

# THE LA TIMES

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Los Angeles, California

## City of Angels



A mother and two of the many children baptized Saturday at *Mission Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles* (Mission of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels, referring to Mary), a Catholic church built on the site of the original church in the pueblo of Los Angeles, founded in 1781 in Spain's Alta California.



# City of Angels

We came to Los Angeles this weekend so Emily and I could celebrate the big springtime doubleheader – her birthday and Mother’s Day – with our son Gordon the actor, who is appearing in a play near where he lives in North Hollywood.

Acting and the entertainment business provide most people with the public face of this sprawling

megalopolis, which takes two hours by car to cross when there’s no traffic on the freeways, which is never.

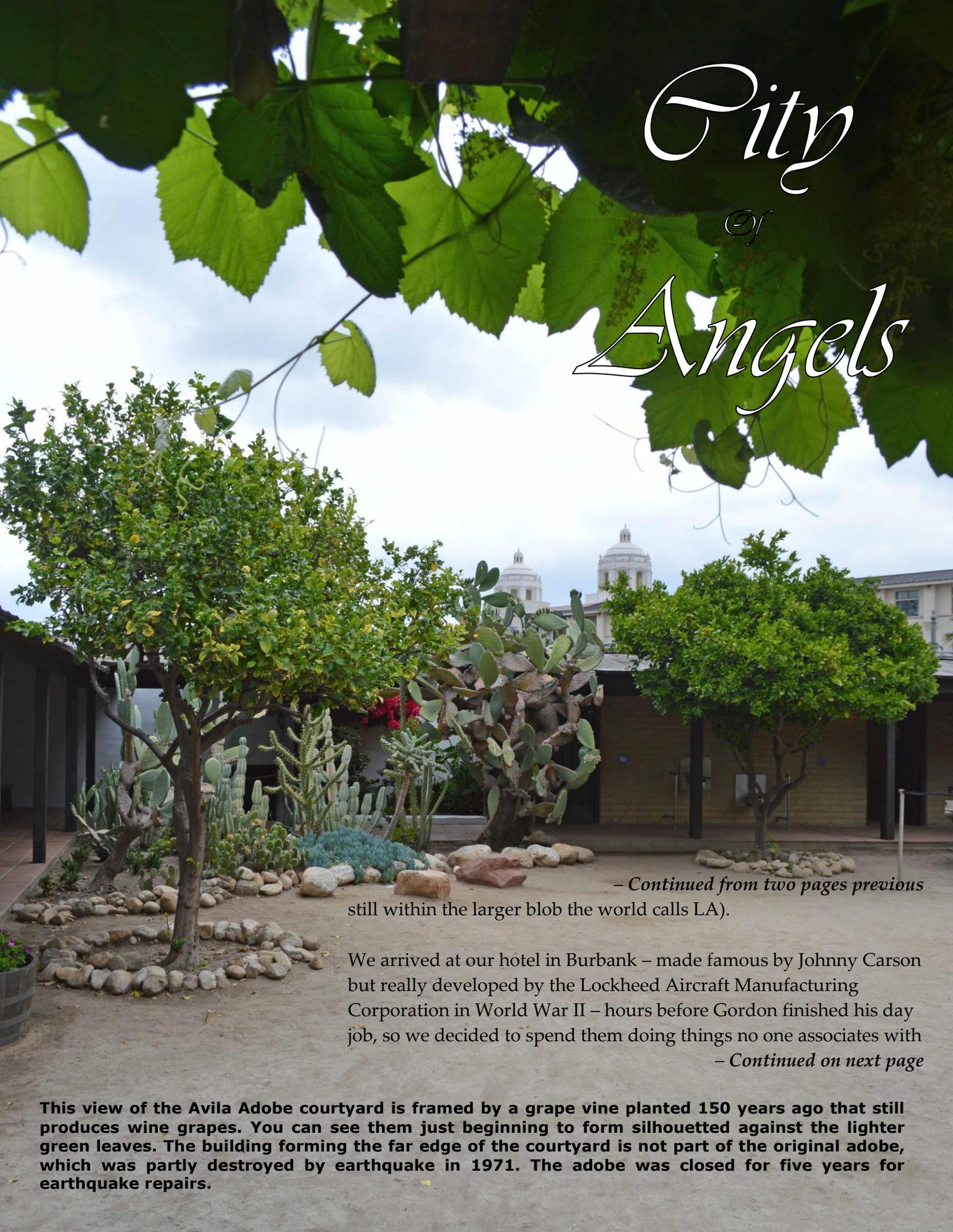
Everywhere you turn is another building, billboard, mountain, beach, town or palm tree that you’ve seen on TV or in a movie. And then there’s Disneyland (in an entirely different county but

