. Retrieved from Songkick.



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*Not every month, that was too often. More than two months might have been too long of a wait. Once the show was booked and we knew we were going to have a show Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>. For the rest of July into August, almost every night we would promote. We would make a flyer and an advertisement for the show with some kind of sexually charged slogan like, "If Rash Occurs Discontinue Use," along with "Tuff in Concert." We would plan the weekend by saying, "Okay, Stevie and Michael go to the Country Club tonight because Warrant is playing, and we are going to promote there. Todd and Jorge you guys go to the Roxy because Pretty Boy Floyd are playing and promote there." Then we would go to the Rainbow afterwards and promote there. We would try to spread ourselves out. At the same time, if we were promoting our show at the Troubadour, Gazzarri's did not want us handing out Troubadour flyers inside of their club. All of the clubs were like that. So, we would pass out flyers outside of the club to people going into the club, or you would put it on their cars. We would put the flyers down our pants and sneak into the clubs, and when we saw a girl that we thought was pretty, and she looked at us, we would go, "Hey, here is a flyer. Quick put it away." You had to be smart, you had to think, you had to plan how you were going to make the most impact this weekend. Even if there were national shows coming up, we would go to promote at those places as well. We would do whatever we could to make those people see us, see our flyers, see our logo.*

When you were doing this, passing out flyers, this was after the pay-to-play requirement had been instituted at Strip venues right?

*Yeah. Here's the thing. There are a lot of people that complained about pay-to-*

*play. I'm not against it. I think it's smart. Again, we are talking about dozens of clubs and hundreds of bands. I'm sure in the earlier days there were a lot of guys that told a good story and convinced the Whisky or the Roxy to put them on a big show. But then they wouldn't draw any people even though their drummer had a big drum set or their guitarist was a good guitar player. At some point, you have to prove yourself. That you are worth that spot, and you are worth selling those tickets. The Whisky-a-Go-Go is not in Aurora, Colorado. It is on the Sunset Strip. This is where Jim Morrison and The Doors played, this is where Van Halen played, this is where Mötley Crüe and Guns N' Roses played. To say you are good enough to get that spot to play there, you better be good. Out of the few times we had to do pay-to-play, we didn't have to pay. We put in our work and had a big enough buzz that we sold our tickets. Not only did we not have to pay, but we made money. Now of course, we did have a pretty organized product already. Tuff was not just four guys who said, "Okay we're cool let's put our name on a flyer." Michael was a very organized businessman. We had a clear process and direction with how we wanted to promote the band. We had the look, we did professional photoshoots, we had endorsements. We paid a graphics person to make our flyers, instead of just taking four pictures and taping them on a flyer and handwriting a logo. So, the pay-to-play thing works if you can draw people. If you are saying you want a record deal and want to get signed, then you should be ready. Tuff was big on a local level and at some point, we did get that big record deal and make it onto MTV and into the magazines. That happened from a whole lot of collaborative work.*

I'm curious what your opinion is of pay-to-play now on the Strip. Do you still

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think it is appropriate?

*Well... Let's say there is a bunch of guys in a band in Cleveland. They just won the battle of the bands there, but now they want to move to LA. They're the hottest band in Ohio so they load up their truck and drive all the way to Hollywood. But, the hottest band from Denver is here, and the hottest band from Dallas is here, and the hottest band from Phoenix is here. This is the same Strip where Eddie Van Halen made it. This is where Guns N' Roses blossomed and got signed. This is where Metallica once played the clubs, and Slayer and Ratt. So now the local band from Cleveland wants to play the Whisky. If you can't play your instrument, if you're not professional, or you're not going to be doing this in five years and making a career of it... You're just kind of taking up somebody's else's spot at the Whisky. If the Whisky says, "If you want to play on our stage, on a Friday night at 9 o'clock, in the middle of summer, we don't care who you are. It's \$750 in presale tickets; you have to bring in 75 people at \$10.00 a piece." If you can't bring 75 people, you don't deserve to play the Whisky. So again, there are a lot of people that say they want to play there, but there are also a lot of people want to play in the NFL. You can't just walk into the LA Forum where the Lakers and Magic Johnson won a championship and say you want to shoot baskets. The same applies for wanting to play a famous club like the Whisky. The Whisky, to operate, to have bouncers, sound men, stage managers, to have a state-of-the-art concert stage for you to showcase your talent as a musician, it's not a free for all. You have to prove yourself. I think that the Whisky, the Troubadour and the Roxy have operated long enough, that when any old Joe has rolled into town, they can make sure the bands they have playing are drawing crowds that will buy a drink or a basket of fries (laughter). They're not in business of opening up to have people play for free, that can't sustain an audience.*

*That's as simple as this: fifty tickets, it's a five-piece band, each person is responsible for ten tickets. So, I think pay-to-play is smart, and fair. Especially at that level. Now if someone said it was \$5000 to open for so-and-so, that's a lot of money.*

What are your opinions on Grunge music? Do you think Grunge stopped people from coming to the Sunset Strip?

*When Grunge music came out, there was some of it that I liked. I liked some Pearl Jam songs, I liked Alice In Chains, and I even liked some of the Nirvana songs. It wasn't just their music; it was the whole attitude of Grunge in the nineties. I mean I kind of knew it then, but none of us really realized what was happening. We didn't think it was going to completely destroy everybody, which it did. I don't think Kurt Cobain said, "Let me make a record and make the eighties disappear." But between what happened with Pearl Jam, Kurt Cobain and Nirvana, the whole thing dismantled what the eighties stood for. Even bands like Poison and Mötley Crüe were no longer as relevant. Being a blonde hair, blue eyed, pretty boy singer in a hair band with leather pants on, looking sexy, and showing off my arms and body... That was no longer cool. Even if I suddenly grew a beard, the cat was out of the bag. In the nineties when Grunge hit, it was cool to be bald, or have a weird beard and be kind of dumpy looking. The guys in the bands, they looked like what the roadies used to look like. The days of David Lee Roth doing the splits or Bret Michaels with his shirt off, that was not okay anymore. Being the singer that I was, the person I was, once that happened, it was almost like I had aids back then. People didn't want to talk to me as much anymore. We suddenly got made fun of by the producers, the magazines,*

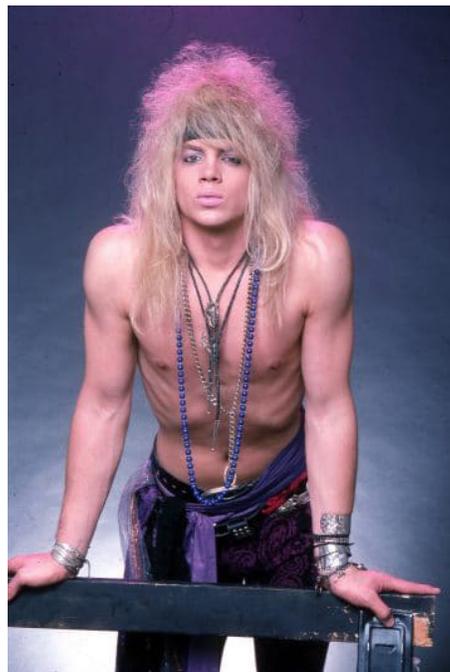
the press, the radio. Meanwhile Phil Anselmo of Pantera had a bald head, he was angry looking, his clothes made him look homeless. Dimebag Darrell had a weird crazy beard. Kurt Cobain was wearing sweaters that my grandpa would wear. Then Weezer came out and he looked like a nerd professor. It was the complete opposite of everything that the eighties stood for. Everything Grunge did collectively from the music to the way they looked, to their photos and imagery, it was basically discrediting what we did. Even the way they would do interviews and go, "We take our music seriously. We're not worried about our hair and our photoshoots." They didn't say that about anybody in particular, but saying that meant Vince Neil, or Stevie Nicks, or certain guys that looked good. I didn't go to a photoshoot and ask if my hair looked good without worrying about songs. Of course, we worried about songs! But at the same time, I wanted to be like, "Hey, I shaved for this. I don't have a bunch of scruffy whiskers on my face," (laughter). But the Grunge scene was image driven as well. Suddenly everyone was wearing Dr.Martens, dirty khaki shorts and had one guy in a band with dread locks, one guy that shaved his head, and one guy that had a weird beard with some kind of beads or color in it. It was as cookie cutter as we all were. When Grunge came, they became a product of their influences. Which, a lot of their influences were actually Glam bands, they just couldn't say that. Alice In Chains used to be a Glam band. Layne Staley used to look like C.C. Deville. A lot of those guys came from a Glam Rock background, but when the nineties happened everything changed. You had to reinvent yourself and your look and hope that nobody knew you. Guys that used to be Rikki Lazer were now just Rich. No more cool stage names, they were just Harold (laughter). Pantera is a great example. Rex their

bass player, he was Rex Roker. Rex Roker is a pretty basic stage name. He dropped the Roker because it would have been goofy.

What would be your hope for the future of the Sunset Strip?

I agree with you and a lot of things people have said. Tearing down every building and putting up a high rise is kind of lame. They should be able to build a high rise. But, at some point, there should be some things that are left in place. Some of the old historic stuff that has meaning - including those clubs, which ever they are. That applies to not only the Sunset Strip but other parts of Los Angeles like Santa Monica Boulevard and Hollywood Boulevard. There is a lot of history there and it shouldn't be bulldozed for some big tall building and neon sign. We have to give some of it, its respect.

