

Los Angeles is not a desert

A guide to native plant spaces

text and images by Christine Atkinson



Why do native plants matter?

It seems that every book, article, and essay on native plants has a section where the author makes a case for why they matter. Many of them are far more knowledgeable and eloquent than what I will say here but, in the spirit of joining in, here is my take on why native plants matter. They smell amazing. Many of our plants do not have scented flowers but scented foliage. When visiting the gardens in this guide, especially in late spring, the deep smell of sage will hit you. In the summer and fall the softer smell of dust, heat and what I always associate with oak trees, comes out, and is best experienced at dusk. It is the smell of enduring and of waiting. They are more economic. Santa Monica City College ran a decade long study of the cost difference between a native front garden and a traditional front garden. The native garden used less water, less chemicals and required less maintenance. Because these plants evolved here, the hot dry summers and the variable winter weather patterns are all things the plants live and thrive on. They connect you to the land and to where you live. And they are beautiful. They are unexpected and wild.

However, if none of these reasons touch you, perhaps this will. Our ecosystem is dying. Not just here, everywhere, all over the earth. This is due, in part, to climate change, but also because for centuries we have occupied space that was a functioning ecosystem and, instead of allowing that ecosystem to continue, we filled it with exotic plants. Alarming report after alarming report creeps into the news feed, “billions of birds are lost”, “where are all the insects?” “monarchs may go extinct in our lifetime”. Why? Every year there is less and less habitat for insects to reproduce and then less and less food up the food chain. As Douglas Tallamy says in *Bringing Nature Home*, “Like it or not gardeners have become important players in the management of our nation’s wildlife”. A shocking 35 percent of all animal species are herbaceous insects and 90 percent of those are specialists, meaning that they are host specific in the plants that they eat. Therefore, without those plants they cannot live and reproduce. In short, planting plants native to your region means that you are supporting and reconnecting parts of the food chain and that your yard, window sill, pot outside your office, is a functioning member of the ecosystem.

We live in a unique place. We have more native species than the other 47 contiguous states combined, and 40 percent of those are endemic. And with those thousands of native plants come the plethora of insects that feed on them. In fact, Pinnacles National Park has the highest bee diversity in the world, at an astounding 400 species of bees found within the park boundaries. Without native plants those insects die. And without those insects, the animals that rely on them die as well.

There is no untouched and functioning wilderness, we have only fragmented and damaged pockets. To help prevent the collapse of the ecosystem we can reintroduce native plants into our urban and suburban spaces. It is rather beautifully referred to as rewilding.





What is this guide book?

When you are known as a “plant person” people ask you questions. What should they plant, what kind of trees should they get and, of course, which of them are edible. Often I find that when you suggest something that they have not seen before, something that does not fit within the internalized model of landscaping, their attention starts to falter. The simple truth is that we do not know what our ecosystem is meant to look like because so few of us have ever actually seen it. Where, in the urban spaces of Los Angeles, ruled by palms, magnolias, jacarandas and canary island pines are we meant to find it? Perhaps in the spaces found in this guide.

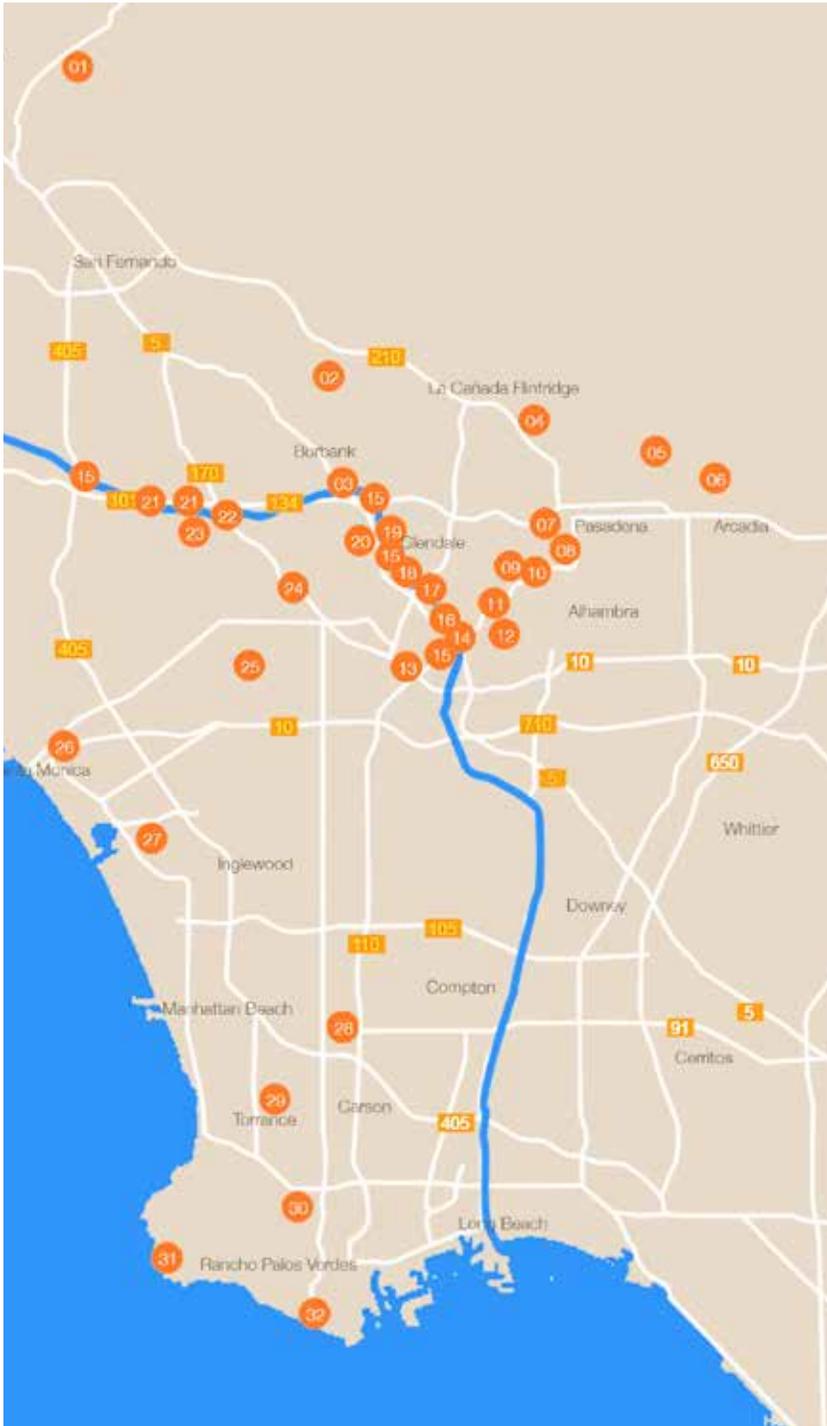
I have compiled a group of gardens and spaces that have native plants. Some of them are simple, and little more than strips along the roadside and plantings in the parking lot, and some are over twenty years in the making and outstandingly beautiful. But they are all about hope, about looking to the future. About understanding that even plants in a strip between a road and a building are better than nothing, and that every space has the possibility to be an ecosystem. There are only 30 spaces that have made it into this guide, though I assure you that this is only a fraction of those that I eventually plan on visiting, photographing and writing about. Think of this version of the guide as a proof of concept, or a rough draft that was created in conjunction with the exhibition “Los Angeles is not a Desert”. I chose these spaces because they, whether as a demonstration garden or a restored habitat, in some way have planted native plants. If there was a demonstration garden at a site that also had preserved space, as in the Madrona Marsh, I focused on the planned garden. The goal of this guide is to provide a sense of how a native garden looks. There are a few spaces like Placerita Canyon that don’t really fall into either category but the spaces have so much information to offer that it felt wrong to exclude them. Another important qualification was that they should be free. This did leave out a few of my favorite spaces, Descanso Gardens and the Southern Railroad in Griffith Park, for example. Both spaces have “tiny trains” that you can ride and the Southern Railroad route runs through a native garden. I mean, how can you not love that? But admission prices get expensive and it seems wrong to devote time to spaces that you have to pay for when there is so much going on that is open to everyone. Because that is part of the point, isn’t it? Nature and beauty and a sense of connection with the world is not only for those who can pay. By now, it is no surprise that the poor and people of color are disproportionately affected by bad environmental choices and then priced out of an area once it starts to see restoration and improvement.

I admit that I did not start this project with anything more in mind than native plants. It came as a surprise to trace the history of Los Angeles through these spaces. A history of activism, of communities that fought against corporations and figures in history. The history of the Tongva and of Spanish colonization, of people who wanted to make Los Angeles better and of Nike missiles. It is a history that is often dark and often uncomfortable to confront. In this guide I included an overview of the history of many of these places, though there is often more complete information at the locations themselves.

Something to keep in mind when looking at the images and visiting the spaces in this guide is that I took these photos in the summer of 2021. Both 2020 and 2021 were hard years, with winters that had very little rain and abnormally hot summers and we are, of course, in the throes of a 22-year-long drought. And, of course, there is the pandemic. Many of these spaces rely on volunteers for their maintenance, which was not possible in the days of the quarantine. If this is your first foray into what a native plant garden looks like, keep in mind that some of these are spaces under a lot of environmental stress, with limited access to care.

I hope that those new to the ecology of Southern California will have a similar experience that I myself had. The more you learn, the more this part of the world makes sense, the seasons come into focus, the hillsides are no longer brown blobs but places filled with generous buckwheats and ever hardy laurel sumacs. I hope that you feel your aesthetic change, that you start to favor what is untamed and useful, to what is predictable but ultimately barren. I hope that the spaces in this guide ask you to rethink how we view our urban landscapes. That when we have the choice we can create something that gives back, rather than just takes, that we are not here for ourselves alone.





