JAKE, IT'S CHINATOWN

AT 25

AFTER ALL
THESE YEARS,
ROMAN
POLANSKI
FINALLY ADMITS
HE LIKES HIS
CLASSIC FILM.

PLUS: AN L.A. TOUR OF THE QUINTESSENTIAL L.A. MOVIE. BY PAUL IORIO. PAGE 6

A Guide to Movie's Many Location Sites

Here's how the 'Chinatown' production crew made '70s L.A. look just like '30s L.A.

In "Chinatown," Los Angeles' Chinatown is more of a metaphor than a place, until the end of the movie, when it becomes an all-tooreal location.

"Chinatown is a pretty good metaphor for the futility of good intentions," says the film's screenwriter, Robert Towne, "[Police officers in the film] are told to do as little as possible in Chinatown in the way of law enforcement because you never know whether you're helping to avert a crime or helping to commit one."

In Towne's original script, no scenes were set in Chinatown. But by the third draft of the screenplay, Towne and director Roman Polanski did set the final sequence in the area, even as they disagreed on what action should take place there.

"Chinatown couldn't not be in the picture," says production designer Richard Sylbert, who chose the locations for the film.

Despite their many disagreements during the writing of the film, Towne and Polanski did agree on the importance of L.A. as a setting in what has become the quintes-



Paramount Pictures and Fave Duna-

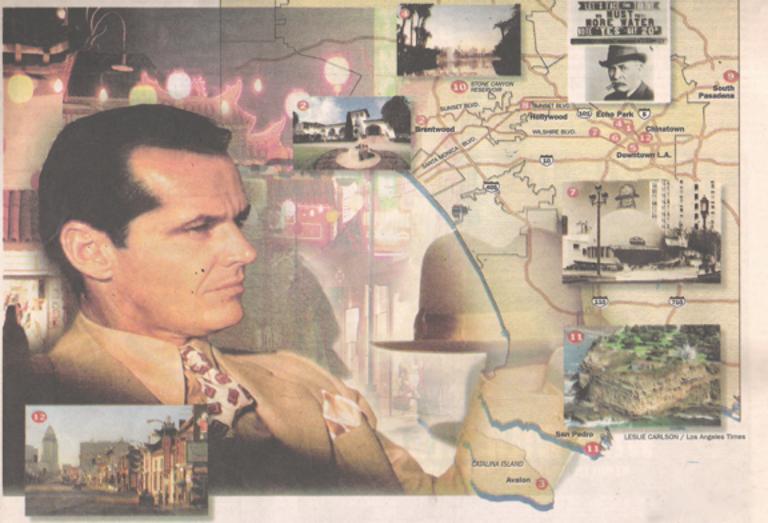
Jack Nicholson and Faye Dunaway starred in "Chinatown."

sential Los Angeles movie.

"Robert Towne had this thing about Los Angeles, about the history of the city, and that's what makes it so profound," Polanski says. "Without that, you would just have another detective thing."

And Towne recalls "Roman repeatedly stressed the wisdom of repeating locations. In other words, if you've got one scene in the department of water and power, make sure

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Locations

Continued from Page 6 you've got two. It orients an audience," .

It was Sylbert's job to make that shared vision a reality, finding locations that would represent a seductively urbane-vision of the city and the county, circa 1939. "This is a Los Angeles movie, not a Hollywood movie," he savs.

Here Sylbert gives Calendar Weekend readers a tour of "Chinatown's" memorable locations. (Numbers correspond to the map on Page 14.)

1. Ida Sessions' Apartment

Toward the end of the film, the body of the murdered Ida Sessions is shown in her apartmentat 8481/2 E. Kensington St. (in real life and the movie)-sprawled on the floor with a spilled bag of groceries. Sessionsplayed by Diane Laddwas the SAG member who passed herself off as Evelyn Mulwray to Gittes at the beginning of the film.

