

Historic Hotels!

XIV: *Los Angeles Biltmore*

As a boy growing up in the Los Angeles area, I certainly remember the great Biltmore. I haven't seen it in at least 30 years now, but I remember being impressed with the size, luxury, and the grounds. I remember all the flashy cars and the just-as-flashy doorman, especially.

There are four truly grand hotels in California and the first is the Los Angeles Biltmore. It is a frequent location for film action. The Biltmore has a grand entrance but its most "cinematic" aspect is the *portecochere* on the side. In *Chinatown*, Faye Dunaway has her 1934 Cadillac V-16 Roadster valet-parked at the Biltmore. The hotel has just been restored by its new owners (one of those big international firms). Many of the beautiful public spaces have been preserved including the Ballroom. However, in the era of mega revenue generation there is no economic justification for a big lobby. Thus, what used to be a grand open space now has the ubiquitous "lobby bar."

In the 1920s, California was a land of prosperity and sunshine. Los Angeles was growing faster than any other part of the United States, with a population that went from 576,000 in 1920 to 1,238,000 in 1930. Along with this rapid development came a boom in construction. Architects from all over the country were called to Los Angeles, each bringing their own particular styles to a city filled with an increasingly eclectic mix of buildings. Architects working in California were responding to regional traditions as well as revivalist trends in architecture. Many were celebrating the area's connection to a Spanish colonial past. Others, like Wright were looking farther back to pre-European regional traditions of Native American cultures. Wright was one of the earliest architects to introduce non-Western detailing to projects in California. For example, the Barnsdall/Hollyhock House of 1917-22, used Mayan and Zapotec motifs and the Ennis House of 1924, is placed like a Mayan temple on a hill.

Hotels were a particularly extravagant endeavor in Hollywood and were built in a series of revival styles. New York architects Schulze and Weaver built the Los Angeles Biltmore in 1923 in a Spanish Renaissance style. With a three-story-high lobby that culminates with an elaborate staircase and wrought iron balustrade. With the atmosphere of a religious space, the lobby has a deep barrel vaulted ceiling and arcades that run alongside the main space. Other unique features are an interior shopping street called "El Camino," Italian brickwork, and terra-cotta detailing

And, the estate-like, downtown Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel received Best Set Design in a major motion picture for *Independence Day*, *Up Close and Personal*, *Forget Paris*, and *My Fellow Americans*. Not too shabby for the ol' 78-year-old gal.

Not surprisingly, the Los Angeles Biltmore [now the Regal Biltmore] has been designated a Los Angeles landmark.

