

A Stellar Renovation

With some trepidation I walked toward the Northern face of one of Los Angeles' most famous landmarks, Griffith Observatory. How would the recent renovation have changed this shabby but glorious edifice, to my mind both magnificent and quaint?

My last visit was made just a few weeks prior to its 2002 closing. I was showing an out-of-town visitor the essential Hollywood sites, so a visit to the observatory was mandatory. And yes, it was dingy with the ravages of time etched into its cracked marble walls, many of its exhibits eclipsed by newer science and technology. But after all, completed in 1935, it was practically prehistoric in a city that tends to demolish its history at the drop of a developer's wallet. And who among us wouldn't show a few lines after almost 70 years? But would it be modernized beyond recognition, its personality distorted like a bad face-lift?

Approaching the front doors, I discovered amusingly conflicting signage: "ENTRANCE," while immediately below, a matching sign, "NOT AN ENTRANCE." It seems the actual entrance is now on the lower level of the west side of the building, reachable by stairs or elevator. Of course, the whole idea of a lower level is new. The actual square footage of the

Photos from top: The beautifully restored Hugo Ballin Murals grace the vaulted ceiling and upper walls of the W.M. Keck Foundation Central Rotunda.

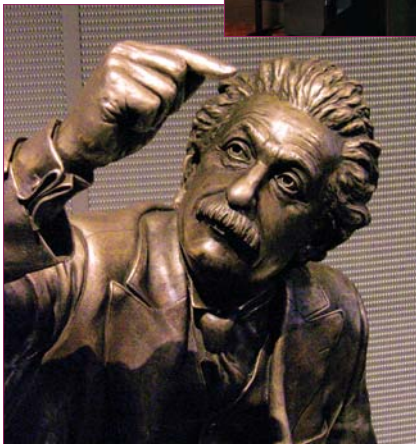
The Gunther Depths of Space Exhibits.

Wolfgang Puck's Café at the End of the Universe.

An Apollo moon rock is mounted in front of the detailed six-foot moon globe.

A life-sized bronze statue of Albert Einstein sits on a bench along side the Leonard Nimoy Event Horizon theater.

All photos by Kurt Reichenbach



Observatory has been increased from about 27,000 to nearly 67,000 square feet, so in order to preserve the iconic art decoish exterior, 35,000 square feet of exhibits and offices, as well as theater, shopping and eating areas were built under the lawn!

Upon entering, the first thing you see is Wolfgang Puck's *Café at the End of the Universe* (no apologies to Douglas Adams in evidence), which includes cafeteria-style freshly prepared dishes as well as a large pre-prepared food section with various sandwiches, salads, and drinks, all VERY reasonably priced. I had a bowl of tortilla soup and one of the specials-of-the-day, a barbecue chicken wrap, all for about \$10. Yummy! I ate my lunch on the terrace, affording me a spectacular view of the surrounding hills, city, and our beloved Hollywood sign.

Directly across the hall is the daylight-filled, high-ceilinged *Stellar Emporium Gift Shop*. While Griffith Observatory-specific

books and posters were completely absent, they are well stocked with Observatory image emblazoned postcards, mugs, shirts, and knick-knacks, as well as a wide selection of science and astronomy books, videos, toys and games. There's even a small section offering James Dean collectibles to commemorate the "Rebel Without a Cause" scenes shot here.

My tour has been made possible by arrangement with the Friends of the Observatory (FOTO), the non-profit organization established to support and promote the Observatory. Members of FOTO receive special benefits at the Observatory including discounts at the Café and the gift shop and the opportunity to make advance reservations for the Planetarium show.

Okay, now I'm really impressed. I've just

Continued on next page

“Each spring the song of the universe begins again.” —Winton Southern

Continued from previous page entered a huge open area. To my right are the *Edge of Space Exhibits* including *Pieces of the Sky* or what I like to call, “everything you ever wanted to know about meteorites.” This colorful space is packed with lots of fun interactive exhibits and electronic games. There is also a



genuine moon rock (for those readers who don't believe we have stepped on the moon, look away quickly!). To my left are the breathtaking *Gunther Depths of Space Exhibits* featuring a scale model of the solar system juxtaposed against *The Big Picture*, a 15.2 by 2.0 degree slice of the night sky, accurately reproduced to cover the 152 foot wide by 20 foot high wall, making this the largest astronomical image ever created. This area also houses many exhibits relating to the

Milky Way and our neighboring galaxies.

