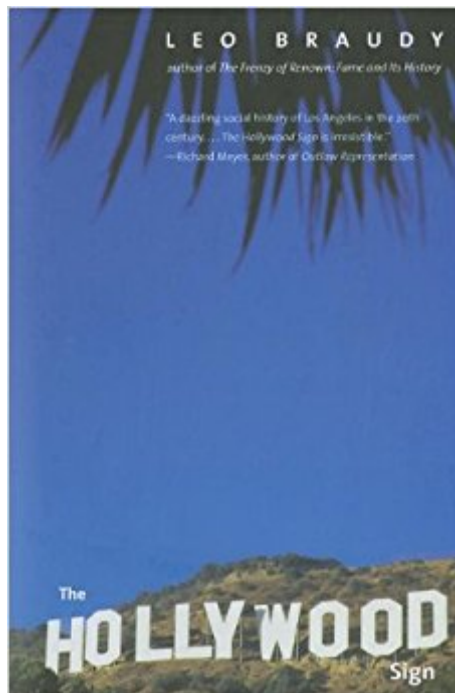


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The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy And Reality Of An American Icon (Icons Of America)



Synopsis

Hollywood's famous sign, constructed of massive white block letters set into a steep hillside, is an emblem of the movie capital it looms over and an international symbol of glamour and star power. To so many who see its image, the sign represents the earthly home of that otherwise ethereal world of fame, stardom, and celebrity--the goal of American and worldwide aspiration to be in the limelight, to be, like the Hollywood sign itself, instantly recognizable. How an advertisement erected in 1923, touting the real estate development Hollywoodland, took on a life of its own is a story worthy of the entertainment world that is its focus. Leo Braudy traces the remarkable history of this distinctly American landmark, which has been saved over the years by a disparate group of fans and supporters, among them Alice Cooper and Hugh Hefner, who spearheaded its reconstruction in the 1970s. He also uses the sign's history to offer an intriguing look at the rise of the movie business from its earliest, silent days through the development of the studio system that helped define modern Hollywood. Mixing social history, urban studies, literature, and film, along with forays into such topics as the lure of Hollywood for utopian communities and the development of domestic architecture in Los Angeles, *The Hollywood Sign* is a fascinating account of how a temporary structure has become a permanent icon of American culture.

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Customer Reviews

“Deliciously quirky and intelligent . . . In his irresistible take on the famous sign, Braudy

spins a larger metaphor for the culture and history of California itself. — Joy Horowitz, Los Angeles Review of Books (Joy Horowitz Los Angeles Review of Books) — “Braudy offers a stimulating exploration of Hollywood’s significance in Western culture. — Edward White, Times Literary Supplement (Edward White Times Literary Supplement 20110603) “Braudy weaves an entertaining tale of the Hollywood sign’s various lives and incarnations.” — T. Rees Shapiro, Washington Post (T. Rees Shapiro Washington Post) — “This is a magically brief book, written with wit and elegance, on the whole history of Los Angeles and the movies. — David Thomson, New Republic (David Thomson New Republic) — “A short, lively book . . . artfully distilled. — Paul Brownfield, Los Angeles Times (Paul Brownfield Los Angeles Times) — “Terrific . . . As I read the book, I marked passages that I thought were particularly interesting, surprising or well-written. Before long I realized I was marking just about everything. — Geoff Nicholson, San Francisco Chronicle (Geoff Nicholson San Francisco Chronicle) — “A rich, far-reaching, gripping history . . . a pithy and sharp little study that is more than just an analysis of this one icon but a larger reflection on the movies in Los Angeles and the implications of that for the place of the movies in our lives. — Dana Polan, New York University (Dana Polan) — “Braudy pulls off the difficult feat of writing a substantive book about an elusive American icon. By unearthing the history of the sign—which turns out to be a rich history of real estate, roads, advertising, starlets and, of course, the movies themselves, The Hollywood Sign ends up exploring the enigma of an entirely mythic place. — Linda Williams, University of California Berkeley (Linda Williams) “What Carly Simon claims for James Bond in *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) is equally true of Leo Braudy. — Nobody does it better, as this polymathic enquiry so clearly demonstrates in its fusion of erudition, insight, and panache.” — Kevin Starr, author of the *Americans and the California Dream* series (Kevin Starr) — “The story of Hollywood as a place and its evolution into the hub of the movie business is as fascinating as anything in the movies it produced. — Using the sign as both protagonist and reflecting mirror, Leo Braudy — provides a mesmerizing account of the shifting fortunes of Hollywood, from the early struggle between Puritans and pleasure-seekers to the emergence of the sign as a pop icon symbolizing the dreams and fantasies of millions. This is movie history from an utterly fresh and kaleidoscopic view. — Molly Haskell, author of *Frankly, My Dear: Gone with the Wind Revisited* (Molly Haskell) — “A deftly told and delightfully detailed account of how a humble real estate promotional tool was transformed over the years into an American icon. Leo Braudy’s book is not just the story of a bold bit of signage, but of

