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Neighborhood Spotlight

Mar Vista: From lima beans to Westside hot spot



Employee Blair Arnell of Vintage on Venice sets out a rack of clothes for the morning foot traffic.

(Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times)

Scott Garner

Ninety years ago, Mar Vista was little more than vast fields of lima beans — with an amazing view of the Pacific. Today, those ocean views have helped Mar Vista evolve into one of L.A. most desirable Westside neighborhoods, with skyrocketing property values to prove it.

The town can thank the storied Venice Short Line trolley for its rise. That trolley shuttled passengers from downtown Los Angeles and bisected what was then called Ocean Park Heights. The rapid development of Santa Monica and Venice Beach helped launch the first wave of housing tracts to rise up from the dusty fields. By 1927, the thirsty little farming community had been annexed by water-rich Los Angeles and rebranded Mar Vista, after the name of a nearby trolley stop.

It's a place of tension between old and new, where large modern homes strain against prewar property lines and traffic pushes to capacity many streets originally designed to accommodate horse-drawn carriages.

Neighborhood highlights

Mar Vista Tract: Designed by Midcentury Modern architect Gregory Ain, this 52-home development aimed to infuse postwar housing for the new middle class with modern design elements. Remarkably, all of the homes still stand, and driving into the well-preserved neighborhood is like turning back the clock to the boom years of the late 1940s.



(Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times)

Mar Vista Hill: Towering 200 feet above the basin, this historic mesa boasts killer ocean, city and mountain views. The hill also plays host to the North Venice Little League park and Ocean View Community Garden, which occupy a site that has been — in succession — farmland, city dump, anti-aircraft artillery battery and the proposed site of an L.A. Department of Water and Power reservoir. Some of the oldest homes in Mar Vista line Grand View above Venice Boulevard.

The Venice/Grand View Historic Commercial District: Mar Vista's historic "downtown" contains buildings built between 1924 and 1960 (including the original Mar Vista Library) in a wide variety of styles. You can find tattoo parlors, hand-brewed coffee and the weekly farmers market.

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Neighborhood challenges

The Santa Monica Airport: Mar Vistans aren't shy about expressing their opinions on the decades-old debate over whether the 100-year-old airport

should close. Check out the neighborhood's Next Door page online — or look for the "No Jets" signs in many front yards.

Infill housing: Many older houses are being bought and torn down, replaced by larger infill houses. Some neighbors worry that trend is endangering the suburban character of the area. Additionally, developers are eyeing some corridors as the potential sites of higher-density town-house style homes.

Expert insight

Tami Pardee, founder and CEO of Pardee Properties and an expert in Mar Vista real estate, gives her take on the market.

Why she loves Mar Vista: "It's very down to earth, very friendly. It's a beautiful little place in L.A., and there are all these little gems in the neighborhood, like the Farmer's Market and the Oasis Healing Center."

Sellers outlook: "It's better to be buying than selling right now. There are many long-term residents who are selling their homes to buy in places like Ojai, Ventura and Oregon."

Buyers outlook: "The market is good right now. It's still affordable; you can still buy for under \$1 million."

Market snapshot

In January, based on 20 sales, the median price for single-family homes in the 90066 ZIP Code was \$1.174 million, up 20.5% from January 2014, according to CoreLogic.

Report card

Clover Elementary and Goethe International Charter are among the bright spots, with scores of 952 and 921, respectively, out of a possible 1,000 in the 2013 API ranking system. Mar Vista Elementary earned a score of 913, Coeur

D'Alene Avenue Elementary 911, and Beethoven Street Elementary 889. New West Charter Middle scored a 910, and Palms Middle a 878. Venice High came in with 741.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/westside/la-fi-hp-neighborhood-spotlight-20160312-story.html>