

A 'tour' on the town



Nestled in the hills of Los Angeles' Angelino Heights district is a slice of carefully preserved history, where Carroll Avenue residents and visitors step back in time to the late 1800s. Here, alumna Laura Massino '95 MA points out the cement step that riders would have used when unloading from a carriage or getting off a horse. To her left is an original horse hitch.

Laura Massino '95 MA holds a key to Los Angeles' past.

Continually driving from Silver Lake to the Hollywood Hills, from Pasadena to downtown Los Angeles, Massino unlocks the city's architectural gems, prominent residences, and bits of culture and history for hundreds of Los Angeles tourists and residents.

"I take people from around the world on tours of L.A.," she said. "They know something is here—they just don't know how to get to it."

Massino, who studied art history at [Cal State L.A.](#) launched [Architecture Tours L.A.](#) 10 years ago. The concept for the company was developed from Massino's master's thesis in which she documented and studied the city's architectural progression from 1781 to 1995. (There are buildings still standing in Los Angeles that date back nearly 200 years, she notes.)

"There are a lot of people interested in the city's architecture," Massino said, acknowledging that few others offer tours that showcase the city's cultural and historical roots. "There's more going on here than just Hollywood and the movie business."

Among her tour highlights: "The Witch's House"—or "[The Spadena House](#)"—in Beverly Hills, a whimsical fairy tale-like cottage built for a 1921 silent film; Pasadena's "[Bubble House](#)," a concrete dome igloo built after World War II and designed by acclaimed architect Wallace Neff; and [Carroll Avenue](#), a street that features the greatest collection of Victorian Manors in the city. She also includes architectural masterpieces of Frank Gehry, Frank Lloyd Wright and many others.



"People from all over say there is no other place like Los Angeles. It's really a unique city," she said.

When Massino started out, she chauffeured clients around town in a 1962 Cadillac. The classic car paired nicely with the historical tour, she said, but poor gas mileage, and limited temperature control and comfort eventually lost out to a more economical van.

Since her initial tour days, Massino has also greatly expanded her reach, moving beyond West Hollywood/Beverly Hills and honing her expertise for tours that encompass Silver Lake, Hancock Park/Miracle Mile and Pasadena. She is currently designing tours for Santa Monica/Venice, the San Fernando Valley and Westwood/West L.A.

Each added tour requires roughly six months of historical research and on-the-road exploration, for which she also develops self-guided tour books that retail in bookstores, online and at museums and historical sites around the city.

"I took a family from London on a tour the other day," Massino recounted. "And I'm kind of one-person shop. I do the tours, respond to e-mail and answer the phone. So, I answered the phone and said 'Hi, this is Laura.' And the man from London was like, 'You are Laura of the books!?!'"

The gentleman brought his well-worn copy of the family's guidebook on the tour, she said.

"I've been pleasantly surprised with how people have been taken by the tours. It's almost like they were starved for it," Massino said. "I never know what to expect. I just know that I love my subject and I want to see and share it in three-dimensions."

Angelino Heights Tour Video

Downtown L.A. Tour Video
