

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

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Pasadena is truly the real SoCal

by Larry Wilson



As far as I'm concerned, the main cultural advantage to Santa Monica over Pasadena and environs is that the surfing is better there.

And, sad to say, it's not all that much better, since Santa Monica proper is actually a crappy beach break. Now Malibu different story. Malibu is really great right, if you like crowds.

Oh, and speaking of crowds, the farmers' market there is even better than the ones at Victory Park and in South Pas. So they say - again, if you can fight through the humanity. My sister lives in Santa Monica and says that if you're not walking and don't get there at the crack, forget it. You'll never get close in your car.

Friendly carping, actually. I love Santa Monica. And it's for the very same reason I love Pasadena - it's a real Southern California place, not a fake one like, mmm, Marina del Rey or the Newport Beach of today. Santa Monica, Monrovia and Pasadena were among the earliest - mid-1880s - cities in Southern California to incorporate. They're as real as we get - everything else is filler. They are places small enough to get your hands around. They are to love.

Now Pasadenan Colleen Dunn Bates is following on the fantastic success of her "Hometown Pasadena" book with this week's release of "Hometown Santa Monica: The Bay Cities Book."

I love that last bit. Bay City is what Raymond Chandler called Santa Monica in his Philip Marlowe novels.

And Colleen, in a pickle for a forward-writer since Larry Mantle and yours truly, who wrote the dueling forwards for "Hometown Pasadena," were otherwise occupied, smartly turned to mystery writer April Smith, author of the beautifully titled "North of Montana." That's Santa Monica-talk for the Palisades-adjacent streets where the really, really rich folk live. Why place crime novels there? "In a land of perpetual sunshine," she writes, "darkness becomes quite interesting."

Just like the first book, this one is beautifully designed, with a real painting on the cover - by Ethel Fisher instead of our Kenton Nelson - great maps and photographs, literate writing and a genuine insider's touch instead of that guidebook-by-amateurs baloney that fills many of the major publishers' output.

Fascinating facts - weird: the city's 78 percent white - restaurant reviews by people who actually eat there a lot, hikes you want to take right now and hilariously apt real-estate envy sections: the Brentwood Park architectural guide is headlined "Homes You'd Marry the Wrong Man For."

This "Hometown" makes it clear Santa Monica's a very cool home away from home.

For celebrating Pasadena, you can't do better than Pasadena Heritage's Craftsman Weekend, coming up Oct. 19-21. Old house fans from all over the world flock to town for it every year, and this one's a doozy. At its heart for those lucky enough to score tickets is a tour of the rarely opened Robinson House, the Greenes' gorgeous, unique - this one's Tudor half-timbered rather than shingled - estate on South Grand Avenue. If you can't get there, you've still got antiques exhibits featuring Arts & Crafts masterpieces, lectures by Craftsman Movement experts, a tour focusing on Heineman & Heineman houses led by Heineman owner and expert Michael Schneickert and way more. Tickets: www.pasadenaheritage.org or (626)441-6333.

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