

PAST THE INFERNO



An exhibition on the history of the Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles CA. From 1924 - Present Day, images collected from archives and field work understanding the conditions that led up to the 2025 Palisades fire, and the memories left behind.

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Supported by Professor Daekwon Park.**

Over the course of the last 20 years, California's natural landscape has completely transformed into a climate of fire paranoia. While California has always been at high fire risk, over the past 20 years the amount of land burned by wildfire in the state rose from 750,000 acres per year to approximately 4 million acres per year.¹ In addition, the landscape of these fires has shifted from forest blazes to urban infernos, coining the new term of "urban wildfire."² Most recently, Los Angeles has faced the brunt of these infernos, with fires that spanned over 59 square miles of the greater Los Angeles area, ripping through different communities across the county. In its wake, the fires took about 16,000 structures, burning down communities in its wake.³ The Pacific Palisades blaze, took 6,837 structures and burned approximately 23,448 acres of land, making it one of the single largest fire in Los Angeles's history.⁴ While this natural disaster may be a tragedy, to say that it took the city by surprise would be a lie. Over the last 20 years, fire has become more and more of a threat to the California region, with 8 of the 20 most destructive fires in California history occurring in the past 5 years.⁵ With this emerging pattern, it is becoming increasingly obvious that there is some sort of recent change in the environment of this area that is leading to the cause of these fires. As more forests become increasingly populated, and weather conditions become more severe due to climate change, these catastrophic fires seem to literally spark in abundance, and it is only through further human intervention that these can be mitigated in any capacity.

