

As the entertainment industry evolves, Tinseltown is in a state of transformation. We look behind the scenes of the USA's creative powerhouse

LA STORY

WORDS JENNY SOUTHAN



The prop house at Warner Bros Studios has four floors, each the size of an American football field. It's said to be the largest prop house in the world... though there's one under construction in China, by Wanda Studios, that may soon surpass it. From Tiffany lamps and presidential desks to oil paintings and telephones from every era, there are almost half a million items available for rental. It's like walking through an antiques shop on an industrial scale, with all manner of curiosities to catch the eye along the way. Here's a gold ladder signed by Lady Gaga, an Iron Throne from *Game of Thrones*, a cobwebbed skeleton from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the piano from *Casablanca*. Outside, huge trucks are loaded up with eclectic hauls of cargo to be delivered to the many sets and studios located across the city of Los Angeles and beyond.

According to Film LA (the official film office for LA), California spent US\$30 billion on film and TV production in 2016, with the average movie budget being just over US\$75 million. Along with Paramount, Universal, 20th Century Fox, Disney and MGM, Warner Bros has been at the heart of filmmaking in Hollywood for decades. Today it has 35 cavernous sound stages and 14 exterior sets, including a New York Street complete with fake subway entrances, shop, hotel, theatre, diner and residential facades ready for dressing. "If you have the dime, we have the time," says my guide, explaining that movies and shows don't have to be Warner Bros productions to shoot here. Long-standing TV shows that have been filmed in this location include *Ellen* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

ONLINE STREAMING

Employing more than 141,000 people, entertainment is the most important pillar of LA's "creative economy". Last year it generated US\$190 billion and employed one in eight people. Consequently, Los Angeles has been dubbed the most creative city in the US. But, disruption is afoot. The industry is changing, with online streaming shaking up Hollywood in a way it's never experienced before. Even social media companies such as Facebook, with a new campus in LA's Playa Vista, are investing heavily in bespoke video content (Facebook's Watch video-on-demand platform launched in the US in summer 2017).

In 2017, Netflix spent US\$6 billion on original programming, and is reportedly planning to plough another US\$7-8 billion



THE AVERAGE
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into dramas and documentaries in 2018. You only have to drive down Sunset Boulevard to see the literal rise of extended format programming, with huge billboards advertising *The Crown* (Netflix), *Big Little Lies* (HBO), *The Problem with Apu* (TruTV) and *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* (Amazon).

"There aren't enough sound stages in LA to cope with demand," says Chris Rico, director of innovation at the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. Competing with Hollywood's traditional studios, Netflix has now signed a ten-year lease for 52,000 sqm of space from Hollywood's Sunset Bronson Studios (the original Warner Bros location and where 1927's *The Jazz Singer* was filmed), including sound stages, production studios and a shiny new 14-floor Gensler-designed office. Amy Dee, Netflix's director of global real estate, workplace and procurement told the *Los Angeles*

ABOVE:
Sunset
Boulevard
LEFT: LA
street art

HOW TO MAKE IT IN HOLLYWOOD

MARC CLEARY, WRITER/
DIRECTOR FROM DUBLIN

"Choreography brought me to the US. It gave me a lot of confidence, supplied me with a visa and introduced me to great people, but somewhere deep inside I knew I wanted more. I began writing and, one night, got chatting to a couple of strangers in a bar. At the end of the night, one of them gave me his card and said: 'If you have any sense you will send me the first 40 pages tomorrow.' Turns out it was one of Hollywood's biggest producers, who later became one of my greatest mentors.

"My first short film, *Pepper*, was a big success. I had the great fortune of working with a phenomenal cast and crew. It made my job so much easier and was a truly wonderful collaborative experience. That acted as my calling card and from that moment it was a lot easier to find people to work with, or have people put faith in me as a writer and director. Finding the right representation has been the biggest challenge.

"Right now I'm developing a TV show based on a seven-book series set in Northern Ireland, which is really exciting. The work I am most proud of has been my last two pilots. My first pilot was sold to Warner Bros almost overnight and my second is currently in development.

"Inspiration and drive are what make LA a unique place to work as a creative. Everywhere you look there are movie billboards, premieres, Q&A events and workshops. It's hard to be around all of that and not be inspired. The same goes for the drive and dedication from a lot of the people here. It's difficult to climb up the ladder without major backing, but thankfully you can't throw a stone without hitting someone as hungry as you are. It's about finding the right people with that drive, and also making the choice to keep creating content until you find the project worth pushing."

