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DAY OUT | SUNSET JUNCTION, LOS ANGELES For West Coast Boulevardiers

By OLIVER SCHWANER-ALBRIGHT Published: January 20, 2008

LOS ANGELES is a monument to the automobile, but secretly every Angeleno pines for a walkable neighborhood. A scruffy stretch known as Sunset Junction, bordering Silverlake, has become just that — an appealing mix of low-key restaurants and eclectic shops that draw artsy part-timers, including second-unit directors, studio musicians and writers. In other words, creative types with long mornings and limited incomes.

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Now they congregate at Intelligentsia Coffee (3922 Sunset Boulevard; 323-663-6173; www.intelligentsiacoffee.com), a Chicago company with a national reputation among the caffeinated set. The cappuccino (\$3) is a work of art, but purists ask for a plain cup of coffee (\$2), brewed-to-order in a Clover, a machine with a cult following.

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Intelligentsia Coffee is the most prominent attraction in a rambling 1920s rust-colored stucco complex that's the neighborhood's focal point. Other tenants include: Cafe Stella (No. 3932; 323-666-0265), a lively French bistro with flea market furniture and moules frites (\$21); the Cheese Store of Silverlake (No. 3926; 323-644-7511; www.cheesestoresl.com), easily the best fromagerie in the city; and Dean (No. 3918; 323-665-2766; www.deanaccessories.com), a boutique where motorcycle jackets and Members Only windbreakers are turned into handbags and watchbands.

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Sunset Junction gets its name from where Santa Monica Boulevard peels off from Sunset Boulevard, once a busy streetcar transfer. Now that corner is occupied by Lovecraft (No. 4000; 323-644-9072; www.lovecraftbiofuels.com), an immaculate garage where diesel engines are turned into vegetable oil-burning biofuel (conversions from \$870). Mercedeses from the 1980s are particularly popular for conversion.

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For clothes, there's the vintage bin-diving you'd expect. But there are also boutiques with original fashions. For couture punk, walk into Pull My Daisy (No. 3908; 323-663-0608), where the owner, Sarah Dale, spotlights local designers. Every month she is the hostess of Vrouw, a trunk show "for the regular-sized female," where nothing is under size 12. One block away, Laura Howe makes elegant, deconstructed street wear on-site at Matrushka (No. 3822; 323-665-4513; www.matrushka.com).

Adult collectors with adolescent tastes go to **Secret Headquarters** (No. 3817; 323-666-2228; www.theseheadquarters.com), a comic-book store with the clubby look of a private library. There's also **Undeclared** (No. 3827; 323-668-1315; www.undfcd.com), which sells sneakers, including limited editions for \$200 to \$600.

The restaurants are similarly louche. It always feels like Sunday brunch at **Town and Country Cafe Bakery** (No. 3823; 323-667-3331), where breakfast is served all day to a bedhead crowd lingering over plates of salmon hash (\$9.49) and sausage strata (\$8.49), a savory bread pudding. The vegan clientele at a newcomer, **Flore** (No. 3818; 323-953-0611), is similarly disheveled, but the satisfying grilled tempeh salad with tahini (\$8.95) is far more healthy.

And adding to the pedestrian vibe is **Pazzo Gelato** (No. 3827; 323-662-1410; www.pazzogelato.net). After dinner, patrons hoof it over to its sidewalk tables for handmade gelato that is as luxurious as Milan's best — like the intensely nutty pistachio (\$3.95 for a small size), or strawberry sorbetto, made with fruit from the **farmers' market** that sets up every Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon (Sunset Boulevard between Edgecliffe Drive and Griffith Park Boulevard).

At night, a line stretches outside the **4100 Bar** (No. 4100; 323-666-4600), a cleaned-up dive that now draws a stylish crowd. More action can be found along the buzzing clubs on Fountain Avenue a few block west.

And then there's the **Sunset Junction Street Festival** (www.sunsetjunction.org) held every August. Thousands descend on the neighborhood for a block party where local bands share the stages with indie heavies. For three days, cars are banished, and pedestrians rule the streets.

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