

Los Angeles: Recommended Viewing

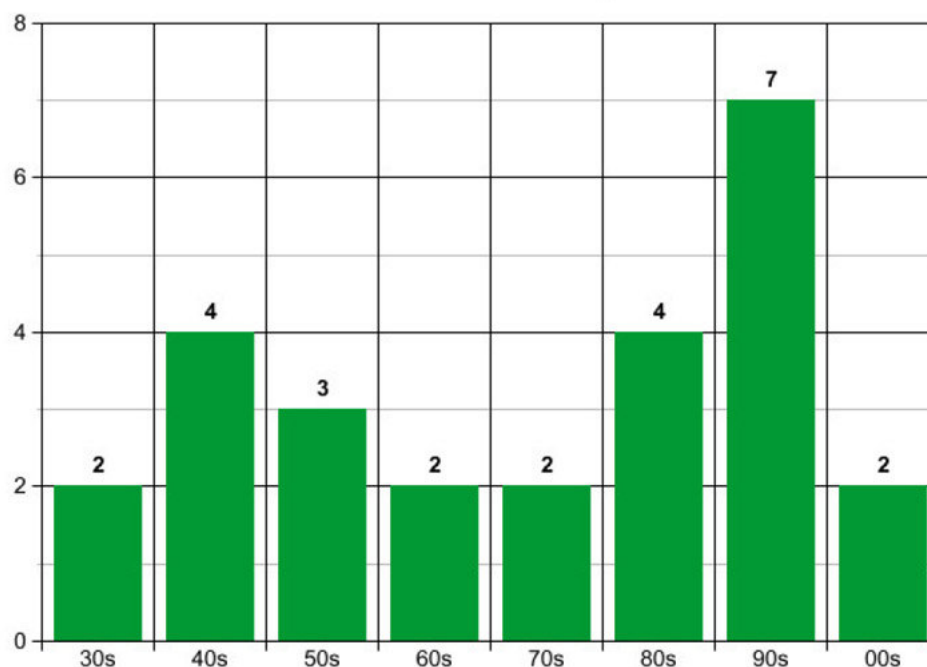


As I finish my look at the wonderful gift my bride of 23 years gave me for our recent wedding anniversary, this is the third and last entry that reviews the particularly intriguing addendum titled “**Selected Los Angeles Viewing/Listening/Reading**” that lies within the publication. The photographic Taschen book, *Los Angeles, Portrait of a City* is a marvelous work written by Harvard PhD. and USC Professor Kevin Starr and David L. Ulin, books editor for the L.A. Times.

Edited by Jim Heimann, it incorporates some gorgeous history-laden photographs for the City of the Angels, the place my family and I call home. It is its own highlight and worth discussion. For this one, I'll showcase their viewing collection, one that has what it is to be L.A. firmly in its sights, theater screens, and in the hearts of movie goers. I've included the IMDB links for the films on their list, as well as the authors remarks for each on the film roll call. What are your thoughts regarding this list? And what would you add, if you could?

For those who are interested, here's their viewing breakdown by calendar period:

L.A. Recommended Viewing



- *What Price Hollywood?* (1932) – “In what would become a recurring theme for movies set in Hollywood, a transplant to the film capital seeks stardom only to be met with success, scandal, and redemption.”
- *A Star is Born* (1937) – “Repeating rags-to-riches tale, a young girl seeking stardom succeeds and soon eclipses her alcoholic movie star husband's career. His subsequent suicide prompts her to consider abandoning Hollywood.”

