

Disney's Hollywood Studios Then and Now: A Photographer's Perspective

by Mark Sties, *PassPorter Guest Contributor*

It's easy to fall in love with Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World, a romanticized version of Tinseltown in its golden era.

The park dedication plaque proclaims it is "the Hollywood that never was and always will be." As in all Walt Disney World parks, Disney Imagineers totally immerse guests into "the show" appealing to all our senses. The park provides enough visual "eye-cand" to make backup camera batteries and extra memory cards essential.

Books, travel podcasts and websites reveal that many of the charming building facades are inspired by actual structures in Hollywood and other parts of Los Angeles. For instance, The Great Movie Ride building is a replica of Grauman's Chinese Theater (today known as the [TCL Chinese Theater](#)). The architecture of Disney's Beverly Sunset Theater is influenced by the former Warner Beverly Hills Theater. Other theaters, shops and food locations in the park are also based on real architecture.

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□ This fascinates me as a professional travel and tourism photographer. I produce "historical photomerges," which are seamless combinations of archival architectural images and photos from their present day locations. Various web sites only show side-by-side photos of Disney's Hollywood Studios facades and Hollywood architecture. My personal blog series entitled [The Hollywood Studios Series](#) includes photomerges to help others gain an even deeper appreciation for the park. Each entry provides trivia on Los Angeles architecture and insight into how each photomerge was achieved.

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□ Regular photomerges are challenging. First there are hours of research and permissions work to obtain the right archival image. You then have to travel to the present day location and perfectly match the angle and the lighting from the archival image. Creating successful merges from Disney's Hollywood Studios is a whole different story though. The facades at the park are obviously at a completely different location and are usually composites, not full scale replicas. You also have obstructions like a giant Sorcerer Mickey Hat, refreshment carts or palm trees right where you need to snap your photo from. Each photomerge requires creative problem solving, patience, a sensitivity to other guests and respect for Disney Park rules. Being a tad bit obsessive comes in handy too!

For decades the streamline modern style Pan Pacific Auditorium hosted events like the circus, beauty pageants, orchestra performances, car shows, home shows, political rallies, ice hockey, basketball, pro wrestling, even a performance by Elvis. Tragically, the Pan Pacific burned to the ground in May of 1989. Fortunately Disney built [this facade](#) earlier the same month! The entrance to Disney's Hollywood Studios carries the torch, welcoming people from all over the globe to enjoy world-class attractions and entertainment. In 2002, the site of the original auditorium was turned into a recreational facility called Pan Pacific Park which also imitates the original architectural style and features one roof turret.

□ If you [look closely](#) you'll see Disney's version isn't an exact replica. The spacing between the roof turrets and the style of entryways beneath are dramatically different. The modern entrance is shot in similar daylight from a number of angles because it is impossible to match the original scene. The turrets and marquee from the archival image are preserved and carefully blended into Disney's facade with careful masking, color tinting and grayscaleing.

□ [Fire Station No. 1](#) was built in 1941 and is another example of streamline modern architecture. The station is still in service today and can be seen here on [Google Street View](#).

□ Like all the other merges in this series, this location presents special challenges. The real life fire station is much larger, with different proportions. I am retaining the bottom of the fire station to show the vintage vehicles and firemen. The lamppost in the modern Disney shot is removed. The marquee and area above the door to the right in the archival photo are manipulated with Photoshop to make the blend more believable and interesting. In real life the billboard over the Disney facade features characters from the movie Who Framed Roger Rabbit. That image was Photoshopped with another billboard from Hollywood Boulevard because Disney protects how and where their characters are displayed.

□ I encourage you to check out more of The Hollywood Studios Series and the sources below before your next trip to Disney's Hollywood Studios. As you wait for rope drop, hold your spot on the parade route or casually stroll to your next attraction you'll have a deeper appreciation and heightened experience in the park.

□ Sources and more information: □

* □ □ The Imagineers, The Imagineering Field Guide to Disney's Hollywood Studios at Walt Disney World. Disney Editions, 2010. Print. □

* □ □ [Wikipedia.com](#) □

* □ □ [Laist.com](#) □

- * Yesterland.com
- * StudiosCentral.com
- * LAFire.com
- * The Library of Congress, American Memory Collection

About The Author: Mark Sties expresses his passion for history, architecture and tourism through captivating professional photography. His gallery blog, including more from [The Hollywood Studios Series](#), is located at [FinePhotoGraphics.com](#).

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