Moving ahead we pass the new *Leonard Nimoy Event Horizon Theater* where a short film telling the story of the Observatory and its renovation and narrated by Nimoy plays free of charge throughout the day.

Taking the *Cosmic Connection*, a gradually inclining ramp elevating you in a half circle to the second level is a hoot in itself. To the right is a 150 foot timeline of the universe, made up entirely of space-themed jewelry, complete with the Big Bang partially composed of hat pins!

The end of this corridor delivers you to the main level where many of the more familiar exhibits have been shined up and/or improved. Old standbys like the *Foucault Pendulum*, the *Tesla Coil*, and a much enhanced *Camera Obscura* are all here, as well as a new addition, the *Griffith Exhibit*. Located where the old ticket booth was on the central rotunda, it tells the story of the man who donated the land and funds to build the observatory, and for whom it is named, Griffith J. Griffith, who, like New York, was so nice they named him twice. Included in the exhibit is a portrait of Griffith commissioned after his death (but is surprisingly life-like).

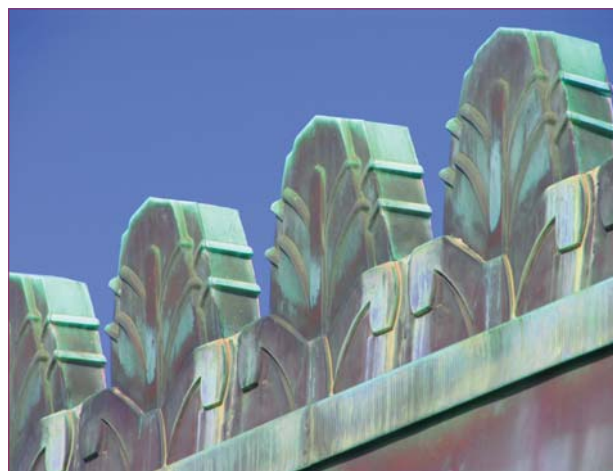
The *Samuel Oschin* (pronounced ocean) *Planetarium* is all new with a state-of-the-art computer controlled star projector and full-dome laser projection system filling the perforated aluminum dome with a combination of traditional planetarium constellations and dazzling

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Top: Located on the west side of the lawn, the “Rebel Without a Cause” monument features a sculpture of James Dean by artist Kenneth Kendall.

Above: The west dome and observation terrace.



A detail of the decorative art deco roof. All photos by Kurt Reichenbach

what do you crave?



Locals' Night

Tuesday

What's your dream? Ours is Tuesday's scrumptious 3-course dinner featuring chef Gary Menes' culinary treats for \$22. Kids eat free!



Happy Hour of course!

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CGI animation. All of this is narrated by a live, professional actor (I remember when the casting notices went out) as you relax in comfortable, stuffed reclining seats (kiss those hard wooden headrests goodbye). Planetarium show costs \$5 and must be purchased the day of your visit.

There's a lot to do so wear comfortable shoes and plan to spend most of the day.

Yes, the *admission* to Griffith Observatory is still free, but there's a rub. At least during its opening months, there will be no parking for Observatory visitors at the top of the hill or on the adjacent roadways. You must have a timed-entry reservation (\$8 per person), which includes handicapped accessible bus transportation from one of three parking facilities (see locations at right).

For information or to make reservations visit www.GriffithObservatory.org.

By phone:
Information 213-473-0800
Reservations 888-695-0888

For information about becoming a Friend of the Observatory visit www.friendsoftheobservatory.com or call 213-473-0879

Hours:

Tues-Fri—Noon -10 p.m.
Sat-Sun—10 a.m.-10 p.m.

Closed Mondays

Parking:

1. *Hollywood & Highland Orange Court* (cost of parking not included in reservation fee)
2. *Griffith Observatory Satellite Parking Lot* in eastern Griffith Park (free parking).
3. A limited number of timed-entry reservations are available free-of-charge, 48 hours in advance. Parking for this service is at the *Greek Theatre*. While these free reservations are specifically set up for hikers and bicyclists, anyone may take advantage of these reservations if available.