**Figure 5.9:** A photograph of Stevie Nicks in the eighties. Retrieved from Sleaze Roxx.



#### 4.5 A British Invasion

As the history of the California Rock scene has always been closely related to the British Rock scene, bands like Fleetwood Mac and The Beatles found themselves living in West Hollywood and immersed in the unique culture of the Sunset Strip. In the rare case that a British musician did not own a home somewhere just off of the Strip, touring musicians would rent rooms (or several floors) at any number of the Strip's many deluxe hotels. Bands like Led Zeppelin, The Who, and later Def Leppard would find themselves spending anywhere from a few nights to a few months at the Hyatt House, Château Marmont, Sunset Tower Hotel, the Grafton on Sunset or the Sunset Marquis (located just one block south of the Strip). The irreverent pulse of the Sunset Strip and the outrageous parties they produced was at times astonishing to some touring musicians, "We were so far away from that Strip mentality that we didn't even know what it was", says Def Leppard's front man Joe Elliott, "But we put out Pyromania and we were in the States touring with Billy Squier... So, we went to the Rainbow, and then we invited a few people back to the Sunset Marquis, where we were staying, for drinks and stuff. We wound up having, like, 65 people trying to walk into Steve's room. It just got stupid. We had to start turning people away... I mean, we were a band from Sheffield. We had never seen a scene like that."<sup>74</sup>

But for most, the excessive lifestyle of the Sunset Strip only drew musicians in that much closer. Between their Rock 'n' Roll billboard, and their endless nights performing at such venues as The London Fog and the Whisky-a-Go-Go, The Doors seemed to have an intrinsic bond with the Strip that could not be shaken regardless of their level of fame. Reinforcing the importance of this proximity to the Strip, The Doors not only continued to record their music on the boulevard throughout their career, but front men Jim Morrison and Ray Manzarek can be seen to have continued purchasing many homes over the years on and around the Strip. Despite being a Los Angeles based musician, Jim Morrison even lived in the Hyatt House for a period of time until he was reportedly evicted by management for hanging out a window by his fingertips.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.6 A Case Study: The Hyatt House

Probably the most notorious of the Rock 'n' Roll hotels, the Hyatt Hotel was opened in 1963 and soon renamed the Continental Hyatt House. In the late sixties and seventies, the Hotel's proximity to popular venues and its forgiving attitude for bad behavior made it the preferred Los Angeles accommodation for touring Rock 'n' Roll groups. A play on the name Hyatt House, the hotel was often referred to as the Riot House, as the balconies that overlooked the Sunset Strip, were made famous by stories of Rockstars throwing televisions off of them<sup>76</sup>. Led Zeppelin would rent as many as six floors of the hotel (including the hotel's rooftop pool) for their band members, entourage, and groupies. Televisions would be smashed, and hallways would be filled with bubbles to be used as slip 'n slides. Drummer John Bonham was once even reported to have driven a motorcycle down the hallways of the eleventh floor<sup>77</sup>. Room 1015 of the Hyatt House had a reputation for being the most desecrated room not only on the Sunset Strip, but the entire world of Rock 'n' Roll hotels. The room was known to be commonly rented by a number of Rockstars that hosted alcohol induced afterparties full of sex and illicit drug use. In 1972, a television flew off of the balcony of room 1015, thrown by the Rolling Stone's Keith Richards and saxophone player Bobby Keys. Landing ten stories below in a corner of the hotel's parking lot, documentarian Robert Frank caught the entire incident on camera.<sup>78</sup>

74 Bienstock, "Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip," April 1983: Brits Hit the Strip.

75 Emily Mackay, "The strangest tales from rock's most mythical hotels," BBC, April 10, 2017, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/articles/d38d1012-c3fb-449a-b3ee-86a8f31a02e8>.

76 Acidinurmind, "LED ZEPPELIN & THE RIOT HOUSE," *YouTube* video, 2:56, May 17, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6xBHuQC3fA>.

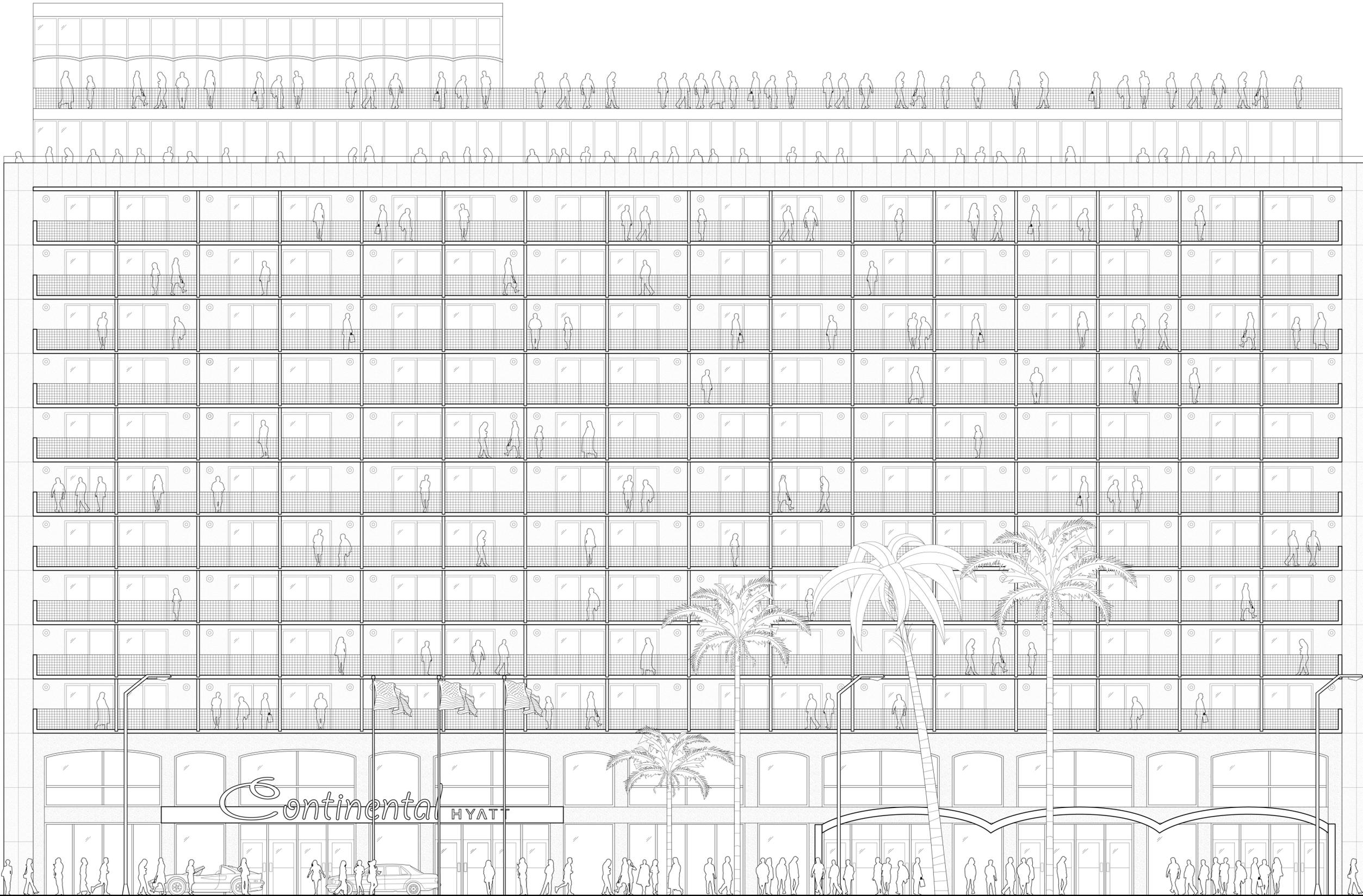
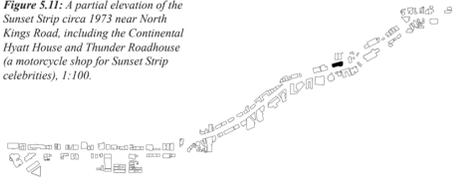
77 Bienstock, "Decade of Decadence: A Timeline of the Eighties Sunset Strip."

78 Robert Frank, *Cocksucker Blues* (1979, United States: Eagle Rock), DVD, 1h 33m.



*Figure 5.10: At fourteen stories high, The Continental Hyatt House is located at 8401 Sunset Boulevard. Photo dated: January 9, 1966. Retrieved from the Herald Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.*

Figure 5.11: A partial elevation of the Sunset Strip circa 1973 near North Kings Road, including the Continental Hyatt House and Thunder Roadhouse (a motorcycle shop for Sunset Strip celebrities), 1:100.



Continental Hyatt House



North King Road

Thunder Roadhouse



Figure 5.12: A photograph of Lisa Smith in 2020. Image provided by Lisa.

#### 4.7 An Interview with Lisa Smith: Previous Waitress at the Troubadour

Kelsey: Where were you born?

*Lisa: I was born at the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital. I was raised in Studio City. I stayed in Southern California until 1997.*

How did you get involved with the Sunset Strip Scene? What drew you to it specifically?