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**Emily pauses in our walk along Olvera Street, the pueblo of Los Angeles’ original street, which is now hidden among the skyscrapers of the modern city’s downtown.**



Inside the dining room of the Avila Adobe on Olvera Street, the oldest existing house in Los Angeles. It was built in 1818 by cattle rancher Don Francisco Avila of Sinaloa, Mexico, who moved to Los Angeles about 1794. He married a local woman, María del Rosario Verdugo, and was elected *alcalde* (mayor) in 1810. She died in 1822 and Avila then married 15-year-old Maria Encarnación Sepúlveda, whose family name can now be found all over Los Angeles, most notably on 43-mile long Sepulveda Boulevard, LA County's longest street. It terminates on what was her family's 32,000-acre ranch, granted to the Sepúlvedas in 1784 by Spain's King Carlos III – what today is the City of Rancho Palos Verdes (Green Trees Ranch) overlooking the Pacific. As Los Angeles grew and its center gradually shifted a few blocks southwest, Olvera Street and its buildings deteriorated. By 1928 the adobe with its 3-foot thick walls was condemned. A private effort to restore the entire area, including the adobe, was completed by 1930, and the state acquired the adobe in 1953 with the help of an Avila descendant, Sophia Rimpau. The furnishings here belonged to the Sepúlveda family. More about the restoration on the last page.



# City of Angels

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still within the larger blob the world calls LA).*

We arrived at our hotel in Burbank – made famous by Johnny Carson but really developed by the Lockheed Aircraft Manufacturing Corporation in World War II – hours before Gordon finished his day job, so we decided to spend them doing things no one associates with

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**This view of the Avila Adobe courtyard is framed by a grape vine planted 150 years ago that still produces wine grapes. You can see them just beginning to form silhouetted against the lighter green leaves. The building forming the far edge of the courtyard is not part of the original adobe, which was partly destroyed by earthquake in 1971. The adobe was closed for five years for earthquake repairs.**