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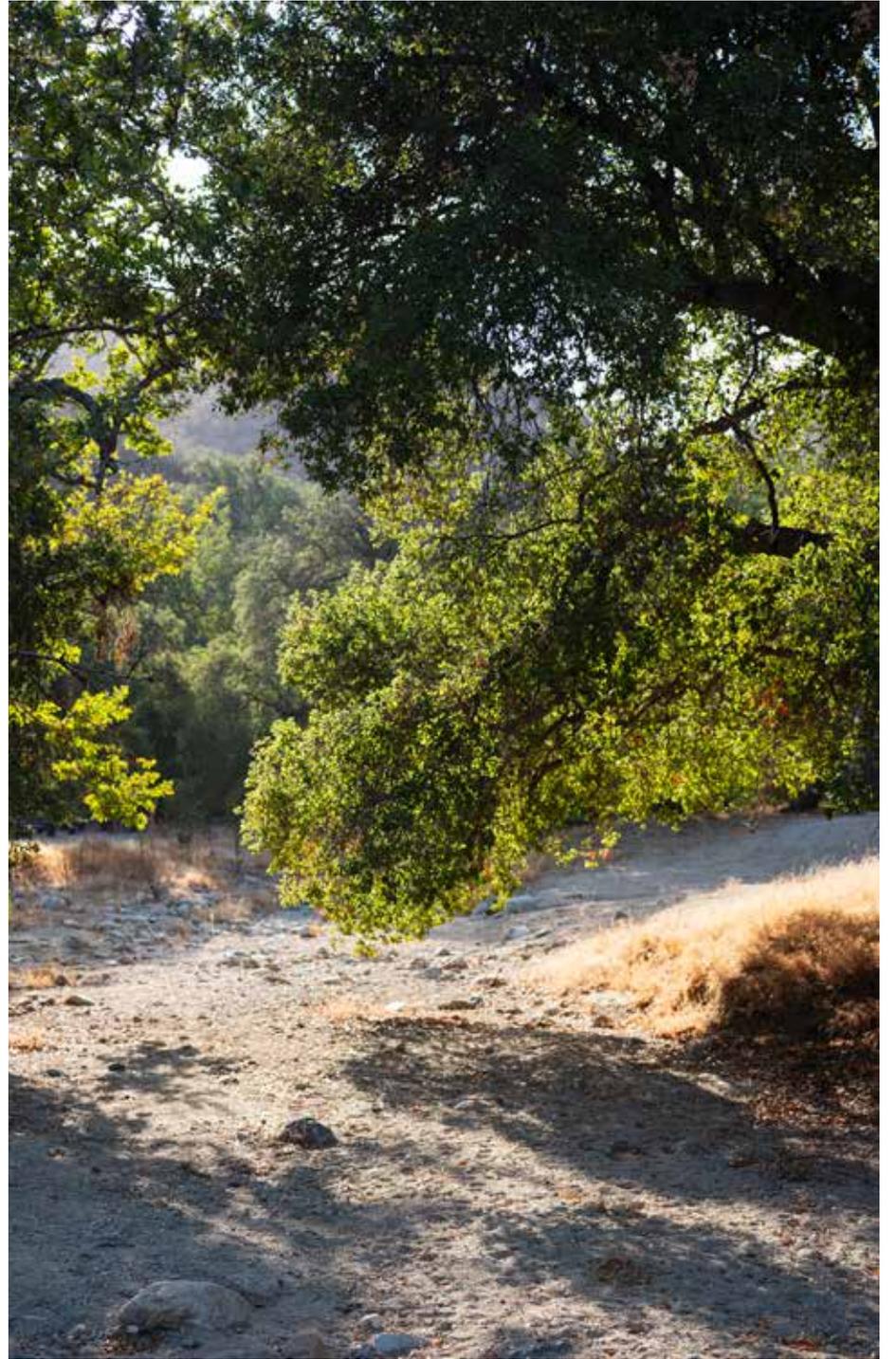
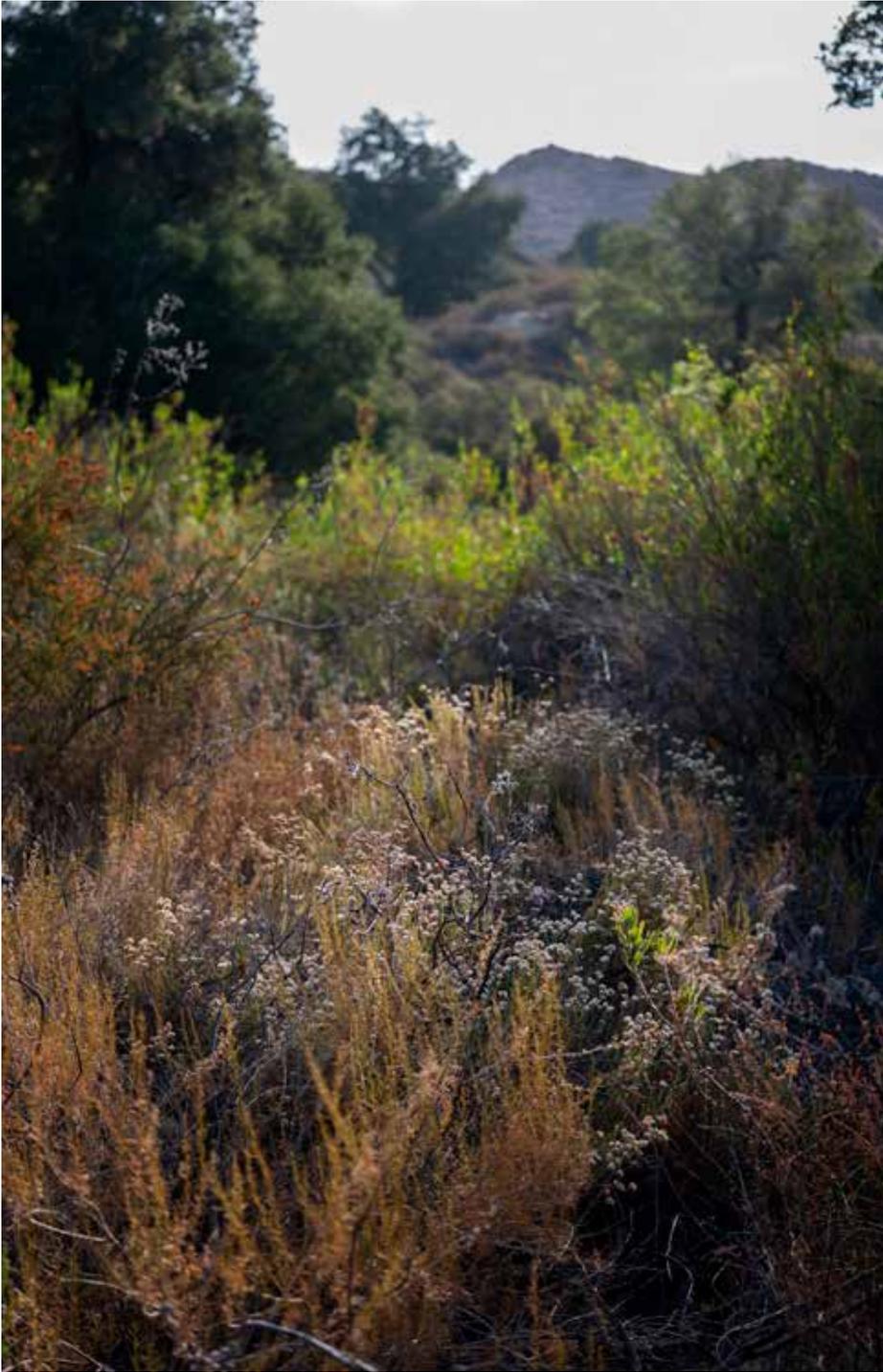
1. Placerita Canyon Natural Area and Nature Center

The story is told like this: around noon on March 9th, 1842, on his 40th birthday, Francisco Lopez fell asleep under an oak tree and dreamed of floating in a pool of gold. When he awoke, he walked across the small creek to a grove of sycamores, used his knife to pull up some wild onions and found gold clinging to the roots. This would be the first documented discovery of gold in California, predating Sutter Mill by six years. Gloriously named “The Oak of the Golden Dream”, the tree that he slept beneath and the creek that he crossed are both to be found at the Placerita Canyon State Park. Of course, the facts of the discovery are less miraculous, for Lopez was not simply a rancher wandering through the countryside. He had studied mineralogy at the Colegio de Minería in Mexico City and was daylighting as a rancher while looking for gold on his niece’s land. There had been reports of gold in the region for a while, since the 1790’s and as recently as 1833, so this was not a shot in the dark. While the first, this was a smaller discovery than that at Sutter Mill, which may be the reason that it has been so overshadowed. Also, it is important to note that, at this time, Southern California, or Alta California, was under Mexican rule, making this a Mexican discovery of gold. Sutter Mill, on the other hand, was firmly American. However much of the story you wish to believe or not, it cannot diminish the beauty of Placerita Canyon or the oak itself. The Oak of the Golden Dream resides in a grove of sycamore and other oaks. The only disappointing feature is the awkwardly placed road that runs above and close to the tree. The Heritage Trail that leads you from the Nature Center and parking lot to the Oak is paved and smooth. An information guide for the trail is available at the Nature Center and online.

The Oak of the Golden Dream is not the only attraction of the canyon. You can also find the Walker Cabin, the homestead of the Walker family who owned and lived in the canyon before it was sold to the state as a park. Not far from the Walker Cabin is a butterfly garden with a lovely pond underneath a large oak tree surrounded by flowering plants. The park is filled with wonderful hiking trails. The Botany and Ecology Trails offer an informative look into the plants of the area and both feature identification labels on the plants. This is an invaluable tool when learning about our native ecology and is a rare find outside of a managed garden. Starting to the north side of the Nature Center is the Botany Trail. The Botany trail itself is only about a quarter of a mile long, however, it combines with the .65 mile long Ecology Trail. Both trails have labeled plants for identification and interpretive markers for the guide maps found in the Nature Center. The full loop takes visitors past a recreation of a Tataviam camp of the people native to the area. The trail takes you through seasonal riparian areas, through oakwood lands and up into the hillside chaparral. The crest of the trail gives a lovely view of the canyon. Far from the manicured gardens, the Placerita Canyon offers a close look at the mountain habitats of Southern California. It is a gloriously beautiful and wild place, just keep an eye out for poison oak.

Placerita Canyon Nature Center and State Park
9152 Placerita Canyon Rd
Newhall, CA 91321





2. Theodore Payne Foundation

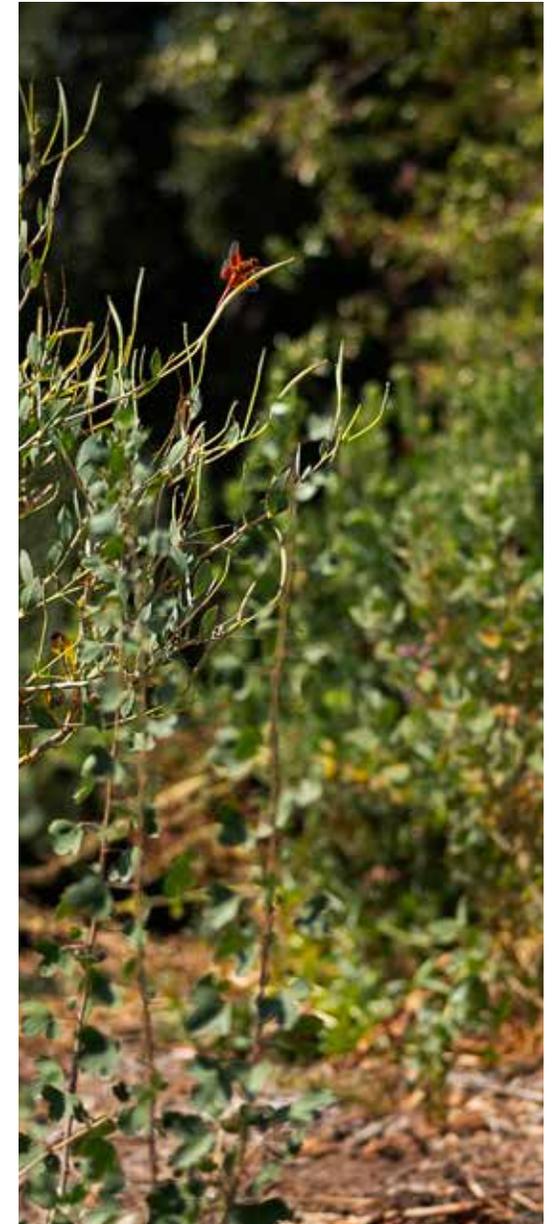
Theodore Payne was born in Church Brampton, Northamptonshire, England in 1872. His parents worked on the Manor Farm in the Althorp Estates. There, on the estate, is a California Sequoia that was brought to England in seed form. The tree still stands to this day. By age twelve Theodore's mother and father had passed away and he was sent to Ackworth Academy, a Quaker boarding school, where he studied natural history and botany. Payne was apprenticed to J Cheal & Sons, where he learned the nursery and seed business and assisted in the horticultural installations for the Crystal Palace. On June 10, 1893 Payne arrived in New York and traveled west to California where he worked as an estate manager and then as a seed salesman for the Germain Fruit and Seed Company from 1893 to 1903. At the end of 1903 he was able to purchase his own nursery at 440 S. Broadway in Los Angeles and then a few years later the nursery moved to 345 S. Main Street. It was then that he began to specialize in native California plants. As his business and influence grew, Payne seemed to touch every important native plant space that existed at the time. He helped to create gardens for Pomona College, Occidental College, Washington Park in Pasadena and installed a five acre California Wild Garden at the corner of Figueroa and Martin Luther King Blvd. It contained 262 species of native plants. He provided insight and plant materials for the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, assisted in the original design of the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden and then later, in 1951, helped with the relocation of the garden to Claremont. Payne worked with the Descanso Gardens to install a wildflower meadow and native plant area, both before and after it was sold to the Los Angeles Estate.