- Double Indemnity (1944) – “Author James Cain’s tightly adapted script is a clever murder story involving an insurance agent and his repulsion and attraction for a murderous black-widow-like client.”
- Mildred Pierce (1945) – “Joan Crawford triumphed in her portrayal of a protective divorcée from suburban Glendale whose spoiled daughter rejects her middle-class values and descends into deceit and eventual murder in Malibu.”
- The Big Sleep (1946) – “The complex plot of Raymond Chandler’s classic novel was aptly led by stars Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall and firmly established the noir genre.”
- Criss Cross (1949) – “Burt Lancaster and wayward ex-wife Yvonne de Carlo team, postdivorce, to double-cross de Carlo’s new gangster husband in a cat-and-mouse game on the streets of L.A.”
- Sunset Boulevard (1950) – “Billy Wilder directed this film classic of a writer on the brink of insolvency forced to offer his talents to a mad, eccentric, and aging silent screen star in her crumbling mansion on Sunset Boulevard, with deadly results.”
- Rebel Without a Cause (1955) – “This angst-ridden tale of teenage rebellion featured several iconic L.A. locations and cemented James Dean’s stardom as the sullen Jim Stark.”
- Gidget (1959) – “Bouncy Sandra Dee starred in this tales of a young girl learning to surf from a group of male Bohemian surfers in Malibu, setting off a national craze for the sport.” [see comment below]
- What Ever Happened to Baby Jane? (1962) – “A dark and twisted tale of two demented sisters who past as Hollywood entertainers serves as the background for a latent and bitter jealousy, eventually leading to murder.”
- The Graduate (1967) – “Dustin Hoffman returns to his parent’s banal suburban home in Los Angeles after college graduation and embarks on an affair with a family friend and her daughter.”
- Chinatown (1974) – “This quintessential L.A. film involves corruption, murder, and love in a complex tale based on the real-life issue of bringing water to Los Angeles.”
- Shampoo (1975) – “Warren Beatty portrayed a womanizer and real-life hair-dresser in the self-absorbed entertainment world of 1970s Beverly Hills.”
- Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) – “Teens, sex, and Southern California all add up to a vignette of life in the ’70s, populated by losers, winners, and surfer dudes.” [Dude! It was the early 80s, not the 70s!]
- Blade Runner (1982) – “Based on a novel by Philip K. Dick, Los Angeles is portrayed as an apocalyptic metropolis with a polyglot populace and vindictive human clones call Replicants.” [as I told author John Kenneth Muir in his recent review, 30 years later and some of this is coming true in this town]
- To Live and Die in L.A. (1985) – “A crime thriller set in urban L.A. involves an obsessive cop who is murdered while tracking down a drug lord and the subsequent pursuit of his killer by his partner.” [not quite, substitute Secret Service agent for cop and counterfeiter for drug lord and you’d be closer]
- Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988) – “Mixing animation and live action, the main character, Roger Rabbit, is an unsuspecting cartoon character caught up in a plot to destroy Los Angeles’ street car system and replace it with freeways.” [some real history here, folks]
- Pretty Woman (1990) – “Julia Roberts is a Hollywood hooker who life is turned into a Cinderella story when she is picked up by business mogul Richard Gere.” [see comment below]
- Pulp Fiction (1994) – “Quentin Tarantino directed this dark, twisted tale, weaving several stories of drug dealers, mafia bosses, and relentless torture and murder into a sometimes-humorous tableau of L.A.’s underbelly.”

- *Swingers* (1994) – “In an all-too-familiar story, a New Yorker heads to L.A. for fame, pining for the lover he left behind, and resumes pursuing romance with a pack of single males.” [if it's "all-too-familiar", why include it on this list? Just sayin']
- *Boogie Nights* (1997) – “The porn industry in '70s L.A. is the framework for this ensemble piece that reveals the sordid, depressing, and at times humorous lives of its players in the world of adult movies.”
- *L.A. Confidential* (1997) – “Director Curtis Hanson deftly adapted James Ellroy's novel of midcentury crime and police corruption, capturing to perfection Los Angeles at its “noir” best.”
- *American History X* (1998) – “A prison-reformed neo-Nazi attempts to change the ways of his younger brother, who inherited his bigotry. The forces of racism ultimately lead to a tragic ending.”
- *The Big Lebowski* (1998) – “This cult favorite follows “The Dude,” played by Jeff Bridges, a bowler-loving, White Russian-addicted slacker who is caught up in a case of mistaken identity.”
- *Collateral* (2004) – “A cab driver is hired by a well-dressed businessman to go to five L.A. locations and slowly realizes he has been hijacked into facilitating a series of “hits” of witnesses in a pending narcotics trial.” [uh, it's not exactly "slowly", especially after that first "hit"]
- *Crash* (2004) – “Overlapping stories reveal the “just beneath the surface” racism and social tension spread through all segments of L.A.'s racial population.”

Note: the first thing that jumps out is the sheer number of films the authors have from the 90s. It's almost double the figure each of the next most popular decades, that of the 40s and 80s. This signified to me as they've moved from books and song and on to film in this work the influence shifted forward across the decades in the authors' thinking. I mean, the 30s-40s held sway for reading material, the 60s, 70s, and 80s for musical listening enjoyment, and now the 80s and chiefly the *naughty nineties* captured their hearts and minds in movie viewing. This, I didn't expect.

I'll not list all of mine as I already enumerated some two years ago in this old blog piece. Still, I feel the need to say something more about this inventory as a native Angeleno. First, I think it strange (not bad, mind you) they'd picked *Criss Cross* over (or just didn't include) the classic *White Heat* from the 40s. They also had *Gidget* above *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Singin' in the Rain*, *War of the Worlds*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, or Hell, even *Them!* for the 50s? Really? I'd have added the 60s cult classic *Point Blank* to better fill out that era some. The 70s were scrimped on, too (how about *Escape From The Planet of the Apes* or *The Omega Man* for sci-fi's sake?).

I think Blake Edward's *S.O.B.* would have been ideal choice for the 80s. And for the decade of Ronald Reagan, John Carpenter's *They Live* remains the perfect science fiction counterpoint on that era in the Southland. The 90s was filled with a number of diverse, thoughtful L.A.-inspired film and they selected *Pretty Woman*?!? Criminy! I'd have added Altman's *The Player*, Burton's *Ed Wood*, or Michael Mann's *Heat*. Lastly, for the 2000s I think leaving off *Mulholland Drive* was a blaring omission. Two films that wouldn't be considered due to the publication deadline, Clint Eastwood's *Changeling*, the under appreciated 1920s L.A. period piece, and Nicolas Winding Refn's neo noir *Drive* already have a growing connection with those that live here in La-La Land.