*I was one of those dorky kids that sat in the front of the class and picked my nose behind a book. Most of my elementary school went to one Junior High, and a few of us went to another. So, I got to start reinventing myself. I didn't really know how or who. I started hanging out with a couple of people from Studio City, one of whom I am still friends with that was a musician. He was a couple of years older than me. His band played at the Starwood, and he invited me. I wasn't old enough to go, I was only fourteen or fifteen. At fifteen I stopped going to school and a couple of weeks*

*after my sixteenth birthday I started going to community college, where I never actually went to class (laughing). I only would have been a Junior in High School. But there I found this Rock 'n' Roll crowd that hung out over the hill on the weekends; I dove in headfirst. Within a very short period of time I was living on the other side of the hill. I wasn't just there on weekends, but every night of the week. Suddenly I was right there in the middle of it. It was a good thing. It was a really good thing. I realize my life looked extremely dysfunctional to a lot of people. I realize it now because I have a fifteen-year-old child and I think about how terrified I would be if he ever did that. But it probably saved my life. I no longer wanted to be somebody else. I got to be somebody else. I got to be who I wanted to be instead of spending my whole life trying to be who everybody else wanted me to be and hating myself in the process. It absolutely saved my life over there. I was there from 1981 to 1990. I started going there right after the Starwood closed. When I was barely eighteen, there were five of us living in a studio apartment. I want to say it was on Larrabee. It was my old roommate's ex-boyfriend, a guy named Bernie, Axl but he wasn't in Guns N' Roses yet (he was in a band called Hollywood Rose), and another guy named AJ. We didn't all hang out together, and we weren't all friends, but we all lived in Robbie's studio apartment. It was excellent for a short period of time. I met a guy and moved to Long Beach for a couple of years. We would still visit Hollywood; he had a rehearsal studio there. After a couple of years, we moved back. A couple weeks after I turned twenty-one, I showed up to the Rainbow to tell Mario... I had already been drinking there for five or six years at this point (laughing)... I said to him, "I want a job, I'm twenty-one." So, he called his son Junior over, and Junior said,*

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*"You start tomorrow night at the Roxy." I got a job at the Roxy without filling out an application. I only lasted a couple of nights (laughing). It was too professional for me. Two days there and I knew I was out of my league (laughing). The Rainbow was run that well too. The people that worked there were good at what they did. But I was quite happy at the Troubadour; I could get away with a lot there. I poured a drink down somebody's pants once! I wouldn't dare do that someplace else. Part of it was that I knew the guy that hired me. In the early 80s, my friends and I would go to the Rainbow and the Troubadour a lot. Like, a lot, a lot. The guy who owned the Troubadour, his name was Ed, he would give us \$20.00 to go get drunk in the parking lot across the street because he didn't want minors drinking inside the club. That was kind of lovely (laughing). But yeah, these clubs were run very well.*

I can't believe these stories of so many people squeezing into studio apartments!

*We didn't think anything of it. We were children! When you're a teenager, you move around in a pack anyhow. It was like a drug and alcohol fueled slumber party every day. We would go out to the clubs, we'd come back, we'd sleep, we'd get up, shower, put on makeup and go do it again. Nobody really thought anything of it. It was mostly just a place to sleep.*

Do you think it was important to live close to the Sunset Strip?

*Absolutely. My friend Frankie and I, when we were twenty-one, lived in the hotel next to Tower Records for almost a year. We moved in there temporarily while we were looking for an apartment. At some point, we wondered why we were even moving. We figured it wouldn't cost us any more than an apartment with utilities. We had*

*a restaurant downstairs, and someone to come clean our room once a day...*

Was there a big sense of community between all of you on the Strip?

*We all knew who each other were. It was like a small school. There were maybe two or three hundred people that were there all of the time on a regular basis. You could tell who was part of the scene and who wasn't. The same people were there all of the time and you would get familiar with how they acted or who they knew. Just like when you would get a new kid at school and they started acting weird, you would know who they are. It wasn't so much that people looked out for each other as people weren't looking to start trouble with each other. It was acceptance and courtesy. We were a community. There were people there that I didn't like, and there were people there that didn't like me. But that was cool. We didn't have a problem. Then there would be these little groupie chicks that weren't actually part of the scene, they were like the décor (laughing).*

While you were working at the Troubadour, what was your experience as a female in this industry? It seemed like an exclusive "brotherhood".

*Well... I usually had black hair at the time and my best friends were all pretty blonde girls. I was always the pretty girl's cool friend. So, I got to go places. When the guys went places once they were sick of the girls and the girls went to bed, I'd get to go with the guys! It was like a brotherhood, but they included me a lot of the time. Working at the Troubadour... I was mean (laughing). I used to carry a plastic laser gun with lights and sounds because I would get so sick of telling people, "Excuse me!" I would put the gun up to the side of their head from behind*

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*and pull the trigger. The lights would go off, the sound would be in their ear, and they would get out of my way (laughing)! It was really effective. But, yeah, I was mean. I was the type of person where if you smacked my \*\*\*, I was going to smack you in the head. I would never have to get a bouncer or anything, they would know not to do it again once I hit them (laughing). I liked working the bleachers because people wouldn't get up and move around as much. They would generally stay where I left them.*

Were a lot of women who worked in the industry like that? Where they put on that mean persona as you're saying?

*No, no. Two of the girls I worked with, one was very sweet and the other was very sharp. But they were the type of girls who would come to work, stay for a couple of drinks and then head home. They weren't really involved in the scene. They lived in North Hollywood, so they weren't really part of it. Whereas by the time I lived there, I lived within walking distance.*

Do you think women were treated equally to men in that scene?

*Yes and no. I don't think they were treated like "less than" (except for the ones that chose to be), but they were definitely treated differently. But we were different. One of the things a lot of us did was have what we called "house boys". Basically, we would let an out of work musician come live with us, and we would give them food and beer in exchange for them doing our laundry and cleaning our house. It worked really well for everybody. So obviously we weren't treated the same, but we got along okay (laughing). We weren't going to bring them groceries and pay their rent, but they were welcome to sleep on our couch*

*and do our laundry. If they were nice, we would even take them with us to work and give them some money for a few drinks. Our best one was named Randall. We would call him Gerald and he would answer to it (laughing). I don't even know why we called him that. We came home one day, and all of our laundry was done. While the last load was in the dryer, he sat on top of it and played the guitar. That's all he had been doing all day – washing and drying our laundry, folding it, sorting it, and playing the guitar. He was our favorite. He would throw hamburgers out of our apartment window at people walking down Sunset. At that point we had moved right in front of the Roxy. It had a window that opened to the front. We would turn all of the lights off, get some hamburgers and throw them out the window. People would get so mad that they were getting hit by a hamburger, but when they looked up, all of the apartment lights were off.*

That reinforces what you were saying earlier, that you felt it was important to live close to the Strip. The fact that you were moving to and from all of these different apartments, but they were still always on the Strip.

*It was important. Even when we didn't live right on the Strip for the last couple of years that we were there, we were still there every single night. I liked being walking distance from everything! I drank, I did drugs, I didn't drive. It was good to be able to walk everywhere.*

What about afterparties?

*There were a lot of afterparties that people didn't know about unless you were in the know. Once too many people found out about them, they would move. They would keep the same name but move to a new location. There was one I went*

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*to for a couple of years. It never stayed in the same location for more than six or eight weeks... But, the parties at the Hyatt would go on for days. Nobody that worked there ever came upstairs and told us to be quiet; I don't understand why now (laughing). Some of those parties would go for four or five days.*

Would you stay at the hotel over those days?

*Oh no, no. I had to go home, change clothes and take a shower. But, a lot of the time I would stay up for that entire time. I would go home, shower, go to work for a few hours and then head back. A lot of people did that. Tony Roman threw a few really good ones. There was one guy, I don't remember his name at all, but he was in Whitesnake... A lot of the time when I would get tired, I would walk down the hall to another one of the rooms that were part of the party but less full. This guy would always end up in the room with me. He didn't act creepy or anything, but he always wanted to talk about golf. I remember that he talked about golf more clearly than I remember anything else about him (laughing)! I couldn't even begin to tell you which instrument in the band he played. He was just the Whitesnake golf guy. People that didn't know me would talk to me because they were so high that they thought they knew me (laughing).*

These people that would throw the parties, would they rent out an entire floor of the hotel?

*It was three, four, or five rooms at least. I threw one down at the Tropicana on Sunset that lasted about three days. Everything was kind of a mess back then. I have to tell you; I never did see anyone throw a TV from the Hyatt though. But if they did, I actually might not have*

*noticed.*

What would be your hope for the future of these clubs?