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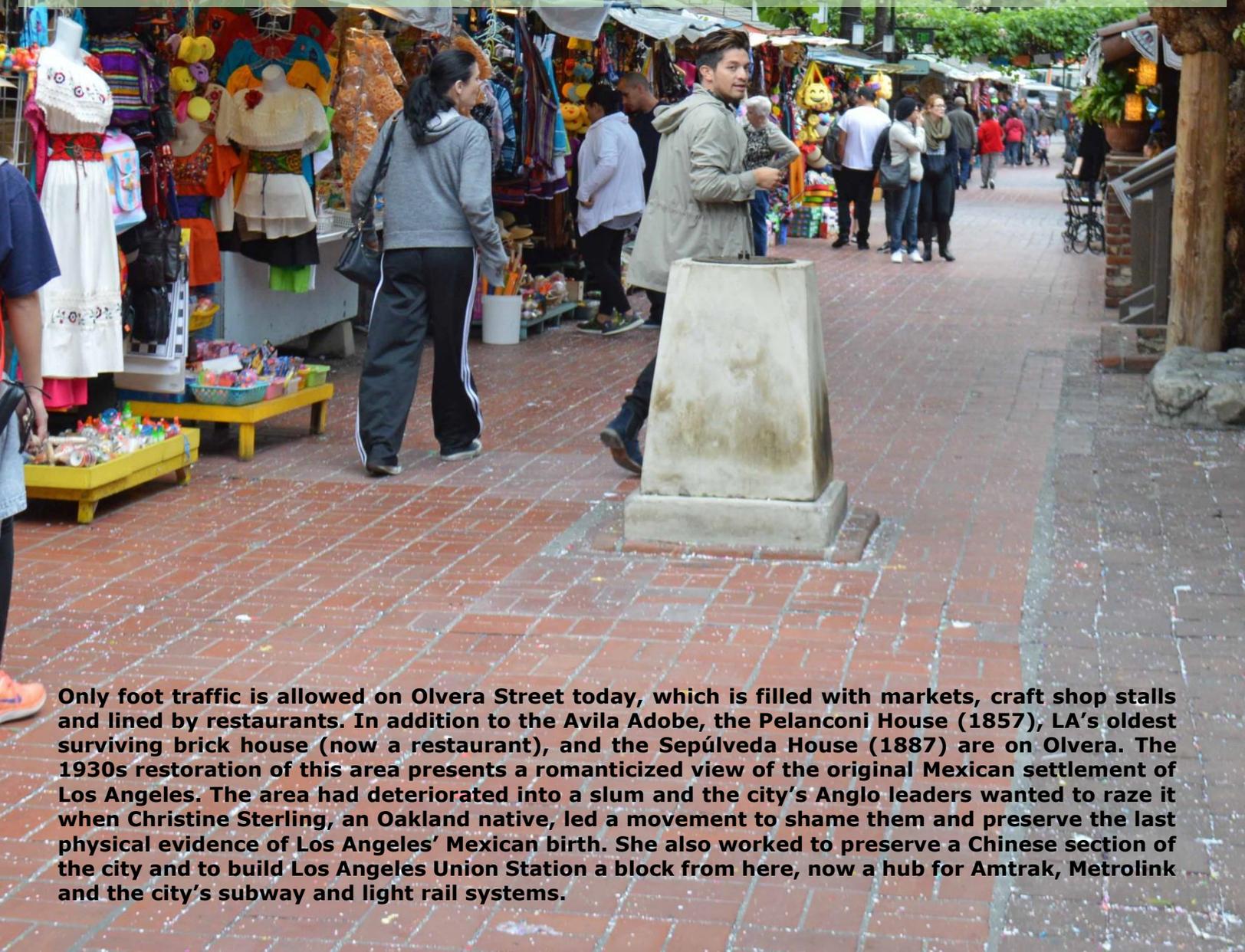
Los Angeles: taking public transportation and enjoying cultural history.

The Red Line of the subway (did you even know LA has a subway?) stops two blocks from our hotel, so we took it downtown (does anyone go downtown if they haven't been arrested Sgt. Joe Friday?) to see where the City of Angels was born and raised before everything – the Los Angeles River included – was paved.

We visited Olvera Street.

Father Juniper Serra founded the fourth of his 21 California missions nearby in 1771. But Olvera Street dates to the pueblo established nearby by 41 settlers – *pobladores* (townspeople) – 10 years later. They were the first to use the words “los angeles” for the place, calling it *El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles del Río de Porciúncula* – the town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels on the Porciúncula River.

What may have been the longest name for any U.S. city has now become the shortest: LA.



**Only foot traffic is allowed on Olvera Street today, which is filled with markets, craft shop stalls and lined by restaurants. In addition to the Avila Adobe, the Pelanconi House (1857), LA's oldest surviving brick house (now a restaurant), and the Sepúlveda House (1887) are on Olvera. The 1930s restoration of this area presents a romanticized view of the original Mexican settlement of Los Angeles. The area had deteriorated into a slum and the city's Anglo leaders wanted to raze it when Christine Sterling, an Oakland native, led a movement to shame them and preserve the last physical evidence of Los Angeles' Mexican birth. She also worked to preserve a Chinese section of the city and to build Los Angeles Union Station a block from here, now a hub for Amtrak, Metrolink and the city's subway and light rail systems.**