In real life: Set in a hilly Echo Park neighborhood south of Sunset Boulevard, the apartment house, painted light green now as then, is split in half by a central bungalow-corridor, just like in the film. Ida's place is in the back, now protected by a screen security door.

Sylbert: It was picked because it was completely symmetrical and had a long narrow passage in the middle of it, so that you looked at it and said, "There can't be any problem here." But once you got into that narrow corridor, the opposite happened, because narrow corridors produce anxiety. And then, of course, you get to the door and the glass is broken.

2. The Mar Vista Inn

Rest Home is where one of the most breathtaking carescapes in the film takes place. Gittes visits the home's elderly residentswhose names are being used without their knowledge in a land-laundering scam-and ends up fighting thug Claude Mulvihill, a former Ventura County sheriff. Evelyn Mulwray saves the day, swinging her car around the famous semicircular driveway, picking up Gittes and racing away as gunfire erupts.

In real life: The inn is actually the Eastern Star Home (11725 Sunset Blvd.), near a commercial strip in Brentwood at Bar-

KIRK McKOY / Los Angeles Times

The Mar Vista Inn and Richard Sylbert revisits Kensington Street apartments.

rington, and is immediately recognizable from the film. One can stroll along the famous driveway (and imagine gunmen coming up the walk) and climb the stairs to the entrance where Gittes battered Mulvihill's skull.

Sylbert: Every important building in this movie had to be white and Spanish and had to be above Gittes' eve level. And because it's above his eve level, it's automatically harder for him to go there visually. And he's a detective. And uphill is where he's going.

3. Noah Cross' Estate

Gittes has lunch here with Cross, who tells Gittes to "just find the girl."

In real life: Cross' house is actually the mountaintop William Wrigley estate and horse farm on Catalina Island.

Sylbert: When Gittes got off the boat, he walked on to that wonderful dock where you can see the

Avalon ballroom in the background. And we cut to the Wrigley Ranch.

4. Echo Park Lake

Gittes and associate Duffy spot Hollis Mulwray with his "girlfriend" at the north end of Echo Park Lake. Aboard a boat, Gittes surreptitiously photographs Mulwray in a nearby canoe.

In real life: Echo Park Lake looks today exactly as it did 25 years ago. Its trademark bridge, visible in the film, is now creaky and red, leading to a damp island full of pigeons and palms. Located south of Sunset and north of the 101, it also sports a boat station that rents out pedal-boats by the hour.

Sylbert: The lake is the perfect location if you're doing 1939 and you're after something that says "California" so clearly, which that does, with the little bridge in it and the palm trees all around. When you start a movie like this, you begin to understand that you have to go to the old part of town. And that's why I came up with Echo Park, and that's why Ida Session's house ended up in that area, too.

5. City Hall

Near the beginning of the film, Gittes spies on Hollis Mulwray at a public meeting at L.A. City Hall in which Mulwray states his opposition to the building of a risky dam project. Meanwhile, valley farmers, irate over having their land dried up by illegal water diversion, protest by bringing sheep into the meeting.

In real life: The L.A. City Hall, which opened in 1928 and is now being renovated, is located downtown on Spring Street south of

Temple.

Sylbert: The meeting was shot in the chamber at L.A. City Hall. All I did was put a huge picture of Roosevelt on the wall.

6. The Pig 'n' Whistle

The Pig 'n' Whistle restaurant appears in the film as the backdrop for an argument between Cross and Hollis Mulwray, captured in clandestine photographs by Walsh, Gittes' associate.

In real life: The longtime downtown L.A. fixture was long gone by the time "Chinatown" was made. Filmmakers used the Pacific Dining Car restaurant (1310 W. 6th St.), at Witmar Street and 6th, just west of downtown L.A. The restaurant was built in 1921, in the heyday of the Mulwrays.

Sylbert: The real restaurant was

the city's oldest restaurant, it was near City Hall and it was the most popular. It was the obvious place for these guys to meet. It was the place.