*I hope they undo whatever the hell they've done to the Rainbow. It looks like it belongs on CityWalk. I'm not okay with that. I remember the Whisky dressing rooms were just covered in graffiti. It all used to be so edgy. They've turned it all into a tourist attraction. I don't know if they actually can save it. They might just have to move the entire scene east. Which they were already starting to do in a small way when I left... For years, I would eat dinner at the Rainbow almost every night with my friend Frankie. People would lay out a sixteenth of an ounce of coke in the bathroom and share it with strangers. Women would be wiping their mouths, crawling out from underneath tables. I used to fall up the stairs there about once a week (laughing). Actually, the craziest thing I think I ever saw was Ted Nugent hock a loogie in the parking lot. I thought that was disgusting. Sure, most of us were louder and weirder, but we weren't gross. We weren't just going to hock a loogie and think it was cool... Part of me hopes that everything is saved. But part of me also knows that even if they do save it, they're not, because that time is gone. They're not going to get it back. It's like when they tried to recreate Woodstock at the US Festivals. The first one was great, I loved it. But I didn't dare go to the second one because I knew there were going to be riots. But it's a piece of history. The Sunset Strip is never going to be what it was, but it's an important piece of history. It changed Rock 'n' Roll. Incorporating it into something new is a beautiful thing. Because the feeling, the time, the place is still there. You can't just erase it.*

#### 4.8 Privacy in a Digital World

Today this immediate connection to the Sunset Strip no longer seems as easily attainable. Although it can be assumed that upcoming musicians would have no problem residing along the Strip in the same way that Mötley Crüe had, for Los Angeles' established artists this could be considered a major safety hazard. With software like Google Maps and social media removing a level of pre-existing privacy for anyone, the address of any number of celebrities can easily be gained by doing a quick internet search. This lack of privacy has caused musicians to fall further and further back into the winding roads and gated communities of the Hollywood Hills, and even as far as places like Malibu or Topanga Canyon. Rather than having it publicly known when they are in town, touring musicians even go as far as hiding behind fake alias while booking their hotel stays and surround themselves with heightened security. It is common practice for non-disclosure and confidentiality agreements to be signed by all parties involved today, to ensure the safety and privacy of celebrities. These increased security precautions often bleed into the after-party scene, restricting the guest list to only those in the entertainment business or in the know. Groupies today tend to have an Uber or Lyft bring them home after watching a performance rather than continuing to hop the Strip's many venues and hotels. It was recently announced that Chateau Marmont owner Andre Balazs will even soon be shifting the Sunset Strip hotel to a members-only model. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, Balazs stated that he had been considering this business model transition for several years, but the global pandemic and its effect on travelers' prudence in regard to interacting with strangers has accelerated his decision. Since the 2010 opening of the Soho House in West Hollywood, the private club business model has grown in popularity across Los Angeles<sup>79</sup>. At this point, it seems the reckless behavior of Rock 'n' Rollers may never be restored.

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79 Gary Baum, "Andre Balazs Turning the Château Marmont Into a Private Club," *Hollywood Reporter*, July 28, 2020, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/andre-balazs-turning-chateau-marmont-a-private-club-1304779>.

*Figure 5.13: A photograph of the Chateau Marmont. Retrieved from Deadline.*



# **Staying Relevant in a Dynamic Landscape**



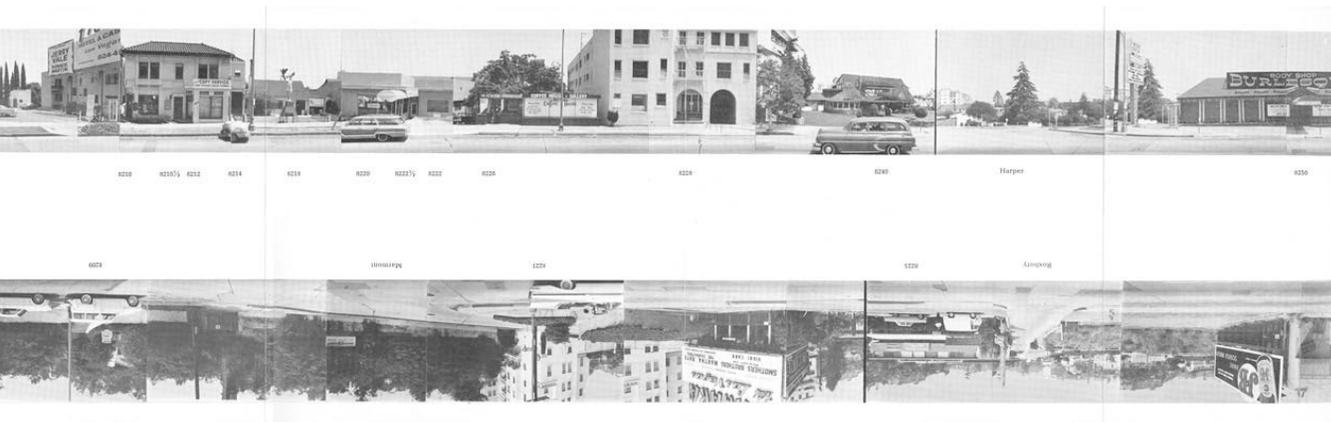
contemporary way. Located on the corner of Highland and Willoughby in Hollywood, the Melrose Neighborhood Association successfully nominated the gas station for Historic-Cultural Monument status in 1992<sup>83</sup>.

Over the course of its many eras the economy of the Sunset Strip has flourished at night. In the nightlife entertainment industry, remaining relevant is key to ensuring socioeconomic security. Staying attuned to current trends and what customers want can be just as difficult as opening the doors of any venue in the first place. Along with having a strong venue concept, training the right staff, and targeting the correct demographic, it is typical for nightclubs to rebrand their venues more often than one would think. With the dynamic environment of the Sunset Strip, this concept continues to be quite familiar to the urban boulevard. With evidence of this socioeconomic implication appearing on the Sunset Strip in as early as the forties, it has become quite typical for venues along the Strip to change their operating name and/or concepts, to better coincide with the latest trends. But Ruscha's same photographs also reveal exceptions on the Strip – businesses and architecture born in the Rock 'n' Roll era that unlike many others, somehow made it out alive. By continuously recognizing and re-applying the three ecologies of the Sunset Strip (Billboards, Flyers, and The Musician's City) in a new and revitalized way without too much nostalgia, some Sunset Strip businesses that were opened in the early seventies continue to find immense success today.

## 5.2 A Case Study: The Comedy Store

Proven in Ruscha's photographs, today, the Sunset Strip's Comedy Store continues to not only be the most successful venue along the Strip, but the most internationally renowned comedy venue in the English-speaking world. With sold out shows every night, the death of Rock 'n' Roll on the Strip has not diminished the success of this venue. Opening in 1972 and featuring many self-proclaimed Rock 'n' Roll comedians like **Sam Kinison**, The Comedy Store quickly rose to fame as its paid regulars like Richard Pryor, Robin Williams and David Letterman worked out material

<sup>83</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, "Starbucks (Gilmore Gas Station)," *Historic Places*, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/starbucks-gilmore-gas-station>.



for their one-hour specials night after night on stage<sup>84</sup>. Located at 8433 Sunset Boulevard beside the famous Hyatt House, The Comedy Store often attracted crowds of celebrity Metal Glam Rock ‘n’ Rollers to its audiences, making its relationship to the Strip and the era clear. Although not unfamiliar to the highs and lows of the entertainment industry, today, The Comedy Store continues to thrive and has introduced many powerful new voices to the comedy industry such as Theo Von, Joe Rogan, and Whitney Cummings that are able to sell out the venue’s three stages and 600 seats any night of the week. When the venue is examined with an understanding of the urban ecologies that contribute to the strong local vernacular of the Sunset Strip in mind, as well as its awareness on keeping relevant, the success of The Comedy Store can be understood quite easily.

Despite turnover in the building’s many owners, their collective recognition and adaptability to the buzz of the local urban environment contributed to the long-lasting success of this site with only minor renovations required to the building itself. Prior to being considered the “Mecca of Comedy”<sup>85</sup>, 8433 Sunset Boulevard opened its doors in 1940 as *Ciro’s*, a glamorous nightclub and supper club known to have its front of house frequented by Hollywood’s elite, and the Los Angeles Mafia in the back. Celebrity guests were often said to have been on their worst behavior in the club, with Frank Sinatra allegedly getting in so many fistfights over then wife, Ava Gardner, that he was almost banned from the supper club altogether<sup>86</sup>. But as police were charged with maintaining the law, order and cleaning the Strip, and the adult entertainment industry made its way to Las Vegas, *Ciro’s* was forced to close in 1957. As Rock ‘n’ Roll began to hit the Strip in the sixties, the venue soon after re-opened as *Ciro’s Le Disc*, a short-lived Rock ‘n’ Roll venue. As it was later sold to comedian Sammy Shore, his wife Mitzi Shore and comedy writer Rudy Deluca, The Comedy Store officially opened its doors on April 7, 1972<sup>87</sup>.

Regardless of The Comedy Store’s situation on a prime advertising location where North Olive Drive meets the Sunset Strip, even in 2020, the roof top of The Comedy Store continues to bare no post and railing billboards despite its ample space. Dating back to its opening in 1972, the venue uses only soft and changeable hoarding billboards to display the names of the daily performances across its marqu e, in addition to the venue’s black stucco fa ade being riddled in white signatures by the venue’s paid regular performers. The Comedy Store recognizes the impact that unrelated off-site advertisements can have on the social condition and cultural urban environment of not only their venue, but the Sunset Strip itself. Although not located specifically on the site of 8433 Sunset Boulevard, with the growing popularity of *Netflix is a Joke* (Netflix’s promotional title for their explosive comedy genre), the majority of the company’s 25 billboards along the Strip often promote the hour-long comedy specials of the paid regulars featured at The Comedy Store.

Although the pay-to-play requirement is not instituted at The Comedy Store, the venue is famous for its “front porch” – an outdoor patio bar that allows guests and performers to intermingle before or after their shows. The front porch of The Comedy Store is a space that similarly promotes in-person interaction between performers and guests, as the passing and stapling of flyers did for Rock ‘n’ Rollers. As an outdoor bar with casual seating, the front porch always has performing comedians and other celebrity guests hanging around. While the interior of

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84 “History,” The Comedy Store, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://thecomedystore.com/history/>.

85 The Comedy Store, “History.”

86 Hadley Meares, “When mobsters and movie stars ruled the Sunset Strip,” *Curbed Los Angeles*, February 14, 2019, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://la.curbed.com/2019/2/14/18215017/sunset-strip-los-angeles-history-mickey-cohen>.