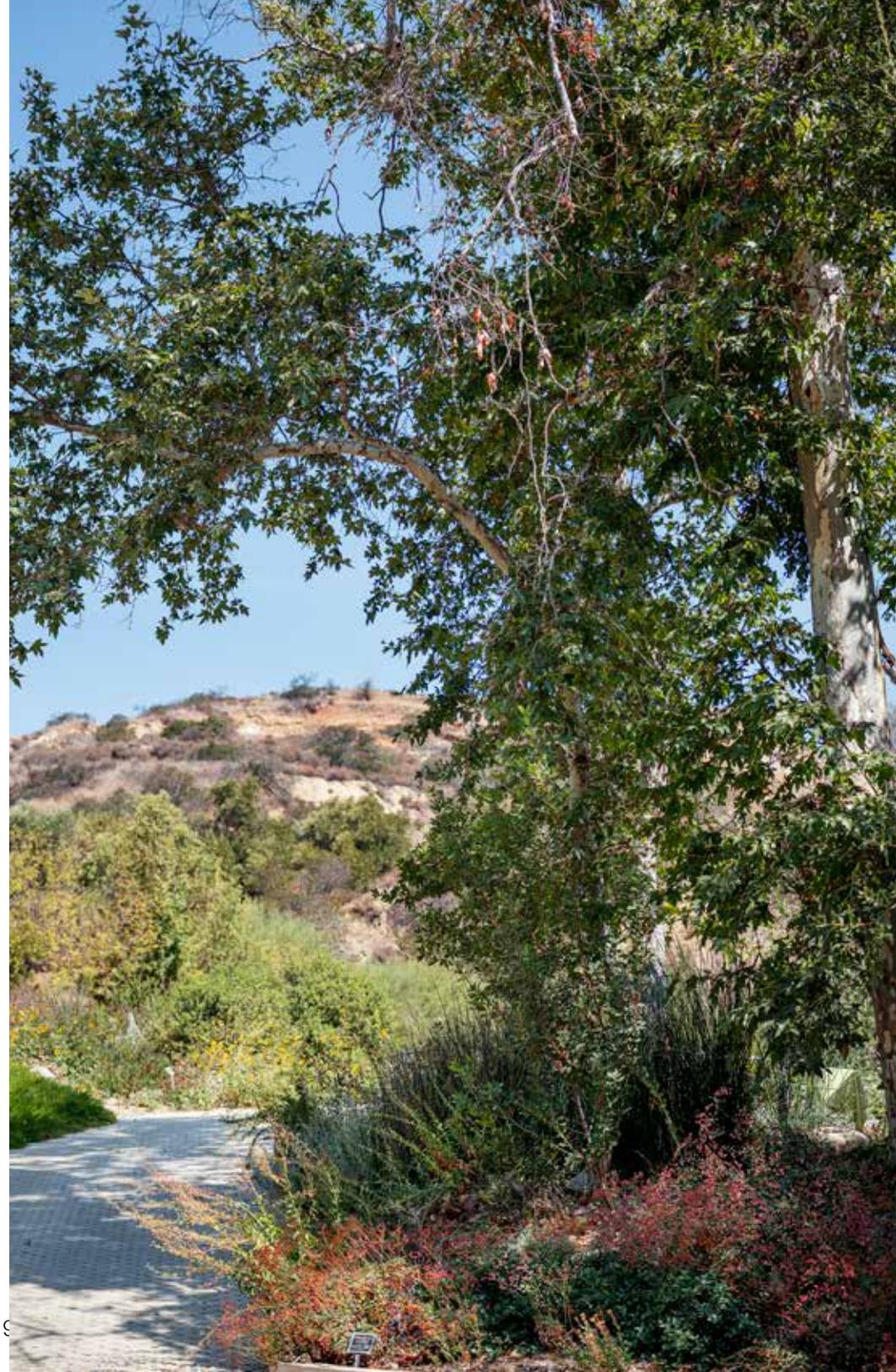
During the 1930's a large portion of his land was taken by the city to make stormwater improvements and, in 1941, the bank foreclosed on the land. He was, however, able to lease a small portion of what was the nursery and focused only on California native plants and seeds. The Theodore Payne Foundation (TPF) was created in 1960 and Payne and the Foundation started looking for a new site for the nursery. The Foundation was almost moved to the Whittier Narrows but, upon learning that they intended to sell plants, the Army Corps withdrew permission. Three years later Theodore Payne passed away at the age of 91. Not long afterward, in 1966, Eddie Merrill, a fellow nurseryman and friend of Theodore Payne, donated twenty acres in Sun Valley to the Foundation, where it has remained to this day.

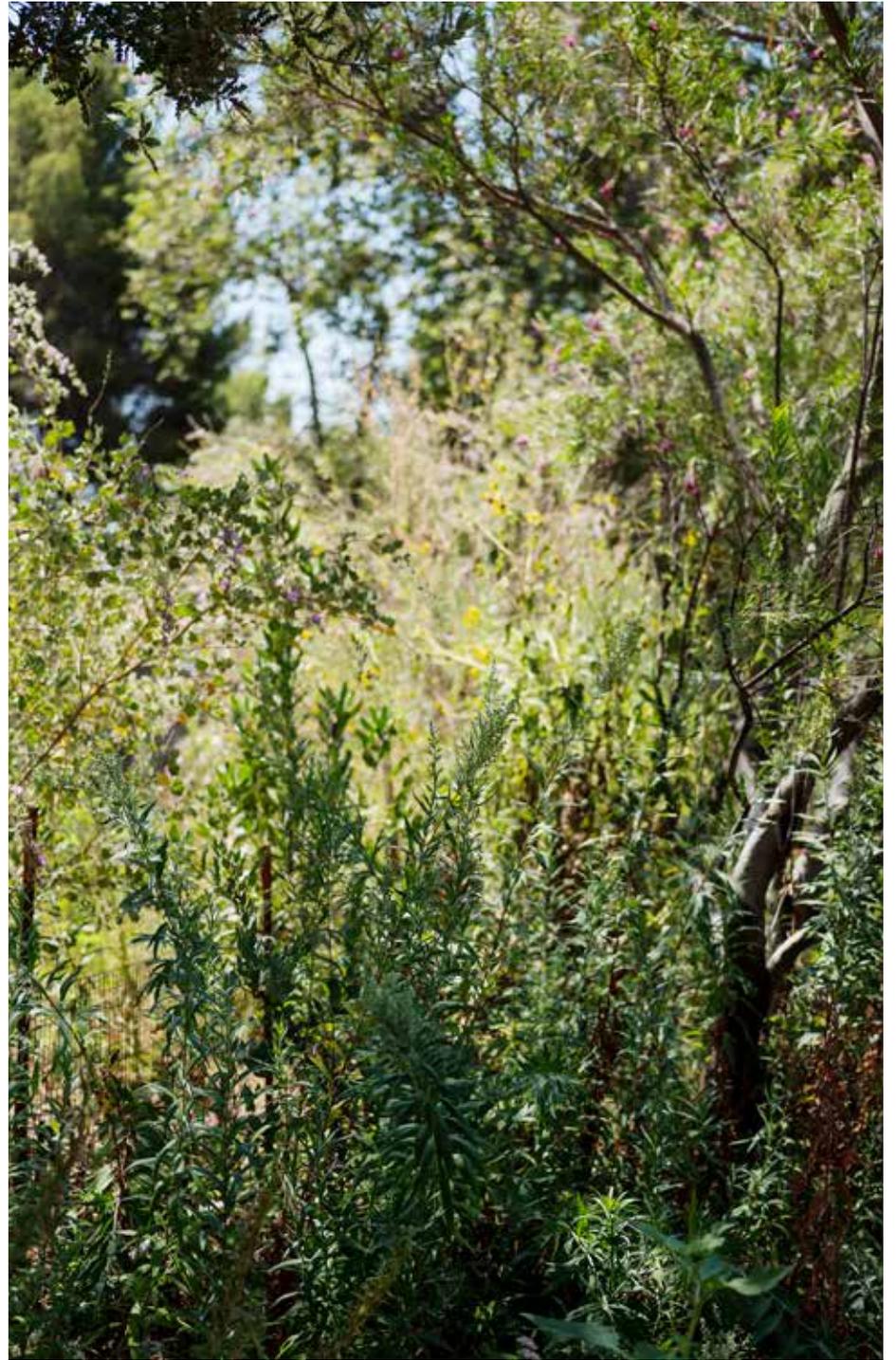
The TPF, like its founder, is a huge voice in the native plant community of Southern California. Their goal is to increase the presence and the understanding of native plants. They started teaching courses in 1976 with a propagation course taught by Burnnell Yarick. In the spring they run the "Wildflower Hotline", by phone and online, which provides information on what wildflowers are blooming at the moment and where to see them. In 2009 TPF launched a Native Plant Library of more than 1,000 entries of native plants with guides and horticultural information. In 2011 they received a \$930,000 grant from the State of California for the construction of educational facilities. These facilities are now surrounded by beautiful demonstration gardens. In the spring TPF hosts the Native Plant Garden Tour, a self guided tour of public and private native plant gardens throughout LA. 2017 saw the completion of the La Fetra Nature Education Center, with two new classrooms, an amphitheater, interpretive signage and replanted demonstration gardens. 2018 saw the creation of the Long Live LA seed bank.

There are several demonstration gardens on site, those surrounding the headquarters, the La Fetra Education Center, and the Fire Management Demonstration Garden. The nursery grounds themselves have many beautiful plants as well and in the spring there is the Wildflower Hill Trail. The TPF is an irreplaceable resource for native plants in Southern California.

Theodore Payne Foundation
10459 Tuxford St
Sun Valley, CA 91352







4. Micro Forest

The Miyawaki Method was developed by Japanese botanist, Akira Miyawaki, in the 1980s. The method uses densely planted native trees and shrubs to create a multi-story micro forest. The density encourages plants to grow faster and create stronger mycorrhiza connections. The plot is monitored, watered and weeded for the first two years and then it becomes self-sufficient. This method has provided interesting results. The dense plantings are said to produce mature forests in 20 years as opposed to the 200 year timeline of traditional forest plantings. There is said to be a huge increase in biodiversity and this can help restore depletion after destructive deforestation. The Miyawaki Method has been used all over the world, in over 15 different countries, and now there is a micro forest in Griffith Park.

Planted in June of 2021, the micro forest was created by the executive director of the Los Angeles Parks Foundation, Carolyn Ramsay, the president of the Hancock Garden Club, Michaela Burschinger, and the program manager of the Los Angeles Parks Foundation, Katherine Pakradouni, and was planted by volunteers. The forest is only 1,000 square feet, contains 145 plants planted two feet apart and a curving path through the center. It was important not to place plants of similar species or heights next to each other and to avoid making rows. This helps create healthy competition between the plants and accelerates the growing process. Most of the plants, Mexican elderberry, lemonade berry, California wild rose, mugwort, and coastal live oak, came from seeds started in the soon to be reopened Commonwealth Nursery.

There are plans to create other micro forests in other parts of the city, specifically in urban areas that currently have no biodiversity, and then to monitor the micro forest for its impact on the area. The Micro Forest is not labeled on any maps but is not too hard to find. It is in the Bette Davis Picnic Area in the southern corner between the LA River and Riverside Dr. The forest is currently fenced off but, as it grows, will be open to the public.

Bette Davis Picnic Area
1850 Riverside Dr
Glendale, CA 91201





3. Hahamongna Nursery

Bearing the name of the Tongva tribe that lived in the Pasadena and Altadena area and of the watershed area where the nursery is located, the Hahamongna watershed marks the beginning of the Arroyo Seco. This beautiful riparian habitat is home to bobcats, grey foxes, mountain lions, the arroyo toad, the endangered Least Bell's Vireo and the arroyo trout. Because the watershed connects to the San Gabriel Mountains and has a variety of habitats, including the increasingly rare alluvial forest, it is a source of incredible biodiversity. Hahamongna Nursery was started as part of the restoration of the Arroyo Seco to help provide plants for the restoration using seeds collected from the watershed. Locally collected seeds help protect the biodiversity of the plant species and propagating them on-site gives the plants the best chance for survival. The nursery is mostly run by volunteers. They do sell plants to the public, though most of them come from other suppliers. Their propagation efforts are directed towards the restoration. The Hahamongna watershed and the Arroyo Seco is under constant threat of further water divergence, dredging, being paved for a parking lot and other industrial activities. To learn more about the fight to save this important part of California, visit the Arroyo Seco Foundation <https://www.arroyoseco.org/> The site of the nursery has a beautiful demonstration garden filled with bladder pods, sages and coast sunflowers. In the back section of the garden there is a large great basin sagebrush, which, normally a desert plant, is exciting to see in person. The nursery is small but is a huge voice for the Hahamongna watershed and the Arroyo Seco and a beautiful place to visit.