7. The Brown Derby

After Hollis Mulwray is murdered, Gittes and Evelyn Mulwray meet over lunch at this swank restaurant. Gittes spends most of the meeting being unjustifiably suspicious of Evelvn.

In real life: The original Brown Derby, representing the elegance of old L.A., is now gone. In its place is a commercial strip called the Brown Derby Plaza (and a vacant space where the actual Derby used to be) on the 3400 block of Wilshire, across from the old-Ambassador.

8. El Macondo Apartments

El Macondo is the so-called "love nest" in which Gittes finds Hollis Mulwray with a mysterious young woman (actually Katherine). Gittes climbs onto the red-tile roof and shoots photos of the two in the courtyard below. (Polanski says he wanted to show the courtyard scene upside down, in the reflection of the camera lens, but the idea was nixed.)

In real life: The apartment building is now called Mi Casa, at 1400-1414 Havenhurst Drive, between Sunset and Fountain. The stylish two- and four-story Spanish

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structure is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sylbert: I named it El Macondo after the name of a city in a Gabriel Marquez novel. It was perfect. It was Spanish, it was white, and we could get to the roof tiles and shoot down into the courtvard.

9. Evelyn Mulwray's House

This is Evelyn's house—at the nonexistent 1412 Adelaide Drive—where Gittes discovers a telltale piece of evidence in the backyard saltwater pond. In a later scene here, he's forced to surrender the evidence to Mulvihill.

In real life: The house is in Pasadena, off California Avenue and near the Huntington museum, though sources can't recall its precise address.

Sylbert: The house was an abandoned wreck before it was completely renovated and redesigned by

the "Chinatown" crew, who even put in the pond. If you watch the scene carefully, you'll notice that when you're in the backyard, you cannot see nearby buildings. Because in 1939, the whole image I was after was that there was nothing out there. I chose the place because one can see in a straight line from the backyard through the house to the front entrance. At the end of the movie, when Gittes is waiting for Noah Cross, he's standing at that back doorway and you can see the car with Cross pull up at the front door. The practice of shooting action in one room through the action in another room is virtually a Polanski trademark.)

10. The Oak Pass Reservoir

The Oak Pass is where Hollis
Mulwray is found dead and where
Gittes has his nose sliced by a thug
played by Polanski.

In real life: The location's real name is the Stone Canyon Reservoir, one of the major reservoirs near the L.A. basin. It's in the Santa Monica Mountains above Bel-Air and close to Benedict Canyon (not far from where Polanski's wife, Sharon Tate, was murdered by the Manson family).

Sylbert: The sluice that the body was in when they pulled Hollis up—that's there, too.

11. Point Fermin Park

Early in the movie, Gittes follows Hollis Mulwray to Point Fermin and watches him walk down a bluff to the Pacific, where fresh water is being dumped in the middle of a drought. Gittes lounges in a suit on the bluff at twilight with a lighthouse in the distance. This is also where Gittes puts stopwatches beneath the wheels of Hollis Mulwray's car in a cul-de-sac.

In real life: This is Point Fermin, a public park on the coast of San Pedro.

Sylbert: I made a cutout of a lighthouse about 25 feet high. . . . It was a quarter-mile away from the camera so you could make it look like a lighthouse. The real Point Fermin lighthouse was not in operation at the time.

12. Chinatown

In the film's last sequence—the only one set in Chinatown—Evelyn is shot to death by Detective Loach and Katherine is whisked away by Noah Cross, in front of Khan's apartment at the screen address 1712 Alameda.

In real life: It wasn't anywhere near Alameda, but was in fact on the west side of North Spring Street in Chinatown, just south of Ord Street.

Sylbert: It was a narrow little street—the only area of Chinatown that could be photographed easily. The other streets were too wide. It had everything. I had to do nothing except block out a modern garage.

-PAUL IORIO