87 The Comedy Store, “History.”

The Comedy Store does not host a space for such interactions, comedians use the front porch to speak with friends, each other, and guests before and after their sets. Similar to the Rock 'n' Roll era, it can be more fun to be in front of The Comedy Store on the front porch than inside, as you never know who you might see grabbing a drink at the outdoor bar. Near showtimes, the overflow of people from the venue's front porch fill the back-parking lot of The Comedy Store.

As The Comedy Store is located just off of Laurel Canyon Boulevard, it would be convenient for the venue's paid regular performers to continue the history of residing in Laurel Canyon because of its close proximity. In their podcast *The Fighter and the Kid*, comedic co-hosts Bryan Callen and Brendan Schaub joke that although fellow comedian Chris D'Elia lives just north of The Comedy Store in Laurel Canyon, he still drives to work<sup>88</sup>. It can also be assumed that because The Comedy Store is located beside the Continental Hyatt House, now called the Andaz West, that the many high-profile touring comedians that appear at the venue would choose to stay at this hotel while in town.

<sup>88</sup> Bryan Callen, Brendan Schaub, "Episode 225:Chris D'Elia," *The Fighter and The Kid*, Podcast audio, January 17, 2017, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/the-fighter-and-the-kid-network/the-fighter-the-kid/e/ftatk-episode-225-chris-delia-48834551>.



Figure 6.2: The Comedy Store today with no off-site advertisements. Photographed by Ken Lund on September 20th, 2015.

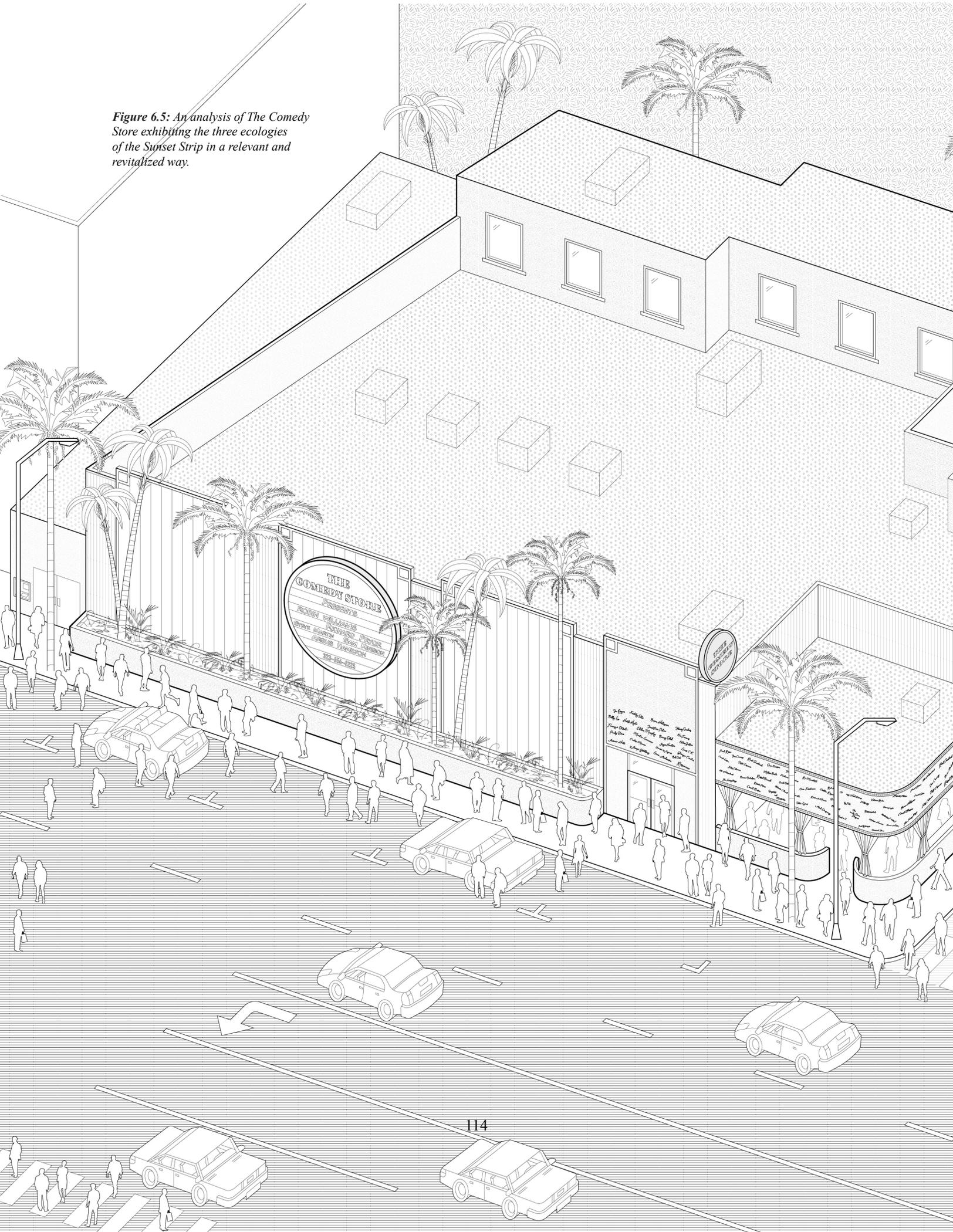


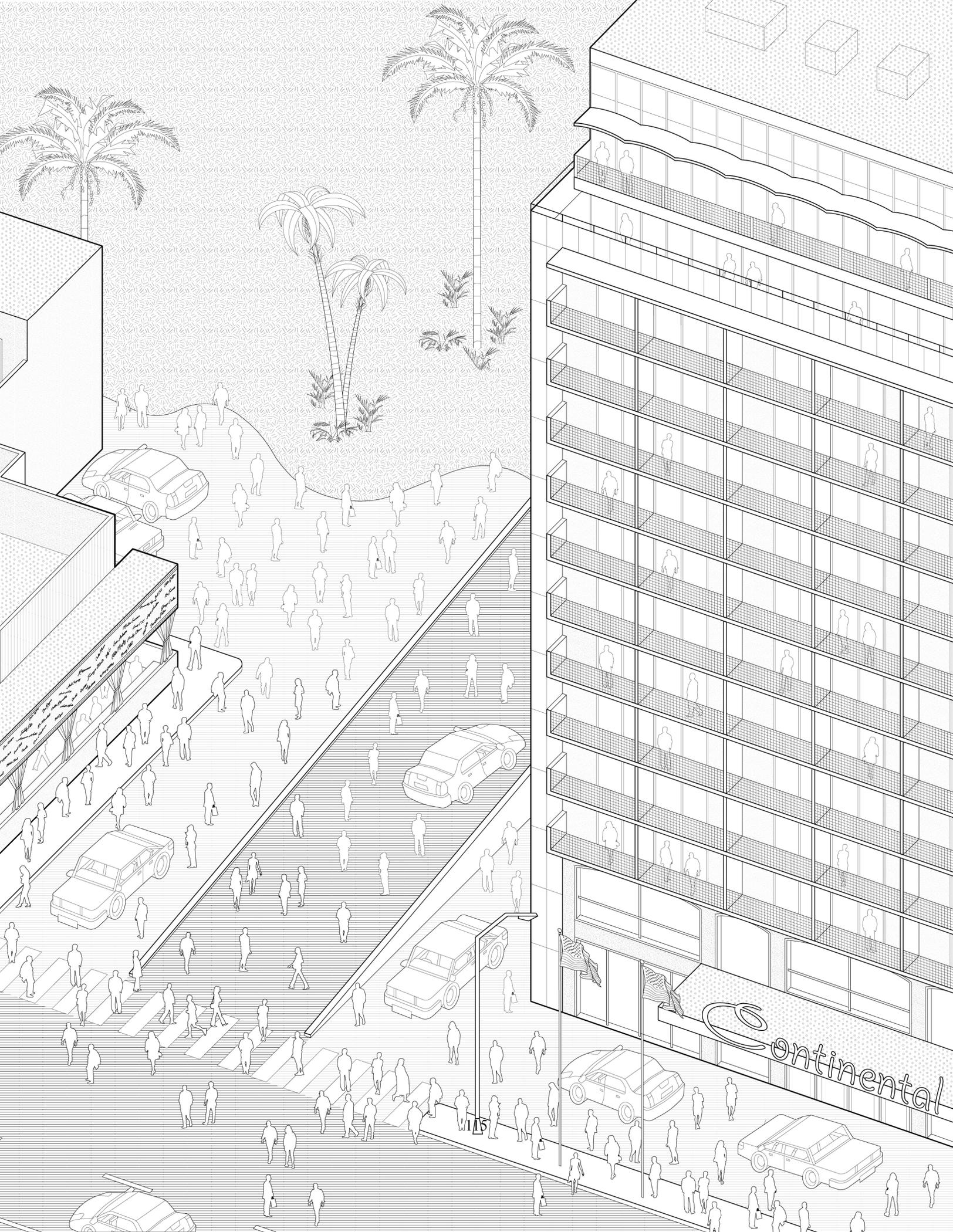
*Figure 6.3: The front porch of The Comedy Store, with signatures of the venue's paid regulars riddled across its facade. Photographed by Sombilon Studios on February 9th, 2009.*



*Figure 6.4: The Main Room of The Comedy Store today. Photograph posted November 4th, 2018 by Ronny Chieng.*

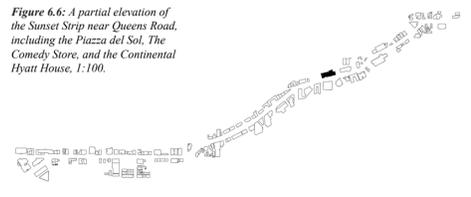
*Figure 6.5: An analysis of The Comedy Store exhibiting the three ecologies of the Sunset Strip in a relevant and revitalized way.*





Continental

Figure 6.6: A partial elevation of the Sunset Strip near Queens Road, including the Piazza del Sol, The Comedy Store, and the Continental Hyatt House, 1:100.