To get to the nursery enter the Hahamongna Watershed Park at Oak Grove Drive and follow the signs down into the park. The nursery shares a space with several equestrian facilities so please drive slowly.

Hahamongna Nursery
4550 Oak Grove Drive
Pasadena, CA 91103





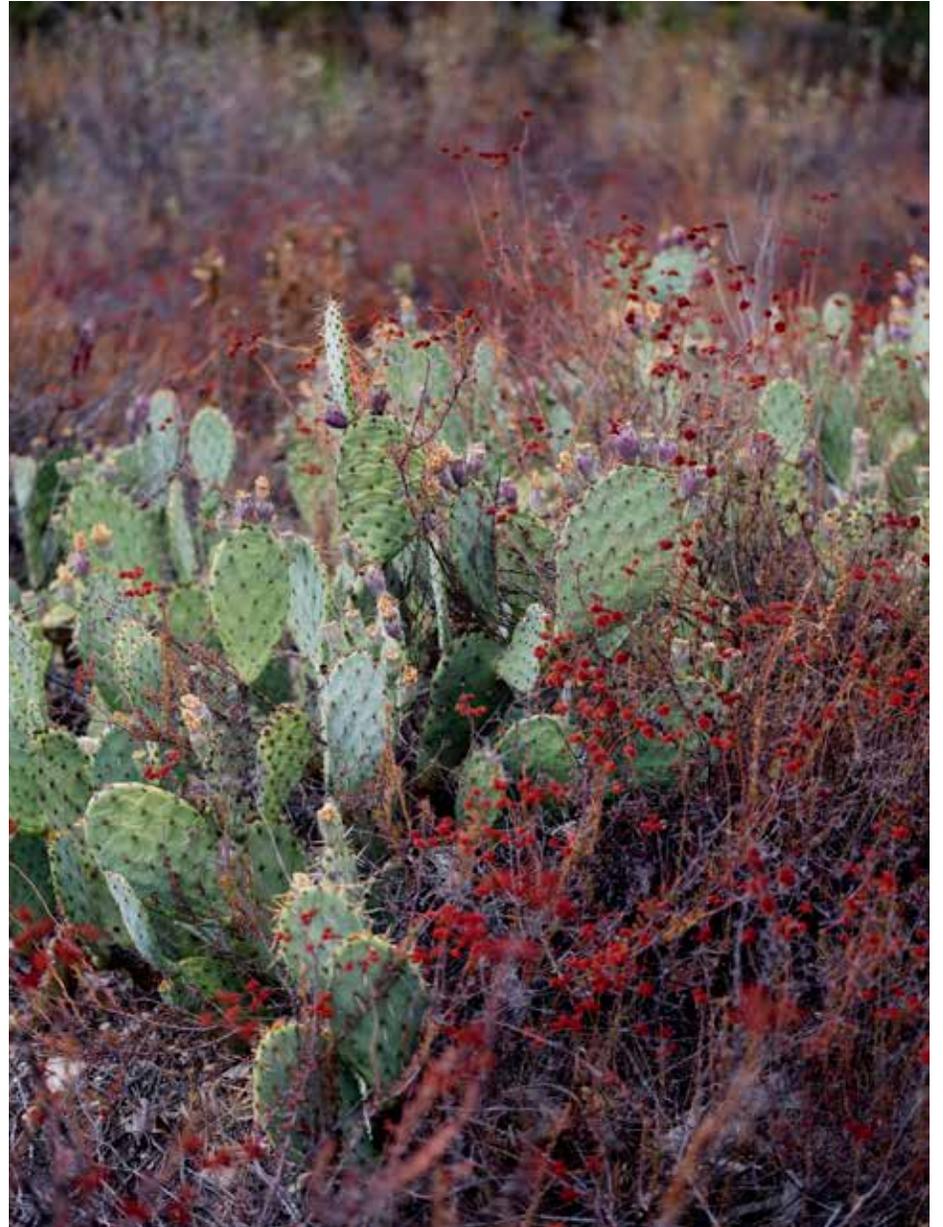
5. Eaton Canyon Nature Center

The Eaton Canyon Nature Center sits at the entrance to the 198 acre Eaton Canyon Natural Area. The Spanish named the canyon “El Precipicio”, but it was later renamed after Judge Benjamin Eaton who was the first person to use irrigation from the creek to grow grapes. The canyon is famous for its series of waterfalls, of which only the lower one is open to the public. The upper falls are dangerous to visit and have been the cause of several deaths in the past. This is also the site of the Mount Wilson Toll Road, which is no longer open to cars but can be hiked on foot.

The first Eaton Canyon Nature Center was built in 1963 and the natural area consisted of Pasadena owned land that was a bird and game sanctuary and land that was sold to the city by Mary Beatrice Fox for the creation of a park. In October of 1993 a wildfire burned through 6,000 acres and destroyed 2/3 of the canyon, including the Nature Center. The fire exposed a secret in the hills, The Eaton Canyon Project, and its WWII missiles. The project covered 146 acres in the foothills, and was the rocket making capital of the United States.

The Nature Center was rebuilt in 1998 and a special fund was raised for the creation of a fire ecology trail. There are three nature trails that can be reached from the Center, the Junior Nature Trail, the Oak Terrace Nature Trail and, of course, the Fire Ecology Trail. The accompanying guides are available on the Eaton Canyon Nature Center website. Surrounding the Center are gardens with large trees, seasonal creeks and a pond. The space is beautiful, shady and a testament to the resilience and recovery power of our native plants. The gardens around the building are irrigated and even deep into our summer dormant period are still green and lush. On the Nature Center’s website there is a list of plants that can be found, with images, descriptions and a link to the plant’s calscape page. They include not only the common landscaping plants but also the less popular plants that generally don’t make it into guide books, such as Horsetweed (*Conyza canadensis*) or Telegraph Weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*) as well as the invasive plants that are to be found at the site. It is a super handy and helpful way to learn about and identify plants in the field and to better understand our ecosystem.

Eaton Canyon Natural Area and Nature Center
1750 N. Altadena Dr.
Pasadena, CA 91001





6. Sierra Madre City Hall

After several years of drought, the city of Sierra Madre declared a stage two water emergency in 2013. They required the consumption of water to drop by 20 percent and then 30 percent in 2014. To conform to their own measures, it adopted water reduction methods around the City Hall. This included the renovation of the landscaping around the buildings with the help of the Sierra Madre Garden Club to focus on drought tolerant grasses and native plants. The new garden was planted on November 7, 2015 with the help of 75 community volunteers and funded, not by the city, but by donations from the community.

The gardens are found on the Sierra Madre Blvd entrance and continue in the covered pavilion and towards the parking lot where one of the site's bioswales can be found covered in a lush meadow. The plantings are divided into sections, the Fire Garden, Chaparral Garden, Wildlife Garden, Edible Garden, Rain Garden, and Shade Garden. Each section has a plaque with information about the garden and the plant species featured there. Each patch of grass in the front of the buildings highlights a different drought tolerant grass species with a plaque stating the type. You will find a lovely mix of plants, especially a spicebush, which has ruby red flowers in the summer, as well as lovely giant chain ferns in the shade garden. Overall, this is a wonderful way to encourage the community to plant native plants.

Sierra Madre City Hall
232 W Sierra Madre Blvd
Sierra Madre, CA 91024





8. Pasadena Casting Club

The Pasadena Casting Club is located in Pasadena's only dedicated nature preserve, the Lower Arroyo Seco Park. It was founded in 1947 for "a group of fly fishing enthusiasts dedicated to fly fishing, fly casting, fly tying, and all things related to the sport." The club boasts over 250 members, some of whom have reached international recognition, and has one of only three casting ponds to be found in the state. The Clubhouse itself is open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Sundays, but the facilities are open everyday from 6:00 AM to sundown. The 5,500 square foot garden was established in 1998 and features plants found in the Arroyo Seco. There are several rare Engelmann Oaks, along with western sycamore and live oaks. The stairs that lead from the clubhouse to the casting pool are bordered by large plantings of hummingbird sage, douglas iris and a wildflower meadow. The plants connect the buildings and the infrastructure to the surrounding open parkland. They smooth the transition between the domesticated space surrounding the club and the wilder spaces beyond. The effect is that, despite having a specific purpose, the club is a joy simply to visit, to walk around and to breathe in the scent of dust, sage and oak trees.

Pasadena Casting Club
415 S Arroyo Blvd
Pasadena, CA 91105





7. Arlington Gardens

The Arlington Gardens are a public garden owned by Caltrans and leased by the city of Pasadena. It was used as a staging site for the construction of the 701 freeway. The three acre plot stayed unused until 2002 when a group of city council and community leaders proposed a garden and the garden was completed in 2005. The garden is divided into two sections, Mediterranean and Californian. The California section is subdivided into desert, oak grove, seasonal wash, meadow and coastal sage scrub habitats and also includes a citrus grove on the far eastern side of the garden. In the center of the native garden a grove of sycamore trees stands in the seasonal wash that runs down into a large vernal pool with a little bridge running over it. Native oaks are planted around the edges, along with plants that grow underneath them. Look for the *Ceanothus arboreus* surrounded by huge white sages on the northern side of the garden and the Englemann Oak on the edge of the citrus grove. The garden is interspersed with small trails that wander through the different habitats. Because of the number of mature plantings and large shrubs it is possible to feel secluded even with others in the garden. The milkweed patches had attracted a group of monarch butterflies while I was photographing the garden. The trees were filled with birds and the ground rustled with the sound of lizards running through the leaves.

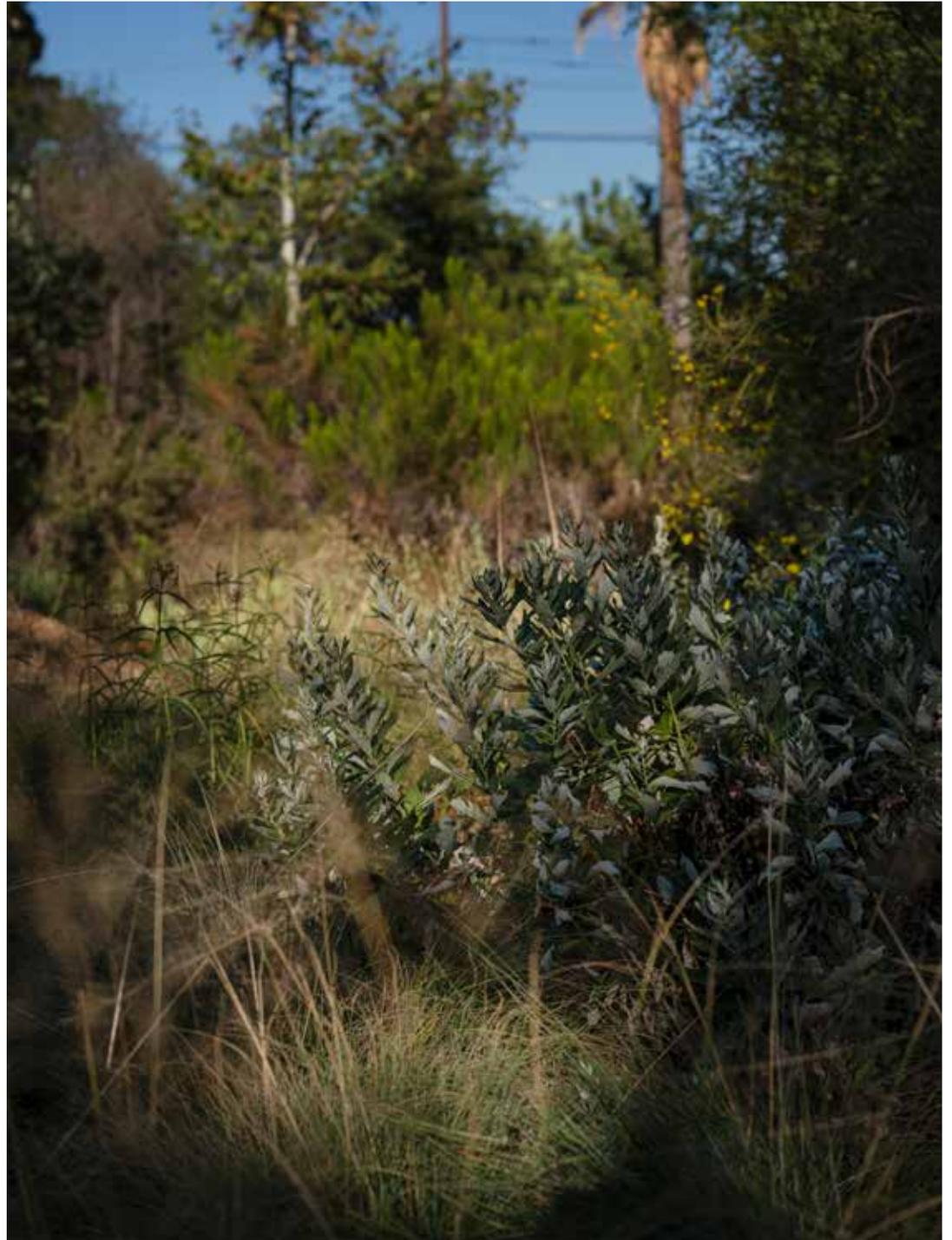
Arlington Gardens hosts several events a month. To find them visit their website:

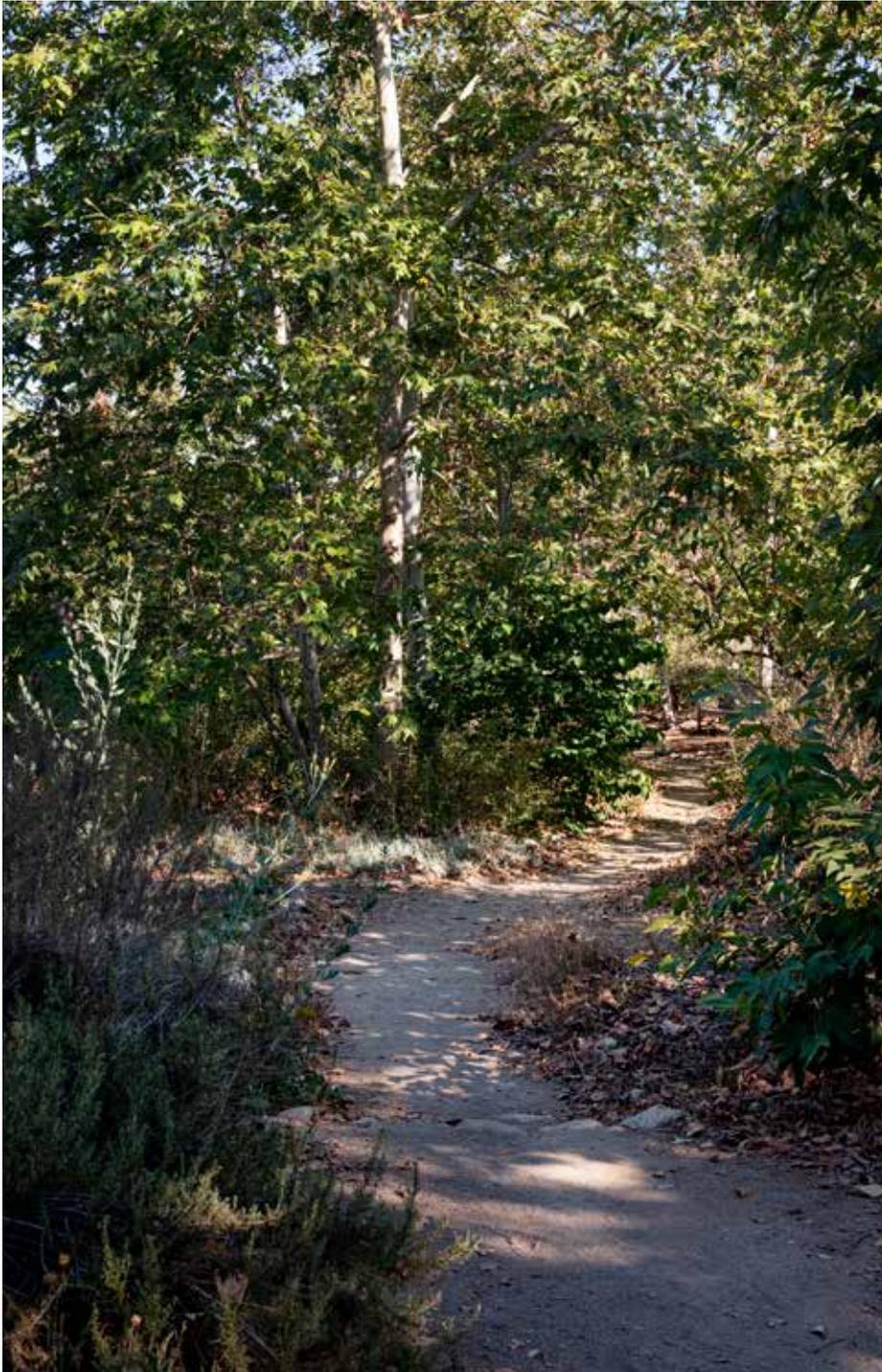
<https://www.arlingtongardenpasadena.com/>

Arlington Garden in Pasadena

275 Arlington Drive

Pasadena, CA 91105









9. Arroyo Seco Regional Branch Library

This is a small planting that runs along the southern side and the entrance of the library. It contains over 200 plants, was designed by the Theodore Payne Foundation and installed by volunteers. The front of the library boasts a large, mature western sycamore with a pitcher sage, buckwheat, asters and hechuras. The long south facing side of the building hosts a wonderful mix of grasses, several sculptural and swirly chamise shrubs, sages, and mallows. While simple, this is a great example of native plants thriving in difficult conditions and in public spaces.

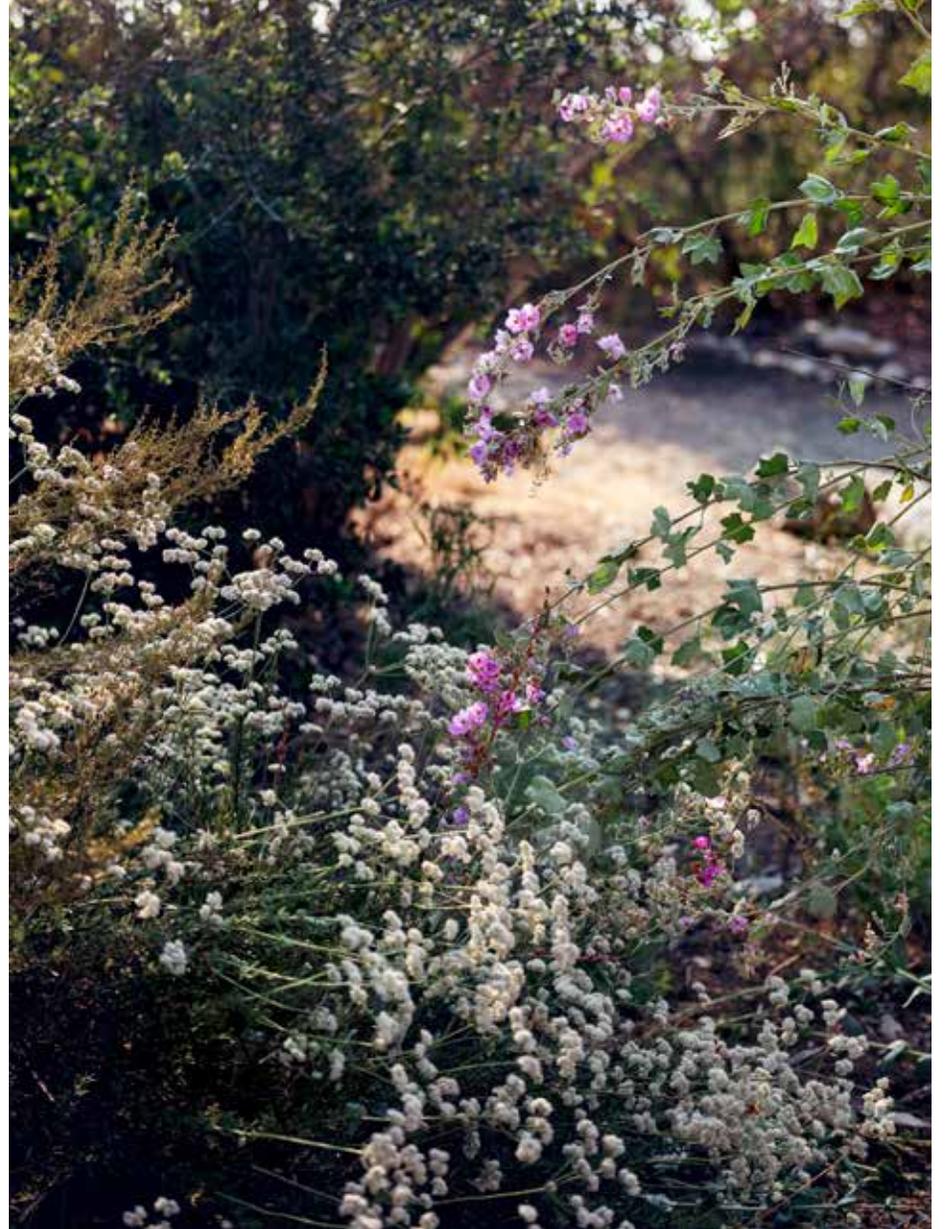
Arroyo Seco Branch Library
6145 N Figueroa St
Los Angeles, CA 9004

10. South Pasadena Nature Park

In the 1990's this three acre piece of land was condemned to be sold and developed. However, it was through community activism that the land was preserved as an open space. Construction began in 2004 and the park has steadily grown since. The edges of the park are lined with mature oaks, sycamores, walnuts and toyons. There is also a very healthy stand of poison oak mixed in, which is lovely to see, but maybe not to touch. The open space of the park is filled with small trails that take you through buckwheats, bladder pods, California sage and an impressive group of coast sunflowers that are simply spectacular when in bloom. The butterfly garden that was completed in 2018 features milkweeds, penstemons, wildflowers and a stunning chaparral mallow. There are three viewpoints with information signs for the native plants, the monarch butterfly and a helpful guide to the visible peaks, such as the well known Mount Baldy and the delightfully named Mount Disappointment. The park connects to the greater Arroyo Seco trails and it is not uncommon to see riders on horseback pass through the park. While coming in the spring could never disappoint, especially with all those coast sunflowers, summer has the buckwheats in bloom and the Nevin's barberries at the entrance are covered in bright red berries. The chaparral mallow in the butterfly garden is simply spectacular and would warrant a visit in the hot sun.

