Where Trojans are in bloom

The area anchored by USC and Exposition Park abounds in education, edibles and Sinatra-bilia.

By Kathy A. McDonald

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Southwest of downtown L.A., University Park is an enclave filled with cultural institutions, the grand homes typical of West Adams, and a few notable new restaurants. At its center is the University of Southern California's main campus, which is bordered by historical North University Park and the gardens and science museums of Exposition Park to the south.

Showbiz connections

Although USC's athletics are renowned, the school's grads have also had a huge impact in film and TV. A hefty donation from film school alum and "Star Wars" director George Lucas funded a new School of Cinematic Arts complex; Lucas also drafted the buildings' Mediterranean-revival design. Public tours are scheduled through the Cinematic Arts office of admission ([213] 740-8358). The Norris Theatre lobby also displays a collection of Frank Sinatra's memorabilia, including platinum and gold records, two Oscars and a Medal of Honor.

Art for education's sake

The intimate USC Fisher Museum of Art (823 Exposition Blvd., [213] 740-4561; www.uscfishermuseumofart.org) exhibits Polaroid and black-and-white photos by Andy Warhol (through April 18). Nearby the classic Art Deco building is a sculpture garden and artist Jenny Holzer's "Blacklist," a work in marble and stone addressing the travails of the filmmakers known as the Hollywood Ten, blacklisted during the McCarthy Era.

Points north
With an estimated 10,000 students living in the area, red and gold are the local colors and beach cruiser bikes are everywhere. Sit on the wide outdoor porch of the 1897-built, sporty 29th St. Café (2827 Hoover St. [213] 746-2929; www.thetwonine.com), known as the "2-9" to 'SC undergrads, where burgers, wraps and baskets of fries are staples. Further north off Hoover, the Italian wine bar bacaro l.a. (2308 S. Union Ave., [213] 748-7205; www.bacarolosangeles.com) specializes in the Venetian-style small plates called cichetti -- elevated bar snacks -- and 20 wines by the glass plus Moretti beer on tap.

**Victoriana**

North University Park is also home to the Doheny Campus of Mount St. Mary's College with its famed centerpiece, the Doheny Mansion (10 Chester Place, [213] 477-2962), built in 1899. Public tours, offered five times a year, showcase the manse's golden Tiffany glass dome. Set in a late-Victorian mansion, the Inn at 657 (663 W. 23rd St., [213] 741-2200; www.patsysinn657.com) is a rare Los Angeles bed-and-breakfast. A hearty breakfast and intelligent conversation are part of the stay.

**Expansion plans**

The light rail Expo Line, now under construction along Exposition Boulevard, will be completed in 2010 with a stop just south of USC. Also underway is a new ecology wing on the California Science Center (39th and Figueroa streets, [323] 724-3623; www.californiasciencecenter.org) and the renovation of the original 1913 building and rotunda at the Natural History Museum (900 Exposition Blvd., [213] 763-3466; www.nhm.org). Amid all the construction, enjoy a peaceful moment in the city's 7.5-acre Exposition Park Rose Garden (980 Menlo Ave. at Exposition Boulevard, [213] 748-4772). April and May are the peak blooming months for the 15,000 rosebushes.

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University Park

This neighborhood includes North University Park.