Piazza del Sol

THE COMEDY STORE  
Presents  
ROBIN WILLIAMS  
RICHARD PRYOR  
Steve Martin Sam Kinison  
Randy Quaid  
88-84-82

The Comedy Store



Continental Hyatt House

### 5.3 The More You Know: Sam Kinison

Sam Kinison, otherwise known as the ultimate Rock ‘n’ Roll comedian, was an American stand-up comedian famous for his distinct scream. One of the first comics to take the “comedy of hate” to arena-sized heights, Kinison performed stand-up routines that were characterized by an intense style. A former Pentecostal preacher, Sam arrived in Los Angeles in 1980 from Houston, Texas to find work at The Comedy Store<sup>89</sup>. He was quickly associated with the Los Angeles Rock music scene through his infamous alcohol and drug habits and was often accompanied by a touring band during his performances. He even appears for a short cameo in Mötley Crüe’s “Kickstart my Heart” music video, as the band’s limo driver. On an episode of VH1’s *That Metal Show*, host Don Jamieson spoke of Kinison’s impact on both the comedy and hard Rock worlds, “As a comedian, I feel that there have been very few comics who have pushed the boundaries of comedy like Sam and even fewer that bridged the gap between Rock ‘n’ Roll and comedy like Sam.” While performing on the Sunset Strip, Kinison was known to pack the 450-person capacity main room at The Comedy Store with crowds of both Rock ‘n’ Roll fans and famous musicians.

<sup>89</sup> Dylan Jones, “Icon: Sam Kinison,” *GQ*, April 20, 2012, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/sam-kinison-tribute-death-wild-thing-quotes-video>.



*Figure 6.7: Sam Kinison often emulated Rockstar qualities in his performances. Here he is seen with Howard Stern, Leslie West, and Kinison’s back-up dancers (one of whom was his wife), on stage at The Comedy Store during one of Kinison’s performances. Retrieved from The Howard Stern Show.*

# Conclusion

Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown state in *Learning From Las Vegas*, “Architects are out of the habit of looking nonjudgmentally at the environment, because orthodox Modern architecture is progressive; it is dissatisfied with existing conditions.” Designers and planners have preferred to change the existing environment rather than enhance what is already there<sup>90</sup>. The emphasis in our world’s cities has been on flashy buildings and standardized public spaces – a concept so especially wrong for the Sunset Strip which was built on the idea where dynamism and event eclipse monumentality and even architecture. Much like the City of Los Angeles, the Sunset Strip finds its success by failing to follow any rules. Reyner Banham emphasizes this in *The Architecture of Four Ecologies* by saying, “Los Angeles threatens the intellectual repose and professional livelihood of many architects, artists, planners, and environmentalists because it breaks the rules of urban design.”<sup>91</sup> As Venturi, Scott Brown and Banham have suggested, in order to responsibly integrate new buildings into the existing environment of the Sunset Strip, we must first examine the everyday, the particularities, and the ecologies, which do not fit traditional urban tropes. Learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect;<sup>92</sup> it is impossible to do great architecture unless you are heavily invested in the place. We need to observe more in order to straddle urban design, architecture and planning on the Sunset Strip imaginatively and responsibly. We must learn about Rock ‘n’ Roll, familiarize ourselves with the historical counterculture of this urban boulevard and develop new ways of retaining the Sunset Strip’s urban identity without being too nostalgic. As Banham affirms, Los Angeles offers a cultural situation where only the extreme is normal, “No City has ever been produced by such an extraordinary mixture of geography, climate, economics, demography, mechanics and culture. The interaction of these factors needs to be kept in constant historical view.”<sup>93</sup>

Looking back at the Sunset Strip and the Laurel Canyon scene, American singer-songwriter Tom Petty recalls, “The 60s, right, it was really blessed. I mean all that stuff showed up at once. Must have been meant that way.”<sup>94</sup> Perhaps it really is just that simple. In a lot of ways, Rock ‘n’ Roll found its way onto the Sunset Strip through a series of efforts put forward by a group of innovative and passionate people who were brave enough to break free from the consumer culture and recognize and benefit from something new. Whether that be Jac Holzman, Mario Maglieri or even Mötley Crüe, these people contributed to the three ecologies that made the urban environment of the Sunset Strip at that particular time. They transformed the Strip by understanding and learning from the history of its counterculture and were smart enough to ride the wave of the most current trend to hit the dynamic landscape. They recognized the power of using colossal billboards to advertise on-site, maximized on the meandering of the curved urban boulevard at night, and felt the cosmic pull that drew musicians to live within close proximity - qualities that set the Sunset Strip apart from the rest of an already unique and unusual Los Angeles. As Banham describes, Los Angeles sums up a general phenomenon of US life, “the convulsions in building style that follow when traditional cultural and social restraint have been overthrown.”<sup>95</sup>

It is important to acknowledge the difficulty of holding onto something that was a product of a particular time. It would be nearly impossible to retain this period of the Strip without it

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90 Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1.

91 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 236.

92 Robert Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, 1.

93 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 24-25.

94 Slater, *Echo in the Canyon*.

95 Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 124.

becoming some sort of museum. Granted the Sunset Strip may never again be the capital of Rock ‘n’ Roll, the influence of this thirty-year period has left an irreversible mark on West Hollywood that should be recognized and learned from regardless of your music preference. Although it should be heavily criticized for its inequality in regard to gender, sexuality and race, it was through its civic purpose and integration into the local vernacular that Rock ‘n’ Roll found its success on the Sunset Strip. It provided a foundation then for the architectural and urban ecological renaissance of the Sunset Strip using the attraction of popular culture, print media, and capital flows. Today as we sit at the crossroad of attempting to revitalize this urban boulevard with the added opportunity of rebuilding the live entertainment industry due to global events, we must understand that the Sunset Strip was built on protesting, questioning, and above all – event. The Sunset Strip considers the pedestrian scale. It binds commercial content with Strip specific artistry to create its unique urban environment<sup>96</sup>. Buildings and public spaces designed for the Sunset Strip should not be similar to those found on Rodeo Drive or Melrose Avenue. It is apparent that whatever the emerging twenty-first century revival of the Strip will be, it will depend on a renewal of architectural practice out of the existing everyday landscape and local commercial vernacular. Similar to how Vince Neil acknowledged, “This is where it all began,” as Mötley Crüe drove past the Whisky-a-Go-Go in a limousine for the opening of their music video *Kickstart My Heart*, as designers of this boulevard, we should acknowledge it too.

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96 Architect, “West Hollywood Belltower,” *Architect Magazine*, November 01, 2017, accessed August 10, 2019, [https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/west-hollywood-belltower\\_o](https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/west-hollywood-belltower_o).

*Figure 7.1: An aerial photograph of the Sunset Strip today. The foothills to its North and flatlands to its South can be observed. Retrieved from Los Angeles Magazine.*



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# Appendix

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**Continued - An Interview with Jamie Wall: Previous Head Doorman of the Whisky-a-Go-Go**

Kelsey: Those stories are absolutely insane. I can't even believe that about River Phoenix, that's crazy.

*Jamie: That was close to my birthday, October 1993. We had what we called club courtesy. We were all close with each other. So, when we saw all of the fuss going on at The Viper Room, we walked over to make sure the guys were alright there. I mean, the number of times the guys at The Viper Room came over to the Whisky to help us break up a fight... We always reciprocated. So, we went over to see if everything was ok and they said someone was overdosing and we watched people stepping over him. It was mad.*

You must have met a lot of celebrities.

*Yeah. I mean, not to mention all of the band members, we would get a lot of celebrities coming in. Nicholas Cage would be there a lot, Darryl Hannah was friends with the manager of the Whisky, Danny DeVito had a nephew in one of the bands, so he used to come visit quite a lot... Charlie Sheen we had to throw out quite a few times. He would show up in his limo with five or six girls with him. You wanted celebrities in your venue. It looks good and gets the word around. Because of the reputation, it attracts more people to your club. People wanted to come. Even if the celebrities were a pain, we would still let them in, and give them front of the line, VIP treatment, just to get them in your club drinking... Angelina Jolie one time, this was about 1993, she came up to the club. My manager used to like to joke around, so he said, "Ask her for ID." So, I did. She said, "You know who I am." I said, "Yeah, but I don't know how old you are." She went in with her bodyguards, her bodyguard bought her a*

*martini, she came over with the martini, threw it in my face and left the club. That was an interesting night. You would see celebrities in there every week.*

It's crazy that you had to be the one to handle them if they were acting out.

*Yeah. Most of them weren't bad; it was just a few. Charlie was just always so drunk and high on drugs that he couldn't control himself. Like I said, it was sex, drugs and Rock 'n' Roll.*

(Laughing) What do you want younger generations to understand about Rock 'n' Roll on the Strip?