South Pasadena Nature Park
100 Pasadena Ave
South Pasadena, CA 91030







11. Audubon Center at Debs Park

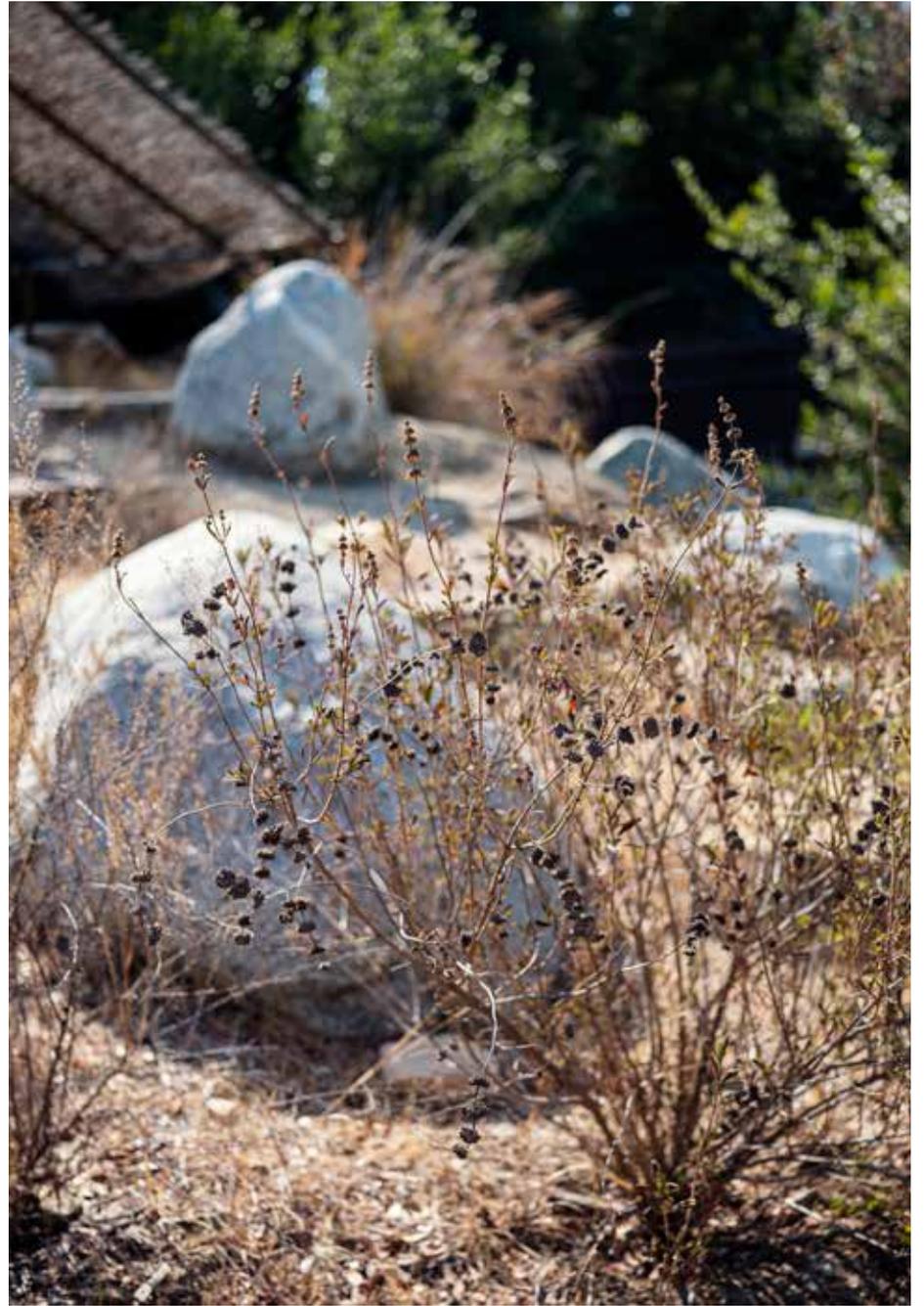
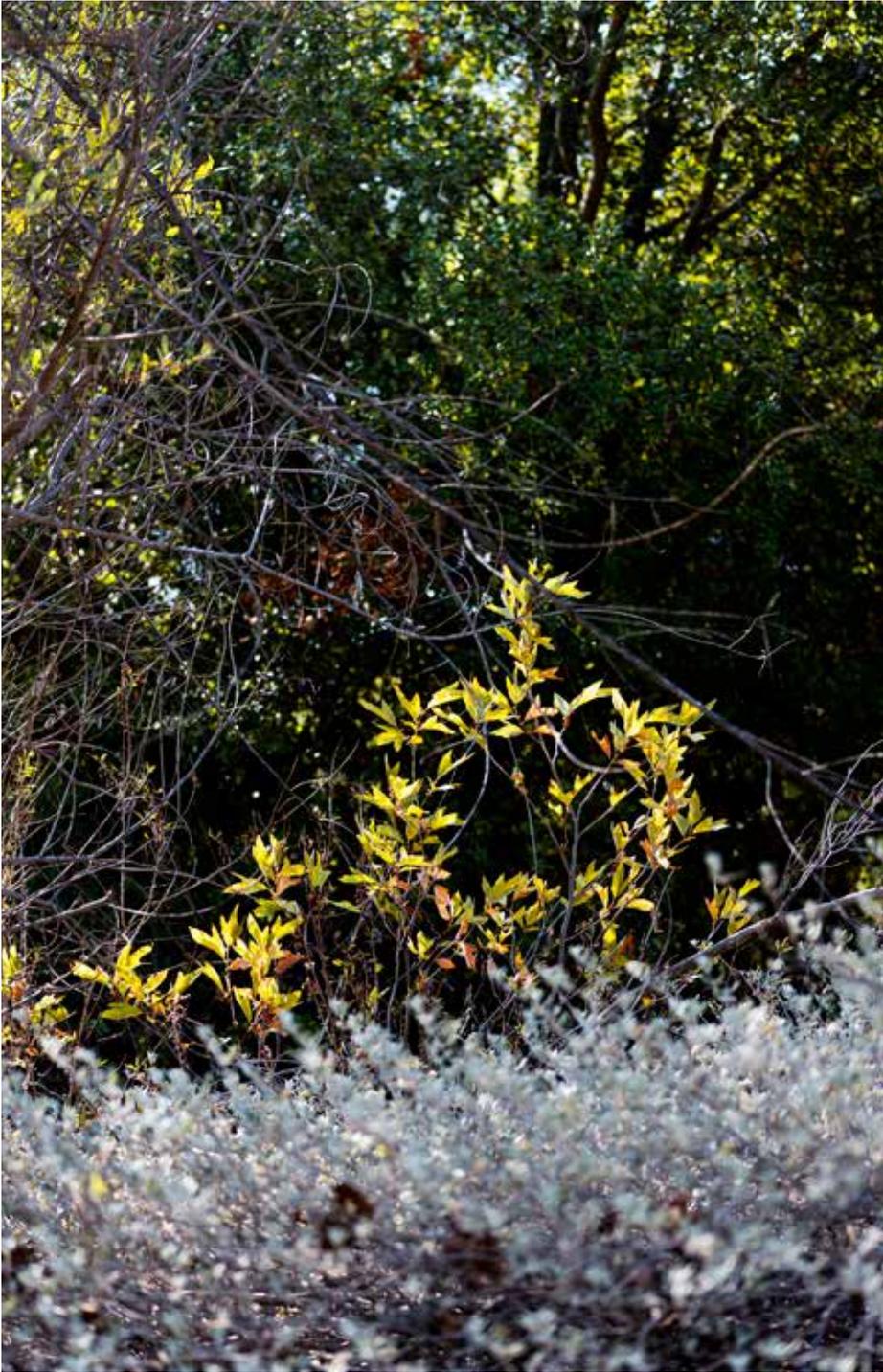
The Audubon Center demonstration garden is part of the 17 acres of Deb's Park that the Center runs and is part of their long term restoration of the area. The on-site nursery, Los Nogales Nursery, was started in 2014 in conjunction with the National Parks Service, providing plants for the restoration. The plants are grown from seeds collected from Deb's Park and thus help preserve the genetic diversity of our region. They have grown over 5,000 California native plants at the site and, with the help of volunteers, have reintroduced them into the park. Eventually they hope to expand the nursery into something that can better serve the wider community.

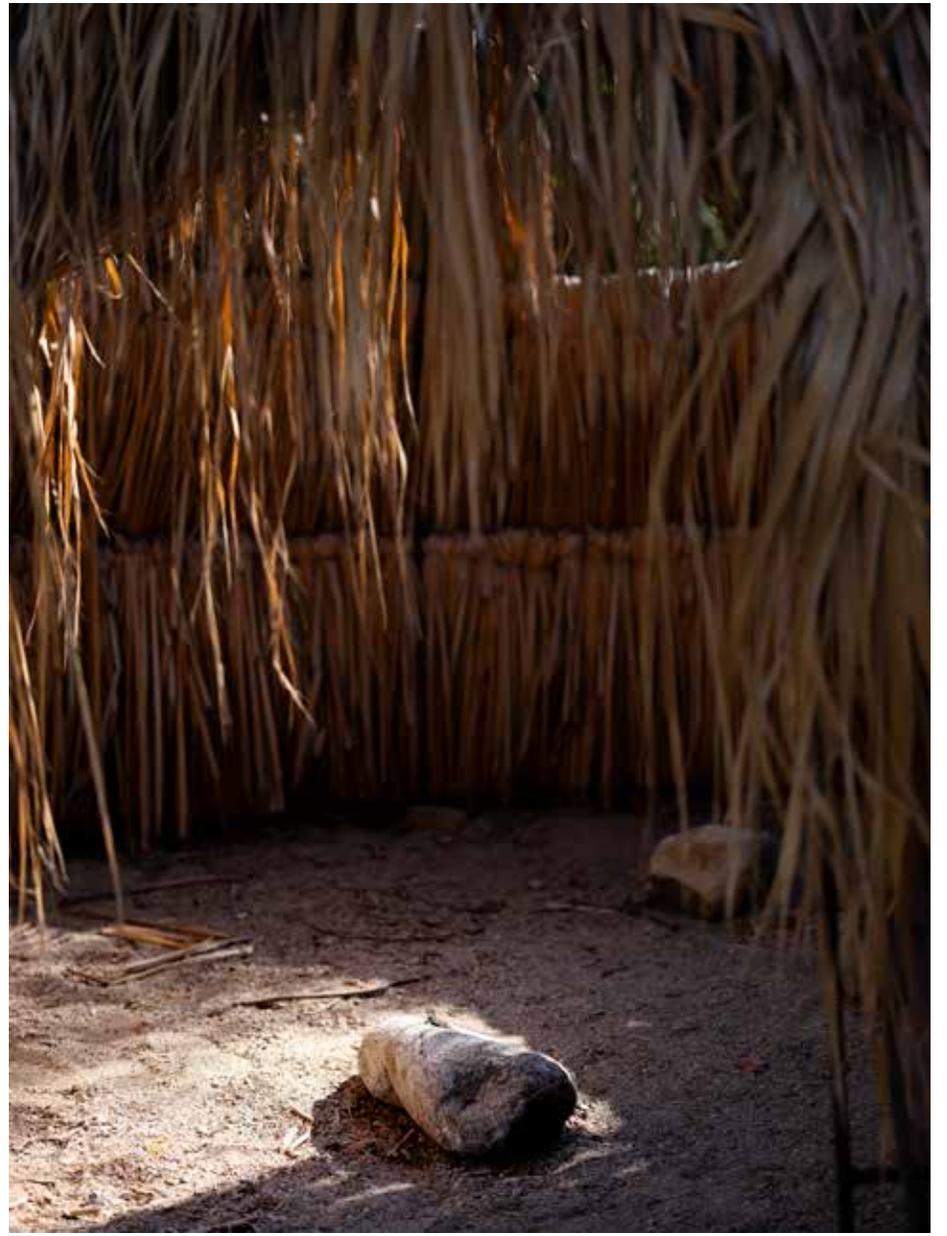
The focus of the Audubon Center seems to veer from simply birds and general bird enthusiasm toward the importance of proper land stewardship and how that affects the environment. The Center draws the direct link between the presence of native plants and a functioning ecosystem and the abundance, or lack thereof, of bird life. Much of the outdoor space of the Center pays tribute to the Tongva people and their connection and management of the land. There are interpretive signs addressing the uses of native plants, the Center's place as part of the Arroyo Seco Watershed and the history of the Los Angeles Basin as once being an interconnected water-filled landscape. There is a kiiy, the traditional house of the Tongva, and information about the differences in the sustainability of kiiy versus the traditional western European houses.

The Audubon Center itself was the nation's first LEED Platinum building in the United States. It is completely powered by on-site solar panels and functions totally off grid. It was built using recycled materials whenever possible, including scrap metal and melted down handguns in the structural rebar. The Center is extremely water conscious, with an efficient watering system, permeable surfaces and low water native plant landscaping.

Around the main courtyard is a short trail that leads you through the chaparral hillside. Here there are two viewpoints of the Center, one from a bridge and the other higher up from the hillside. The landscaping and hardscaping shows what good design can do; it creates sustainable, beautiful and functional space. Look for the grapes, especially in fall, on the building and the covered bridge that crosses by the pond. The butterfly loop is also accessible from the Center and passes through the land part of the managed land. Make sure to stop in at the Visitors Center, they have wonderful information on birds, native plants and where to find both, as well as a delightful number of books and pamphlets that are yours for the taking.