the community and the industry it came to symbolize. It's a must read for anyone interested in the history of a place and a dream. Hooray for The Hollywood Sign." [Richard Schickel, Author of Clint and Conversations with Scorsese \(Richard Schickel\)](#) "Leo Braudy, one of our most astute cultural critics and film historians, has produced a wonderful history of this pregnant icon, an analysis of its "metaphysical life" and an examination of its dissemination as the triumphant yet decadent symbol of America and its dream factory. In doing so he has given us what is perhaps the best single essay ever written on not just on the sign, but on Hollywood itself." [Tom Lutz, author of Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers and Bums in America \(Tom Lutz\)](#) "Though we've all seen the Hollywood sign, no one has ever looked at it more beautifully or to better effect than Leo Braudy. With Braudy as expert guide, a word on the side of a steep hill opens onto a dazzling social history of Los Angeles in the 20th century. Like the landmark on which it focuses, The Hollywood Sign is irresistible." [Richard Meyer, author of Outlaw Representation \(Richard Meyer\)](#) "An artful, illuminating and absorbing meditation on a place, an era, an industry, a cast of unlikely characters and a zeitgeist. . . . An instant classic." [Jonathan Kirsch, Jewish Journal \(Jonathan Kirsch Jewish Journal\)](#) "Amusing, astute and informative . . . not just about the sign but about Hollywood itself." [Rob Hardy, Commercial Dispatch \(Columbus, Mississippi\) \(Rob Hardy Commercial Dispatch\)](#) "Braudy's short, sharp-shooting social history of modern movie culture says hooray for the Hollywood sign and the American Dream." [The Times \(The Times 20110402\)](#) "Braudy, in this terrific book, is at home with the history of Hollywood." [San Francisco Chronicle \(San Francisco Chronicle\)](#) "Explores the remarkable story of the hillside icon that began as a 1923 advertisement." [Wendy Witherspoon, Los Angeles magazine \(Wendy Witherspoon Los Angeles magazine\)](#) "A dazzlingly enjoyable exposition." [The Independent \(The Independent 20120309\)](#) "An entertaining history." [PD Smith, The Guardian \(PD Smith The Guardian 20120428\)](#) "A witty, lucid, far-reaching contribution to Yale's Icons of America series." [Philip French, The Observer \(Philip French The Observer 20120715\)](#) "Braudy's witty, allusive study uses the famous sign as a framework on which to string the history of Hollywood itself." [Philip Kemp, Sight and Sound \(Philip Kemp Sight and Sound 20120901\)](#)

Leo Braudy is among America's leading cultural historians and film critics. He currently is University

Professor and Leo S. Bing Chair in English and American Literature at the University of Southern California. He lives in Los Angeles.

The Hollywood Sign was put up in 1923 as a gigantic billboard for a real estate development. But over the years it has become the symbol of the movie industry itself. Braudy's book starts long before the Sign appeared with the foundations of Hollywood as a place, a temperance paradise for rich midwesterners in the sand and sagebrush. He interweaves the history of the Sign with the history of Hollywood as a real town, the growth of the movie business (to a great extent not in Hollywood or even nearby), and the rise of Hollywood as a world-wide fantasy factory. It's a briskly told, rich story, filled with interesting details and ideas, and a must for anyone who has ever felt a little shiver seeing the Sign, either in a photo or in person.

