

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CLOSE-UPS; There's a name for it: fun; Baseball, gorillas, music and more await in the L.A. swath that encompasses Elysian Park, Griffith Park, Los Feliz, Echo Park and Silver Lake.**

It's no easy job, being the lungs of Los Angeles.

But Griffith Park, the foremost green space in a city notorious for meager parkland and abundant smog, endures bravely, maybe even heroically. Venture into the park, or nearby Elysian Park, or one of the creative neighborhoods in between, and you'll find not only beloved landmarks such as Griffith Observatory and Dodger Stadium, but also happy surprises, such as the time-travel supply shop, or the cafe where cops dine daily to the sound of echoing gunfire, or the Korean greetings that echo at dawn every day atop Mt. Hollywood.

The more time you spend in these occasionally gritty, mostly gentrified neighborhoods around the park -- Silver Lake, Los Feliz and Echo Park -- the more you realize that they're incubators of American pop culture. Thousands who live here work onstage and off in movies and TV, make music, art and theater, keep up with the interwebs and savor all things ironic (including the nonword "interwebs," a.k.a. the Internet to the rest of us). Yes, Hollywood is glitzier and Beverly Hills is richer. But who's cooler? These 10 micro-itineraries, the third in a series that concentrates on Los Angeles and Orange counties, might help you decide.

And while you're at it, maybe you can decide what to call these people. Many call themselves Eastsiders, which sounds great but annoys people who live east of the Los Angeles River in the area long known as East L.A. Maybe we should call this the Near East instead. Or maybe, given that Griffith Park, Echo Park, Elysian Park and the Dodgers' ballpark all rub against one another, these people are Parksiders.

Modernism, murder and "Snow White"

Silver Lake, a series of hills surrounding a scenic pair of reservoirs five miles northwest of downtown L.A., is where many of America's leading Modernist architects first made their marks from the 1930s to the '60s, working on sloping lots because they were cheaper. Walt Disney built his first studio and made "Snow White" at 2725 Hyperion Ave. (now occupied by a Gelson's supermarket). And in 1969, Charles Manson and followers drove here and killed Leno and Rosemary LaBianca in their home on Waverly Drive. For more on Disney and Manson, and much more on the architectural legacy of Richard Neutra, Rudolf Schindler and others, sign on for a two- to-three-hour tour from Laura Massino Smith, founder of Architecture Tours L.A. After a cup at Lamill Coffee Boutique (1636 Silver Lake Blvd.) and a stroll along the east or west reservoir footpaths, you meet Massino Smith, who wheels you through the hills in her minivan, spinning the stories behind the dozens of homes whose open floor plans, big windows and spare geometry were revolutionary in their time. In the 2300 block of Silver Lake Boulevard, you go pedestrian to explore a colony of Neutra buildings (including his former home, which is open for tours 11 a.m.-3 p.m. most Saturdays). Atop Micheltorena Street, you glimpse the craziest tennis court ever, cantilevered from a hilltop as part of the Silvertop estate designed by John Lautner.

*Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.*