Audubon Center at Debs Park
4700 North Griffin Ave
Los Angeles, CA 90031
Thursday-Saturday 8:00 AM- 4:00 PM



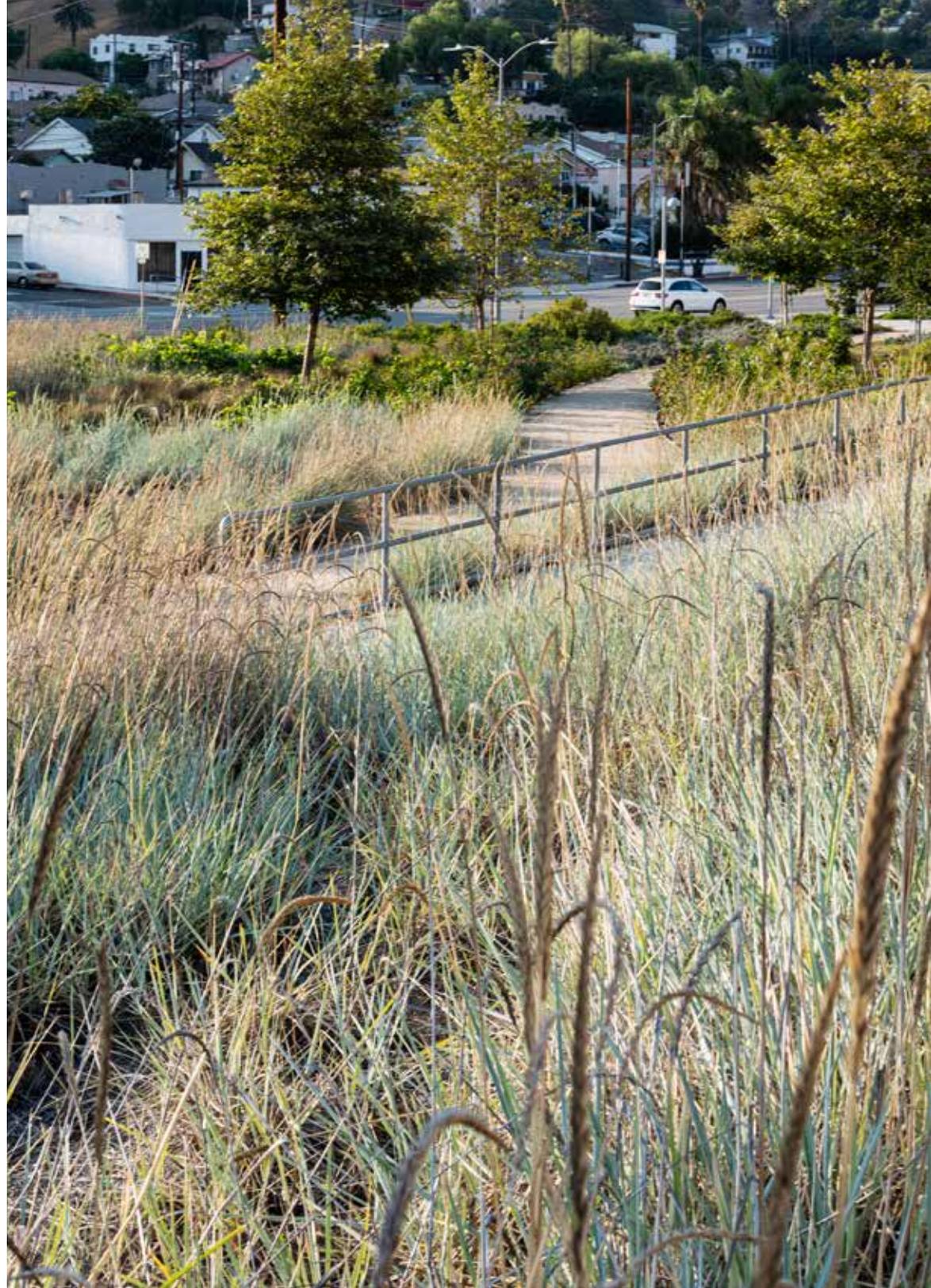


12. Soto Street Park

So many of the spaces in this guide are the product of intense and passionate engagement and activism. The park at the intersection of N. Soto Street, Huntington Dr and N. Mission Road has that in common, except that it is the product of an unsuccessful protest. It is on the site of the historic Soto Street Rail Bridge. The bridge was constructed to separate car traffic from railway traffic in 1936. In 2013 the bridge was condemned as a safety hazard and multiple traffic collisions were cited as evidence.

The El Sereno Historical Society fought the destruction of the bridge, arguing that it was an important part of our history. The bridge was part of a four-track interurban system that allowed for the separation of the local commuter and freight lines from the high speed lines. The bridge was used by the Pacific Electric Railway which was the most widespread transportation in the city's history. Both the bridge and the P&E Railway played a huge part in the growth and expansion of Los Angeles and the Historical Society argued that it is the last bridge of its kind in Los Angeles. They accused the company who had won the bid to demolish the bridge of doing a shoddy job of informing the community about the demolition and they cited concerns over resident safety. The El Sereno Historical Society was unsuccessful, stating that they had been "sold out" when, on Thursday, March 6, 2014, the Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission voted not to declare the Pacific Electric Soto St Bridge a Cultural-Heritage Monument. The bridge was demolished, the road was widened and the intersection made, presumably, safer. The community didn't totally lose out because, as part of the project, they received this beautiful park. It stretches along Huntington Dr down to where it intersects with N. Soto St and N Mission St. At the intersection you can walk into the park surrounded by oaks, sycamores, coyote bush and a clever use of grapes as ground cover. The side of the park along N Soto St is filled with a meadow of silvery blue prince canyon ryes. The summer months bring the grasses to seed and they have one of the most beautiful seed heads of all our grasses. The park has a public art sculpture by artist Michael Amescua featuring monarch butterflies, which symbolize the Mexican immigrants, milkweeds, the spiritual Mexican jackalope and the culturally important corn. Also in this lovely park is a placard giving information and, interestingly, defending the choice to demolish the Soto Street Bridge, as well as giving a brief overview of its history in the area.

This park is found at the intersection of N. Soto Street,
Huntington Dr. and N. Mission St.
Los Angeles, CA 90032



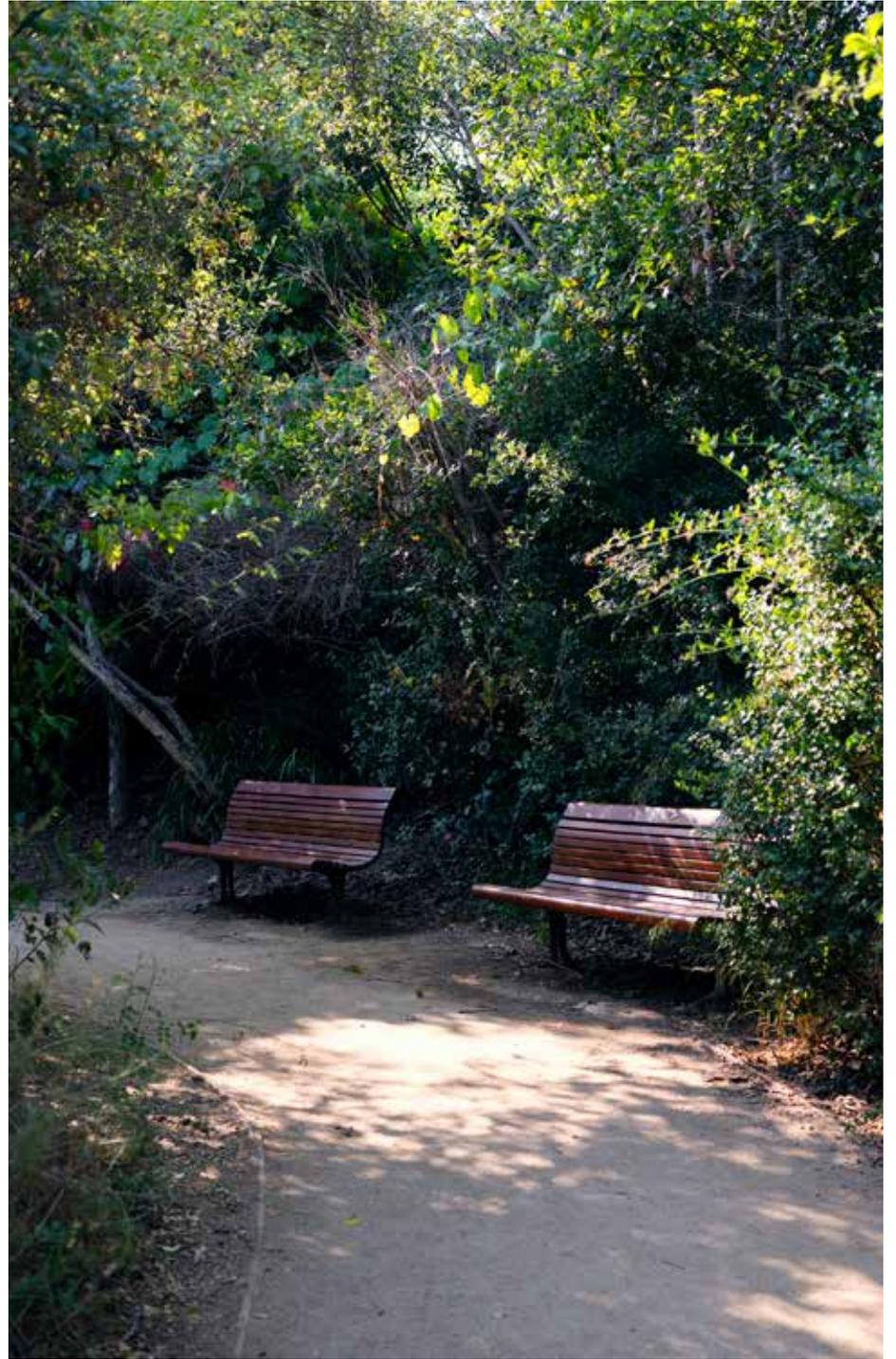


13. Vista Hermosa Natural Park

Opened in 2008 and covering 10.5 acres, Vista Hermosa Natural Park was the first park to open in downtown LA in over 100 years. Like many of the parks in this area it was meant to be developed, in this case, into an educational complex. When the site was found to be unstable due to a fault line and previous oil drilling, the plans were put aside. The community spoke up and asked for a park, and they got something truly outstanding. Designed by Studio-MLA and created by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, the park is meant to be a window to the mountains, and it is easy to forget that you are in downtown LA. The park even smells like the mountains. The walking trail runs along the perimeter of the meadows and picnic areas, and twists its way through mature chaparral. The trail leads you through tall hedges and then gives you glimpses of the grassy meadows. The result is that even when the park is crowded you get a sense of solitude and isolation. Toyons, laurel sumacs, black sage, giant rye, elderberries and native grapes are all to be found here. And with these plants the hedges are alive with butterflies, bees, birds and the rustlings of lizards. In spring, look for the stunning fremontodendrons at the Toluca Street entrance and in autumn come for the fall color of the native grape. The beauty and practicality is only one part of what makes Vista Hermosa such an asset to Los Angeles. The park is designed to be its own watershed. Its topography, permeable surfaces, and park drains are all part of the system to collect water in an underground cistern under the parking lot and return it back to the groundwater table. The water that is collected into the cistern is used to irrigate the park. It is estimated that the system collects 95 percent of the water that falls in the park. Contrasted with the natural beauty of the park is an incredible view of the downtown skyline. The "Transit to Trails" is a public bus aimed at connecting the community and youth to the outdoors, taking visitors from the park to the beach and Santa Monica Mountains.

Vista Hermosa Natural Park
100 N. Toluca Street
Los Angeles, CA 90026









14. The Los Angeles River

The Los Angeles Basin was a rich floodplain, a forest floodplain ecology, to be specific. The river was unpredictable in both its course and in strength. At one point the mouth of the river was not Long Beach but 90 degrees to the west in Ballona Creek. Because the entire basin was a flood plain the river moved and changed as it wished. While mostly calm and, in the summer, often slipping beneath the surface to run as an aquifer, the river is capable of incredible force. There is a reason that the flood channel walls reach 30 feet high. It is capable of matching the output of the Colorado River during a strong winter storm. The river was wild but it created a paradise. The basin was a lush forested ecosystem. Teeming with life and resources, the river was filled with steelhead trout and lined with cottonwood, willow and oak trees. This place only lives in stories, and the stories themselves are rare and few. Accounts from the Spanish during this time describe the basin as pastoral, as an eden, as a paradise. The strange reality of the Los Angeles that we live in now, is that the relic of this landscape is visible only in the LA River flood channel, specifically the Glendale Narrows. This is one of the soft bottomed areas that, due to a higher water table and the composition of the river bed, could not be paved over. Here we find the willow and cottonwood trees. There are small islands of grasses, rushes, cattails and shrubs, and there are water birds and fish. Imagine an LA Basin that looked like this, lush and filled with life.