Very essential for anyone who thinks they know Hollywood.

Very pleased with purchase as a gift for Christmas. My wife wanted more information about the iconic sign and this book provided that information to go along with a Hollywoodland poster I purchased as well.

I thought this title was more focused on the sign itself, but this is really a history of the Hollywood district of Los Angeles and the motion picture industry that sprang up in its environs. When discussing the Hollywoodland development group that put up the sign, Mr. Braudy correctly credits Harry Chandler with being a key investor behind the venture among other LA bigwigs of the era. Surprisingly however, the author omits entirely the name of the actual developer, Mr. Sidney H. Woodruff, truly a key figure in getting the sign built. It is like writing a book about the American auto industry in Detroit and not mentioning Henry Ford. This is a decent read for anyone interested in Hollywood and the movies, but it surely isn't a good value at \$26 in hardcover.

One of the mistakes in movies I always find funny is the opening scene where the director wants to set a locale in the mind of the viewer, so he might place the words "Washington, D.C." at the bottom of the screen, while at the same time showing the capitol or the Washington Monument, making such a caption unnecessary. Using the symbol is enough, and the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, or the Golden Gate Bridge all suffice for nailing their locales visually. If you want the locale to be Hollywood, though, you have to use a caption because the word is the visual symbol. The famous

Hollywood Sign is easily visible as it sits on its steep hillside, looming above movieland. It is a peculiar symbol in many ways, and they are all drawn out by film critic and historian Leo Braudy in The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon (one of the books in the useful Yale Icons of America series from Yale University Press). The sign started as a real estate promotion, and has alternated from eyesore to beloved symbol and back over the decades, and the history and meanings of the sign are all documented here in an amusing, astute, and informative book that is not just about the sign but about Hollywood itself. Movie makers were headed westward starting around 1910, to take advantage of the weather and the light and the economy, but they avoided Hollywood itself. This was partially because of the place's reputation, not as a somnolent village, but as a haven for prohibition. In 1923, real estate backers opened up a subdivision near Griffith Park called Hollywoodland, which was supposed to house the wealthy, away from the noise and smog down below (to say nothing of the wrong kind of populace). It was the age when billboards were proliferating, and they wanted their sign to be easily legible as people drove by. Hollywood itself can be seen as big on gimmick and ballyhoo but lacking in real self respect, and that was the sign, too. Maintenance of the letters ended in 1939. They fell to pieces, and because of their superb location, everyone could see it happen. In 1947 the Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Commission wanted the sign razed; it was an unavoidable eyesore, and the subdivision it designated had been forgotten. But the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce protested, and said the sign ought to be restored, which it did, removing the last four letters. The responsibility for the sign and its land was divided up. Currently, the city of Los Angeles owns the sign and the land it is on, and there is a Hollywood Sign Trust that takes care of chores and security, but the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce has the trademark rights to the arrangement of the letters. Unlike the Washington Monument or the Eiffel Tower, the Hollywood Sign is not to be ascended. People have done so; the most famous one was Peg Entwistle, a 24-year-old actress who may (Braudy doubts various parts of this story) in 1932 have thrown herself off the H. There is no point to climbing the mountain to get close to the monument. It is better seen from far away, block letters wiggling across the mountain, familiar to us all and yet strange and very peculiar. Peculiar or not, there are people who love the sign and have done what they can for its upkeep, or to make the governments involved do so. The last major overhaul, which ditched the telephone poles and replaced them with steel foundations, in 1978 was funded by an odd coalition of Gene Autry, Hugh Hefner, Alice Cooper, Andy Williams, and others. There was a recent threat of development around the sign, but such lights as Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks raised funds to keep the builders away and the mountaintop pristine (except for the antennas; it is too high a location to go to waste for

broadcasting, that bane of the movies). Whatever Hollywood means, this will remain a sign of our times.

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