CREATIVE ECONOMY IN NUMBERS

US\$190.3 BILLION

Financial output of the creative economy

1 IN 8

Ratio of people in LA working in the creative economy (both freelance and salaried)

12 SECTORS

The creative economy includes: entertainment, fashion, architecture, interior design, art galleries, digital media, furniture/decorative arts, communication arts, industrial design, toys, visual and performing arts, and fine and performing arts schools

759,000

Total jobs (direct, indirect and induced) in the creative economy

429,400

Direct salary/freelance jobs in the creative economy (489,500 in New York)

4 MILLION

Population of LA (New York has 8.5 million)

141,400

Jobs in entertainment

87,600

Jobs in fashion

33,800

Jobs in printing and publishing

5.1%

Predicted creative industry employment growth over the next five years

US\$56.9 BILLION

Total wages earned from the creative economy

US\$2 TRILLION

Total economic output of California

11%

Percentage of economic output from creative economy in California

SIXTH IN THE WORLD

If California was a country, it would be the world's sixth-largest economy

NUMBER ONE

California's ranking among US states for number of people working in the creative economy



EMPLOYMENT IN LA'S CREATIVE ECONOMY WILL GROW BY MORE THAN 5% IN FOUR YEARS



The lifestyle is, of course, very different. During my time in Los Angeles I went to an afternoon soiree at a beautiful low-rise house in West Hollywood. Out the back, people had gathered in the garden by the pool (it was still warm enough for this in December) to listen to a string quartet perform renditions of Schubert and Gershwin, an ensemble crowd-funded by the

Times: "We wanted to be where Hollywood came to life. Even though we're a cutting-edge tech company, we take very seriously the history of the entertainment industry and its roots in Hollywood."

Meanwhile, Amazon is moving from Santa Monica to Culver Studios (near Sony Pictures in Culver City) where films such as *Citizen Kane* were once made. Apple, too, is keen to muscle its way into Hollywood production and is apparently on the lookout for a permanent studio base to create original content (it plans to spend US\$4.2 billion on programming by 2022). Over the next year, Google's Youtube is funding more than 40 movies and shows for its site, which is a state-of-the-art production facility in Playa Vista. It occupies a former aircraft hangar once used by legendary film director and aviator Howard Hughes, but now refurbished with giant green screens. BuzzFeed Motion Pictures has been entrenched in Hollywood's Siren Studios for the last couple of years as it looks for somewhere bigger, while, conversely, famed director James Cameron is renting studio space 25 miles away in Manhattan Beach, where he is filming his *Avatar* sequels.

BILLION DOLLAR BABIES

There have been all manner of bankruptcies, mergers and takeovers in Tinseltown, and new deals are being forged all the time. But the most headline-grabbing deal in recent times was the announcement in December 2017 of a planned US\$52.4 billion sale of the majority of Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox empire (including the movie and TV studio) to the Disney Company. If it happens, by 2019 Disney will have added two new streaming platforms – one for sports and one for entertainment. Disney will also be gaining control of homegrown LA streaming (video on demand) company Hulu (Fox, Comcast and Time Warner also have stakes in it), which spent an estimated US\$2.5 billion on original content last year.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Paul Smith store on Melrose Avenue; LA's iconic palms; the subway

A report from the Otis College of Art and Design predicts that, over the next four years, employment in LA's creative economy will grow by more than 5 per cent across sectors including entertainment, fashion, printing and publishing, architecture, interior design and digital media (the fact box on page 28 gives details). It's easy to believe when people speak of the flood of New Yorkers, for example, moving here for more opportunities, cheaper rents and sunnier climes.

Rico says: "I find that if you asked New Yorkers ten years ago if they'd ever live in Los Angeles, they would have said 'No way, New York is the place to be, I would never live in LA, it's too big, there's too much traffic.' But relative to Manhattan it's a bargain. Whereas they will have been living in a 300 sq ft apartment there, for a comparable amount of money, here they can have 1,000 sq ft. I think for people who are artistic, being in a place that's conducive to being in a good mood can be beneficial for their work. After getting used to a frenetic pace of life, they come to LA and it's as if they have excess bandwidth. It's infused new energy into the city."

guests through a platform called Group Muse. Once the performance was over, I overheard two New York expats getting heated about how spontaneous (or not) you can be in LA. "In New York you could leave the house at six and walk to the theatre for a show," said one. "That would depend where you live," said the other. "In LA, I love being able to jump in my car to visit a friend whenever I like." The fact is, you do have to drive everywhere here, and there is no true centre; rather, as someone witty once said, "72 suburbs in search of a city".

TINSELTOWN GETS CEREBRAL

Many people have dismissed Los Angeles as a vapid place to live, but its growing status as a cultural capital is gaining respect. It's much deserved, when you consider it has some of the best museums and galleries in the country, including the Getty, The Broad and LACMA, which will be expanded by 2023 thanks to a US\$600 million investment that will see its campus extended over Wilshire Boulevard with the addition of the LACMA Building for the Permanent Collection. (The new nearby Wilshire/Fairfax subway station will open at around the same time.) Running from September 2017 to January 2018, "Pacific Standard Time LA/LA" was an ambitious four-month exhibition of Latin American and Latino culture with works by 1,100 artists from 45 countries displayed across more than 70 venues in LA and the wider state. It's endeavours like these that are inspiring an influx of talent.

With a growing community of creatives comes innovation, which means LA is also leading the way when it comes to everything from food trends to the experience economy (Airbnb Experiences lists dozens of activities you can book with a local, such as vinyl record shopping with a Grammy award-winning artist). Los Angeles has been a health-conscious city for decades, but it's amazing to see the number of juice bars, organic supermarkets, protein

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