—Kurt Reichenbach is using the space of his regular column, "I Saw it, I Liked it," to share his trip to the Griffith Observatory with the *Beachwood Voice* readers. Kurt thanks Nina Marsh for inviting him on this field trip, and Melissa Devor, Director of Development for the Friends of the Observatory, for her enlightening tour as well as furnishing much of the information used in putting this article together.

Left: The roof observation terrace and the main dome. All photos by Kurt Reichenbach

Extra NOSH

LUNA PARK: WILD AND CRAZY WEEKEND BRUNCH FARE!

By Rona Edwards

Located near the corner of Wilshire and La Brea, Luna Park has been delighting diners for more than 4 years. Owner A. J. Gilbert, originally from San Francisco, wanted to create a comfortable yet fanciful, somewhat kitschy, space to enjoy hearty international cuisine with a twist.

I've eaten at Luna Park for both dinner and lunch and found their menu interesting if not daring. There's a sense of humor that makes it all enjoyable and the food is quite good. They're also known for their lively bar and creative libations. This, however, was the first time I had Sunday Brunch there.

Though famous for their Mojitos and exotic concoctions, I opted to start with a "Make Your Own Champagne Cocktail." A glass of Prosecco Sparkling Wine (an Italian sparkling wine) arrived with a sidecar of Fresh Orange Juice for me to mix myself. While I realize it's a crime to use good Champagne in a mimosa, I couldn't help wishing the champagne was just a little better grade of Prosecco. However, it's a great way to begin a meal.

The selections for brunch are fun, unique,

and above all, delicious. I tried the *Four Flavored French Toast Skewer*, consisting of Blueberry,

egg battered sandwich of ham, turkey and Gruyere cheese—almost like a breakfast pannini. My

Fontina, Gruyere and Breakfast Potatoes!

For the more traditional diner, Executive Chef JJ Needham cooks up a conventional breakfast with *Here*—2 Eggs, Bacon, Ham, Potatoes and Toast or a cowboy brunch with *There*—2 Fried Eggs, Baked Beans, Ham, Grilled Tomato and Toast. You can also order lunch items, like

was mighty tasty. But the perennial long-time Luna Park favorite is *Make Your Own S'Mores*.

The shabby chic atmosphere coupled with the whimsical artwork on the walls and the chandeliers seemingly hanging mid-air only add to the ambiance and creative fare. Try to secure one of the private little booths with the curtains and voila: It's bordello panache! Above all, don't limit your visits to Luna Park for just lunch or dinner. The brunch is inventive and a great way to start your day of rest!

LUNA PARK: KITCHEN AND COCKTAILS:
672 S. La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90036
(323)934-2110;
www.lunaparkla.com
Lunch: M-F 11:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Dinner M-Thur: 5:30 p.m.–10:30 p.m.

Dinner Friday & Saturday: 5:30 p.m.–11:30 p.m.

Dinner Sunday: 5:30 p.m.–10 p.m.

Brunch Weekends: 11:30 a.m.–3 p.m.

All major credit cards accepted.

BEST BETS: Chilaquilles (\$9.50), *Four Flavored French Toast Skewers* (\$9.00); *Deep Fried Apple Pie* (\$7.25); I'm also a fan of their skirt steak for dinner (\$15.25).



Above: Luna Park on LaBrea Avenue
Right: Luna Park exudes "a shabby chic ambiance." Photos by Rona Edwards



Strawberry, Vanilla and Chocolate Pound Cakes (yes, pound cakes!) with assorted toppings, cleverly assembled like a kebab (with fresh banana and strawberries substituting for vegetables) and guaranteed to satisfy the sweetest tooth.

If that's too sweet for you, try the *Monte Cristo*, an

favorite, however, was the *Chilaquilles*—Fried Tortillas with Spinach, Tomato, Beans, Avocado, Feta and Eggs.

If you want more of a breakfast feel but still want to be gutsy, try the *Quasi Tutto*—an egg casserole with Italian Sausage, Broccoli Rabe, Sundried Tomatoes, Mushrooms, Red Pepper, Cheddar,

warm goat cheese fondue, various salads and sandwiches.

If you have room for dessert, pastry Chef Lei Shishak prepares *Dominio Cake*—Light and Dark Chocolate Mousse served with Chocolate Ice Cream and *Deep Fried Apple Pies with Caramel Sauce and Vanilla Ice Cream*, which