*The music kids listen to know, even rap, a lot of the samples and beats are from these Rock 'n' Roll bands that played the Strip. They had so much influence on music today. Live music is so important. If you haven't been to see a live show, you're really missing out. There is nothing better than seeing a live show at the Whisky or the Roxy. There is only five hundred people there. Even if you are standing at the back of the club, the performer is only 20-yards away. It is a much more intimate experience than seeing a show with 10,000 people. When I was doing security and the musicians would be right there, it was absolutely amazing. Bands that I had only ever seen on TV, I was right there living it. Keeping the live music scene is very important. Everyone should make time. Buying a ticket and going to the Whisky for \$10.00 to see five bands, you might discover a great band that you had never heard of before. I hope live music continues for years to come. It would be such a shame if Sunset Boulevard turned into hotels and strip malls. Live music is such a big piece of history in California and the Sunset Strip. That would be my message to youngsters these days. Go out and have a good time. Check out a band. You might be*

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*pleasantly surprised.*

What do you think is missing from the Sunset Strip today?

*You know, I still love the Whisky, and I love the staff. The Whisky is still one of my favorite places to go to see a band play. But the Strip has just lost its charm, hasn't it? Especially from that area between Doheny to San Vicente. There's nothing to see anymore. There are no people passing out flyers. There is no one hanging out and drinking. It's become quite boring... When I started working at the Whisky, every night we would count the money. At the end of the night, we would walk to the Bank of America to go deposit it beside the Rainbow. Some nights at 2:00 am it would take us thirty minutes, even longer, for us to get there because of foot traffic, or we would just run into so many people that we knew. We wouldn't even think about being home before 4:00am. That's how busy the Strip was. Just to get from the Whisky to the Bank of America. But when I finished working there, we would count the money, and we would be at the bank in five minutes. I just don't know what's happened. It's a crying shame though.*

**Continued - An Interview with Mike Schneider: Author of Flyers of the Sunset Strip**

Kelsey: When did you first know that you wanted to get into the entertainment industry?

*Mike: It was at a fairly early age. I was musically inclined all through elementary and high school. I loved listening to the radio. I started playing bass in about 1981, and that was when my dream really started. I actually traded my BMX bike for my first bass.*

Who were some of your biggest influences back then?

*Yeah! Mötley Crüe, W.A.S.P, Kiss, David Bowie, Cheap Trick. When I was young, there was a TV special on about David Bowie. I was probably around eleven, and I said to my mom that, that's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be like Bowie. My dad said, "What? You want to dress like a weirdo?" I liked it (laughter)! The theatrics of Bowie, Kiss, W.A.S.P. and Mötley Crüe. That was the big draw for me. So, I knew the Sunset Strip was where I had to go when I when I really decided I wanted to do this professionally and hopefully make my dreams come true!*

I've seen some flyers that say, "If you show up with this ad then you will get \$2.00 off." Do you know what that was about?

*That was for advance tickets. There is a little difference between what the venues would do as far as a "pay-to-play" or advance sales. Pay-to-play was more or less set up for bands that had a fan base already. But with advance tickets, you could get a better reduced rate if they give you one hundred tickets and they said it's going to cost you \$700.00 to play. That was \$7.00 a ticket. It was a little bit cheaper and you could sell those advance tickets at that reduced rate to maybe family members or friends if you really didn't have a fan base. In my eyes, it was pretty much the same thing. You were paying to play either way if you couldn't sell your tickets.*

What do you want younger generations to know or understand about the Rock 'n' Roll era of the Strip?

*If they are musicians and they have thoughts about going out there, it's not all it's cracked up to be. It is a lot of work for a band. You have to write songs, prepare for the stage... We had to put together flyers and ride that Strip like there was no tomorrow. My pair of cowboy boots that I got just*

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before I went out to California, I probably walked a thousand miles back and forth up and down that Strip. I wore the soles off of them. I worked a couple of different jobs at that time. I worked at a record store, Temple Records, and I also worked at a Subway on Hollywood Boulevard. I still have my boots to this day... So, yeah, it is not all it's cracked up to be. It is like a job. You just can't sit around on your butt. Also, I want them to understand that there's a lot of history on that street. I'm proud to say that I was part of that history.

Why do you think that the Whisky and the Coconut Teaszer chose to help promote for those two bands? Even to an extent when The Dirt came out and the Whisky used its facade for those billboards... Do you think the venues saw an opportunity?

*I think, again, the venues are grasping to bring some attention back to their clubs. Whether it was painting it purple, or doing the movie with The Doors, or The Dirt movie now. I think they're looking at ways to bring attention, good or bad. But it's unfortunate that they didn't do a lot to support the local bands. Even just how they would tell guys, "Oh yeah, we will have food for you and alcohol, and your opener is going to be the Zeros," or whoever. Then you would get there and there was no food, no beer and the Zeros were not playing. It was pretty cutthroat.*

Without being too nostalgic, how would you like to see the Strip revitalized?

*I think if the clubs would assist bands in some way to promote, it would help bring more people there. The more people you can bring in, it sustains your club. For the clubs to promote, "Hey we still do what we do here. We still have bands." Yes, they still have the pay-to-play, but that's up to the band. If you can't sell tickets, don't take the gig. But I think yeah, to help the bands*

*for once. Don't let it fade away. Don't sell it out. I guess that's what I'm really trying to say, to not sell it out. The billboards are selling out in a way. They could probably do a lot of things to bring people to their clubs other than live music. I mean, I believe the Whisky showed The Dirt movie when it came out. They utilized their venue as a mini movie theatre and brought people in where all of these bands played, Mötley Crüe played, and now people get to watch the movie there. I don't think that would be selling out. Selling out to me is utilizing their billboards or their venues as promotion for other stuff or selling out the upstairs tables at the Whisky for \$400.00 as a VIP. They never used to do that before. I think that's taking a little bit advantage of people... I'm sure there's a lot of things that clubs could do. But I still think bringing all the Glam bands back, that would work too (laughing).*

#### **An Interview with Tanzal Thorne: Lead Vocalist of CIRCUS**

Kelsey: Where were you born and when did you move to Los Angeles?

*Tanzal: I was born in Corpus Christi, Texas. I moved to LA for the first time in '88. I joined a Rock band in Arkansas. My first band was named Armageddon. We dominated Arkansas. I said, "Man. We aren't going to be Rockstars in Little Rock. Let's at least go to Houston." Then we dominated Houston, so I said, "Man. We're not going to be Rockstars in Houston. Let's go to Hollywood." My guitar player and I set to go. I only had \$100.00. I had this publicist in LA that said I could crash on her couch if I moved out there. The deal was, on my way out to LA, I had to go through Arkansas and pick up her stuff that she had left behind and bring it to Hollywood. Every time I would stop for gas, I would call her. She told me she had a surprise for me, "Queensryche is playing*

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at the Universal Amphitheatre tonight, and I have you backstage, VIP, all-access passes for it." Geoff Tate was my favorite singer at the time. So, I got there, and we went. I was backstage, and Warrant was opening for them. I was backstage with everybody: Don Dokken, Stephen Percy, Vince Neil. Then all of the sudden... Ok, there are Rockstars and then there are Rockstars... All of the sudden, here comes Axl Rose with these two huge bodyguards in a big fur coat. Everyone was whispering, "There's Axl. There's Axl." I looked at my publicist, who then soon became my manager and said, "That's who I want to be." She said, "Stick with me and you will be." She was big. She managed Whitesnake and Guns N' Roses. Soon after I was sleeping on her couch one day while she was on the phone interviewing Andy McCoy from Hanoi Rocks. He said, "We're looking for a wild blonde lead singer to take the place of Michael." So, she told him, "I've got him! He's passed out on my couch!" I went to their studio, we jammed a little bit, and I ended up joining the band. They were huge for me. I was just a kid with no money. I was only nineteen at the time. I was signed within thirty days to PolyGram.

Wow. When did the band CIRCUS come in to play then?

I went to the Roxy. I was backstage with Andy, and this lady came up to me in the VIP section saying, "Who are you? How did you get back here?" I said, "My name is Tanzal. I'm the new singer of Hanoi Rocks." She said, "Screw Andy McCoy. He's a drugged-out loser who's never going to do anything. Call this guy. He's the guitar player for a band called CIRCUS. They're all your age with long hair and have a crap ton of money backing them up. They're going to take this City over." So, I said, "Ok. I'll check them out." When I met them for the first time, they kept saying "We need a singer with attitude. We need a screamer! Someone like Brian Johnson." I said,

"That's what I do brother. Give me your hardest song." So, they did, it was called Fool Proof. They went through it one time, gave me the words and I screamed it out. After we were done, our guitarist looked around and said, "Holy \*\*\*\*. We've got a band!" (Laughing). Over the course of the weekend, I moved all of my stuff into the band house. All of that was probably about a year before we even started playing live. We rehearsed, had clothes made. We found a homeless guy named Neil and let him live in our closet. In return, he had to go flyer the Strip... And I don't mean pass out flyers. On the Strip, there are light poles that go all the way down. On six 8.5x11", colored papers we put C-I-R-C-U-S on every light pole down Sunset. For over a mile! Neil would take stacks of flyers and glue them up. Either way you came down the Strip you would see CIRCUS in rainbow colors, for a year. He would even spray paint bridges with CIRCUS logos. We were rehearsing, he was advertising. When we went to book our first show, we went to the SIR building across the street from the Roxy, and they offered us a slot on a Wednesday. My guitar player said, "No. We want Friday night, Gazzarri's, headlining. It's not negotiable." She goes, "Well, for that, you're going to have to sell one hundred tickets at \$13.00 a piece." \$13.00 was a lot in 1990. But my guitar player reached into his coat, pulled out his cheque book, and wrote a cheque for \$1300.00. These venues thought they would scare us saying we have to sell one hundred tickets. We would just write them a cheque and pass out the tickets to one hundred hot girls. By the time we were done each show we had spent five, six, seven thousand dollars between advertising, balloons, roadies and everything. We also advertised in all of the Rock magazines. We always took out the entire centerfold. What's crazy is, we would put our actual home number in the magazine. On weekends, our phone would ring every 2.5 minutes. We would get

*so much flak from other bands, because we would show up to a gig with a moving truck full of our gear, with twenty-two roadies who would set everything up for us. Bands would take drumsticks and put holes in our drummer's drum heads.*

The advertisements in the magazines, for example, would the Troubadour or Gazzarri's help pay for that cost?