<p>"Where the sea meets the mountains."</p>	<p>Before the Pacific Palisades, the area was a film set by Thomas Ince.</p>	<p>Founded in 1922, the Pacific Palisades was established after a group of Methodist missionaries were able to buy the land from the film set (Inceville) that burnt to the ground 3 years prior.</p>	<p>The founding Palisades Methodist church burns down, leaving many Pali residents heartbroken for their beloved church.</p>	<p>The destroyed business block, is a hub for many Palisadians, where many residents fought to keep it in 1982 when a real estate developer wanted to make it a \$22 million, three-story shopping mall.</p>	<p>Today's Inceville is William Rogers's state beach, which has been active again a year after the fire.</p>	<p>The founder's oak across from the destroyed Pali Theatre.</p>	<p>In the Palisades Shopping Village, a gas station structure remains, everything else cleared after a year.</p>
<p>As a serene location, the Pacific Palisades becomes a location for a Self-Realization Fellowship.</p>	<p>The Palisades was founded under the "Founder's Oak."</p>	<p>While the original oak is no longer standing, a new one has been replanted, near the Pali Playhouse theatre.</p>	<p>Will Roger's ranch house was destroyed, leaving only the brick chimney at the site.</p>	<p>While steel is a popular method of construction, at extreme temperatures it loses its strength, as seen by the destroyed Pali Playhouse</p>	<p>Most of the facade of the business block survived, and proposals have been made in what should be done to it.</p>	<p>Brick is one of the most sturdy material against fire, a chimney here is lone survivor among the destroyed.</p>	<p>A year after the fire, the coast has been slowly cleared from debris, and nature slowly returns back. An upkeep of vegetation prevents high fuel for future fires.</p>
<p>Contrary to popular belief, wood is actually one of the best performing materials in a fire-prone area to build with. The Methodist church is built with a wood framing.</p>	<p>Along the blue seas of the California coastline created a spiritual experience, the Southern California Methodist Church was founded.</p>	<p>The term "wildland urban interface," or WUI, has been coined to describe "the area where houses meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland vegetation."</p>	<p>The Pacific Palisades blaze, took 6,837 structures and burned approximately 23,448 acres of land.</p>	<p>The Palisades fire is one of the deadliest fire recorded in Los Angeles history, marking it up as third deadliest in the state of California.</p>	<p>The founding Methodist church cleared of debris and is in the process of rebuilding.</p>	<p>The Pali Theatre's steel framing after the fire destroyed it has been cleared, leaving only the foundation.</p>	<p>Homes must rebuild within the two years after issued permits. Rebuilding should include fire resilience efforts over quick rebuild.</p>
<p>"If you are rich you live in Beverly Hills, but if you are lucky you live in the Palisades."</p>	<p>Along its iconic "alphabet streets," the town began to build itself up, establishing buildings like the Spanish-Colonial Revival styled Business Block building.</p>	<p>The Business Block holds many businesses, such as a Starbucks, local Italian restaurant, and private businesses.</p>	<p>The EPA and Army Corps of Engineers cleaned up debris on the area, slowly allowing residents to come back and start accessing their destroyed homes.</p>	<p>Many residents' have built generational wealth over time in the Palisades from the 1960s legislative acts, meaning many of these homes are passed down from families.</p>	<p>Will Roger's ranch house is cleared of debris, leaving only stone ground and iconic brick chimney.</p>	<p>A year after the fire, many residents are in the rebuilding phase, the Akron house just passed their permitting phase.</p>	<p>Impression of stairs have been left behind in the foundation of the house.</p>
<p>Housing demands increased throughout the city, citizens of the Pacific Palisades fought to keep their neighborhood "sacred," wanting to prevent larger scale buildings to be constructed.</p>	<p>As famous actors moved into the area, like Will Rogers, the allure of the Palisades only grew, and people flocked to the area.</p>	<p>WUI areas have homes loosely connected together, while largely surrounded by unregulated forest or shrubland, meaning that these communities are usually at higher risk of facing wildfires.</p>	<p>Contrary to steel, brick as a building material is sturdier, resulting as a fire-proof method, however due to earthquakes being prone to California, it is not a desirable method.</p>	<p>During the fire, many residents escaped via car, but roads became congested with debris, leaving many residents to abandon their cars and flee on foot.</p>	<p>A prominent surviving artifact found at the Pacific Palisades was this pool fountain, made of blue tiles.</p>	<p>Some structures, such as the Department of Water Power in the Palisades luckily survived the fire.</p>	<p>While rebuilding with wood after a fire seems wrong, wood chars slower in fires, leaving chances for people to flee early. Wood also allows for easy reconstruction.</p>
<p>The Department of Water and Power safely distributes power and water to residents.</p>	<p>In 1938, a fire blazed out in the mountains near the Palisades- citing that fire is not a new occurrence to the area.</p>	<p>Throughout the 1960s, a series of legislative acts passed that allowed for citizens of the Pacific Palisades to expand their property lines and only pay property taxes on what they bought their homes for instead of what the homes are currently worth.</p>	<p>One of the main sources of water firefighters took was from the ocean.</p>	<p>While the first initial clean up after the fires were done in a month, and the Army Corp finished clearing debris, many sites are still continuing the clean up efforts at their own accords before fully rebuilding.</p>	<p>Many Pacific Palisades homes have pools, which were one of the many consistent surviving pieces of homes.</p>	<p>Warped steel beam/ column found at the site of the Pali Theatre House.</p>	
<p>The Pali Playhouse was built in 1980s, housing many theatre productions, serving the neighborhood.</p>	<p>By building code, a neighborhood defined as a WUI simply means there are higher requirements in creating defensible spaces around a structure.</p>	<p>The area in-between the Santa Monica Mountains and Pacific Ocean is colloquially known as the "fire belt" of Southern California, because of how often fire spreads throughout the valley.</p>	<p>However, if the reservoir had been filled, studies show that water pressure would not have been adequate for the amount of fire the water had to cover.</p>	<p>After the fire, many objects are leftover on sites, some more visibly recognizable, others not so much.</p>	<p>The fire blazed through, leaving simply only the foundation of many homes.</p>		
<p>In 1993, up in the Palisades mountains, in Laguna Hills, a fire breaks out.</p>	<p>The nearby Santa Ynez Reservoir was drained prior to the 2025 fire's ignition for repairs to be made to the cover.</p>	<p>However, if the reservoir had been filled, studies show that water pressure would not have been adequate for the amount of fire the water had to cover.</p>					

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