*Nope. We paid for everything.*

Where did this money come from?! You only had \$100.00 in your pocket and then suddenly you had twenty-two roadies?

*Our drummer's dad and business partner made a lot of money. All I knew was, whatever I wanted, I got, and whatever the band needed, we got. We were all like his kids. He had to have spent, oh man I don't know, \$750,000.00 or \$1,000,000.00 over the course of two years with everything that we did.*

Did you guys make that money back?

*Oh hell no. But CIRCUS didn't do anything little. When we got to play in that first show at Gazzarri's, a woman came backstage and said, "Wow. That was amazing!" And I made the comment to her, "Yeah! We sold out our very first show!" She said, "What?! First show? No, it wasn't. I've seen your name on light poles for a year! If I would have known that, I would have never committed to this." It was because of those CIRCUS light poles that the promoter let us play. I don't think any other band in history has ever headlined the Strip on a weekend for their first show and sold it out. CIRCUS never opened for another band and we never played a show that wasn't sold out. When Bill Gazzarri would introduce us he would say, "This band has done more in four months than Van Halen did in four years!" We had armies of girls that would*

*promote and hand out flyers for us. We got a notice from the City that said they were going to start fining us if they found our flyers because we were passing so many out. The notice said that if they found over a certain number of flyers, they would fine us \$100.00 a flyer. That's how we came up with the idea to do helium balloons that said when and where we were playing, with the phone number to call. The girls would come over to our place and fill up the balloons with helium and put streamers on them. Then, they would load the van and bring us huge bouquets of balloons. Everyone on the Strip would want one. The whole Strip would be an ocean of color that said CIRCUS. It was amazing. Nobody can see your flyer in a stack when somebody is carrying them down the Strip. But everyone can see your name on a balloon. Especially when there is a thousand of them walking up and down the Strip. At that point, everyone on the Strip was advertising for us.*

What do you think of the pay-to-play requirement for bands that didn't have the same opportunity as your band did? The ones that had no money. Do you think it was fair?

*No. It's not fair. My days in West Hollywood were not like a lot of the guys out there. I never had a job, I never needed to work... But when you think about clubs that are open seven nights a week and have five to seven bands playing... It's just how it always was... Guns N' Roses didn't have the same opportunity as us. They lived in a rat-infested studio, stole money from girls and made the girls bring groceries to them if they wanted to come over. They scrapped to live. All of us, we just had to do what we had to do. We started playing everywhere and sold out everywhere, but when Grunge started to come... I really wasn't feeling it. When Grunge really hit and started tearing things apart, we had*

*just recorded our first album with Capitol Records, "Coming For You." Times were changing. I didn't even know what we were going to do with the album. So, I decided I wasn't going to do this anymore. I split and went back to Texas. The band freaked out. We still talk, and we're starting to write again. I'm really happy in Texas. I have a daughter. Which reminds me, the first time I pulled up YouTube for my six-year-old daughter to show her CIRCUS performing, she turned to me and said, "Dada, you used to be a girl?" I said, "No baby, I wasn't a girl!" (Laughing)... But the Sunset Strip was amazing. There were hard times, but in general it was a great fun time... I mean, if you want to talk about architecture, what I found so cool was how they used their building facades as billboards that reflected the times. It wasn't just a building with a sign on the front. At Gazzarri's, Bill had his face with his gangster look that said, "Bill Gazzarri's, the Godfather of Rock 'n' Roll," beside all of the bands that had played there. It reflected the culture. It was really cool. But bands today are here today, gone tomorrow. Popstars have one hit and they're gone. That's the culture now. I think everything is too broad now to do that. Back when we played, nobody played the Roxy but Rock 'n' Roll... But nowadays...*

Do you think that Grunge music contributed to the "death" of the Sunset Strip?

*Absolutely. It was a knife in the heart. Seattle destroyed the Sunset Strip. Every band sounded the exact same. To this day I can't tell you the difference between Stone Temple Pilots and Weezer. Every guitar sounded the exact same and had no solos. It's just absolute cookie cutter. That's not how it was with our genre. When you hear Vince Neil sing, you know it's Vince Neil. When you hear Stephen Percy, you know it's Stephen Percy. Same with Ozzy or Don Dokken, or Def Leppard, they all sound different. The guitars all sound different. But*

*Grunge came and it just... But I'll admit it did give a voice to a Grunge generation. It was their time to shine, I guess... I just didn't want to look like a greasy haired, college drop out in a flannel shirt and Chuck Taylor tennis shoes. Screw that. When I walked down the street, I wanted people to know I was a Rockstar. After I left CIRCUS, I went and did country music. I saw Garth Brooks on TV while I was out by my pool one day, and I thought, "Wow look at that arena. Look at that stage show!" They were breaking guitars and blowing things up. So, I thought to myself, "I could do that. I just have to trade my high heels for cowboy boots and my leathers for wranglers, put on a hat and go do it!" So, that's what I did, and I still do. I write for a lot of country artists. I'm working on one right now for Billy Currington. I love country music. I think it's really authentic. Well, unless you bring Justin Bieber on a country song, that ain't country no more (laughing).*

When you were on the Sunset Strip, did you host or attend a lot of afterparties?

*Yes (laughing). Lots. We would go party at Fig's house, he was Van Halen's attorney. He had crazy gray hair and he would walk up and down the Strip in a spacesuit with a live cat on his shoulder. After a night on the Strip, we would go up into the Hills to his house to party. We would party at our house sometimes too. We would stop at Turner's Liquor, and all of the girls would carry cases of beer back to our house to party. Wherever there was a party, we were there. That's all we did. Our windows were blacked out. We would party all night and sleep all day. We would rehearse five days a week from about six or seven pm until midnight. Then we would hit the Strip and party until the sun came up. We would just walk to the Strip. We never drove. We would also party at all of the hotels. When Warrant got signed, they didn't have*

*houses, they all had their own suites in this really nice hotel in Beverly Hills. One night, once we were done partying, Jani and I went back to his suite with some girls. He said, "Do you want to hear a new song I've been working on?" I said, "Yeah!" We went down the elevator to his black Corvette and he played "I Saw Red". I was probably one of the first people to hear it.*

Do you think it was important for musicians at the time to live close to the Strip?

*Well, yes. I mean LA is not a place where you want to live far from anything. "Close" is relative though. There was Hollywood, West Hollywood and then Beverly Hills and Malibu. The further you get away from Malibu, the cheaper it is to live. For us, we were golden. We would walk out of our place and we were at The London. We would just walk straight up our street and be at Turner's Liquor and the Whisky. Mötley Crüe had lived just up the hill from the Whisky, and we lived just down the hill. If we wanted to throw a party, everyone knew where we lived so we would say, "Alright, we're taking it to our house tonight."*

When you got to the Sunset Strip, the billboards had already started to revert to promoting items for the consumer culture, rather than Rock 'n' Roll. Do you think this change in billboards had any effect on the Strip?

*Maybe it changed the attitude and the feel of the Strip. LA should be like going to Disneyland. Every street should look different. The Sunset Strip is Rock 'n' Roll land (laughing). I would love to take my daughter back to the Strip and show her where we played.*

Is that your hope for the future of the Sunset Strip?

*Designers need to figure out how to incorporate people like Bill and Mario into the Strip. I think Bill Gazzarri deserves to have a statue beside the Rainbow. He started everything. He started the whole Rock 'n' Roll culture on the Strip! That whole section of the Strip should be a historical landmark. Paint it, make it look nice, do what you have to do... But man, don't destroy it. Don't bulldoze it. That's like bulldozing Graceland. I know that we have to progress with the times and that different clubs will buy them out. But I would hate to see the Rainbow not be the Rainbow, or the Roxy not be the Roxy, or the Whisky not be the Whisky. If I had it my way, Gazzarri's would still be Gazzarri's with Bill Gazzarri's face on it. I would have never turned it into The Key Club... Nowadays, any genre could take over the Strip. Country could take over the Strip! But the problem is, you don't have that many country artists out there or that many bands out there anymore. Actually, Austin has become the Rock 'n' Roll capital now. 6<sup>th</sup> street is kind of like the new Sunset Strip. It's packed. The cops have to close the streets because of people walking up and down it.*

Would you be okay if some other form of live performance took over the Sunset Strip in the future?

*I would not be okay... But if that's what has to happen to preserve it. I would be okay. What I would really like, is for history to repeat itself.*