Until 1910, the river was the source of water for what would become the city of Los Angeles and part of the draw, when LA was marketed to the rest of the country, was as the city where you could live in nature. It was healthy and clean. This drew people out west in droves and the population grew. It was then that the river was overtaxed and the city became unsustainable, and water had to be brought in from elsewhere. In 1938, the river flooded again and 98 people lost their lives. It behaved like a wild thing. It surged and ran and took and did not think of the consequences. And then, like other wild things that don't behave, it was destroyed. The river became encased in concrete and was erased from our memory. The channelization of the river took approximately 50 years. There was a moment when, instead of a drain, we could have had a long park system that ran from the mountains to the sea along the river. It was part of a proposal by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and his firm in 1930. The plan was incredible. It was a thoughtful, farsighted vision of the city that identified many of the problems that we are facing now and had solutions for them. The proposal was so powerful

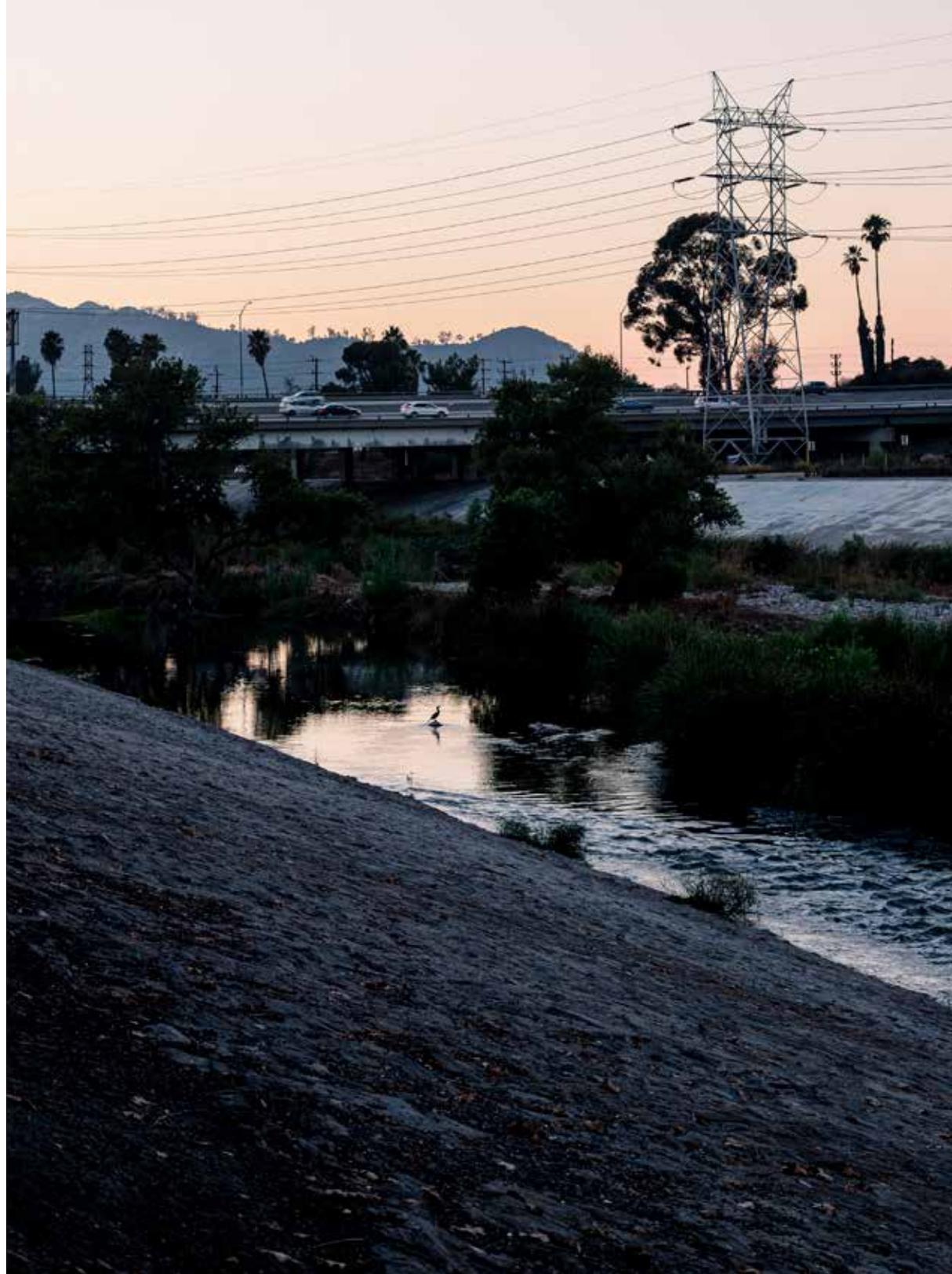
that the Chamber of Commerce, worried that they would not be able to control the outcome, greatly limited its dispersal and effectively killed off the project. Frederick Olmsted Jr. proposed to turn the land along the banks of the river into park land. The river then could flood in safety and the land would return to public space when the water receded. This specific part of the plan was blocked by real estate interests that objected to the loss of valuable land, which, of course, would be secured when the Army Corps stepped in and started paving.

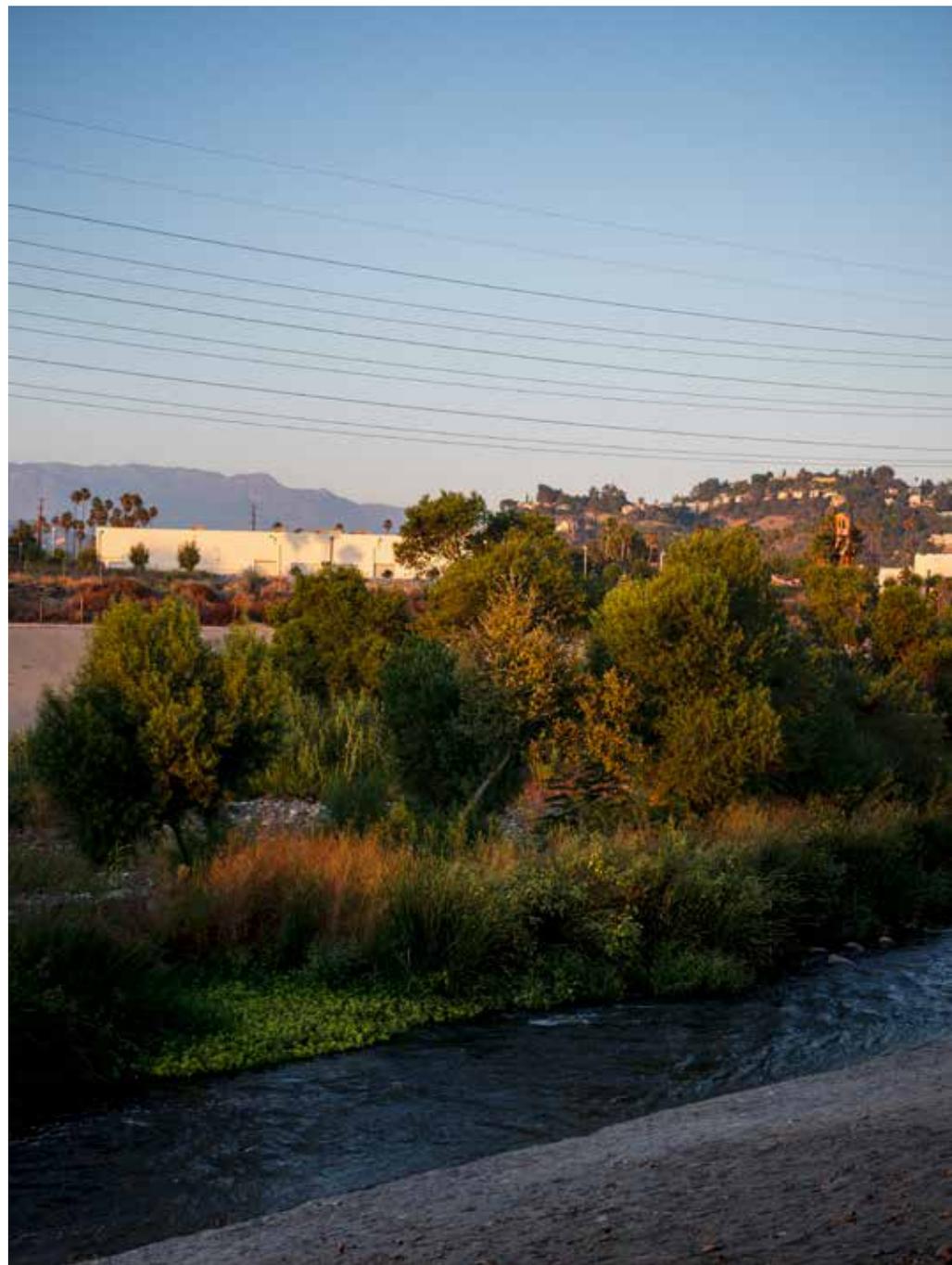
So the river became a flood control channel and the city began dumping sewage, industrial run off and drain water into it. But in 1986, Lewis MacAdams and a friend, armed with wire cutters, and perhaps a little alcohol, cut through the fencing along the river and declared it open to the public. Later that year Friends of the LA River was formed and in 1989 they began their annual river clean ups. 1996 saw the adoption of a wide sweeping plan to revitalize the river, which was updated in 2007. A year later, in 2008, a group of kayakers, including George Wolfe and Heather Wylie, kayaked the entire 51 miles of the river in three days. Wylie was a biologist for the Army Corps and would eventually lose her job over the incident. However, she said that she was happy to sacrifice it to save the river. By proving it was navigable by traditional non-motorized craft it regained its identity as a river and received a new set of legal protections under the Clean Water Act.

Now the city is making bits and pieces of Olmsted Jr.'s vision a reality. New parks, focusing on the river, have been put into production. There are a series of "pocket-parks" along the river that are designed to pull drain water into the soil instead of flushing it, with all its contaminants, into the river and eventually the ocean. There is the 100 Acre Partnership, a plan to turn the brown space that was Taylor's Yard into parkland and river restoration. This, of course, is now creating a new set of problems. Even though it will be years before ground is broken on these new projects, gentrification along the river is skyrocketing. Home prices are already unaffordable for those who are living in the area, yet new luxury apartment complexes and townhouses are being proposed.

Now that the river is becoming desirable, who will have access to it? The parks that are featured here are part of this revitalization. While they range in complexity and amenities, they all have the same goal in mind: to create green space along the river, to provide access to the river and to help clean the river. These parks feature bioswales and vernal pools designed to pull the water into the soil, thus trapping contaminants which would otherwise end up in the waterway.

The LA River is a strange place. More than any other place I can think of, it is a distinctly LA place. It is known mostly for its roles in movies, is greatly beloved by some and completely ignored by others, and was a beautiful thing that was destroyed for money. It holds so much of our history and the history of the land. It is now a place of change and while we cannot fix the wrongs that have been done, perhaps we can move in a better direction.







15. Los Angeles State Historic Park

Los Angeles State Historic Park is a triumph of community agitation and mixed-use space. The park is aptly named, as the site seems to have borne witness to many important events in Los Angeles' history. Originally it was the site of Yang-na, the largest Tongva village in the region. It was from this village that the Pueblo de Los Angeles sourced its slave labour. The village was relocated to the eastern side of the LA River and eventually was razed to the ground in 1847. During later construction, a fragment of the Zanja Madre canal, the water source for Pueblo de Los Angeles, was uncovered. Between 1876–1901 it became the River Station, the end of the continental railroad and the entry point to Los Angeles to those who traveled by train from the east.

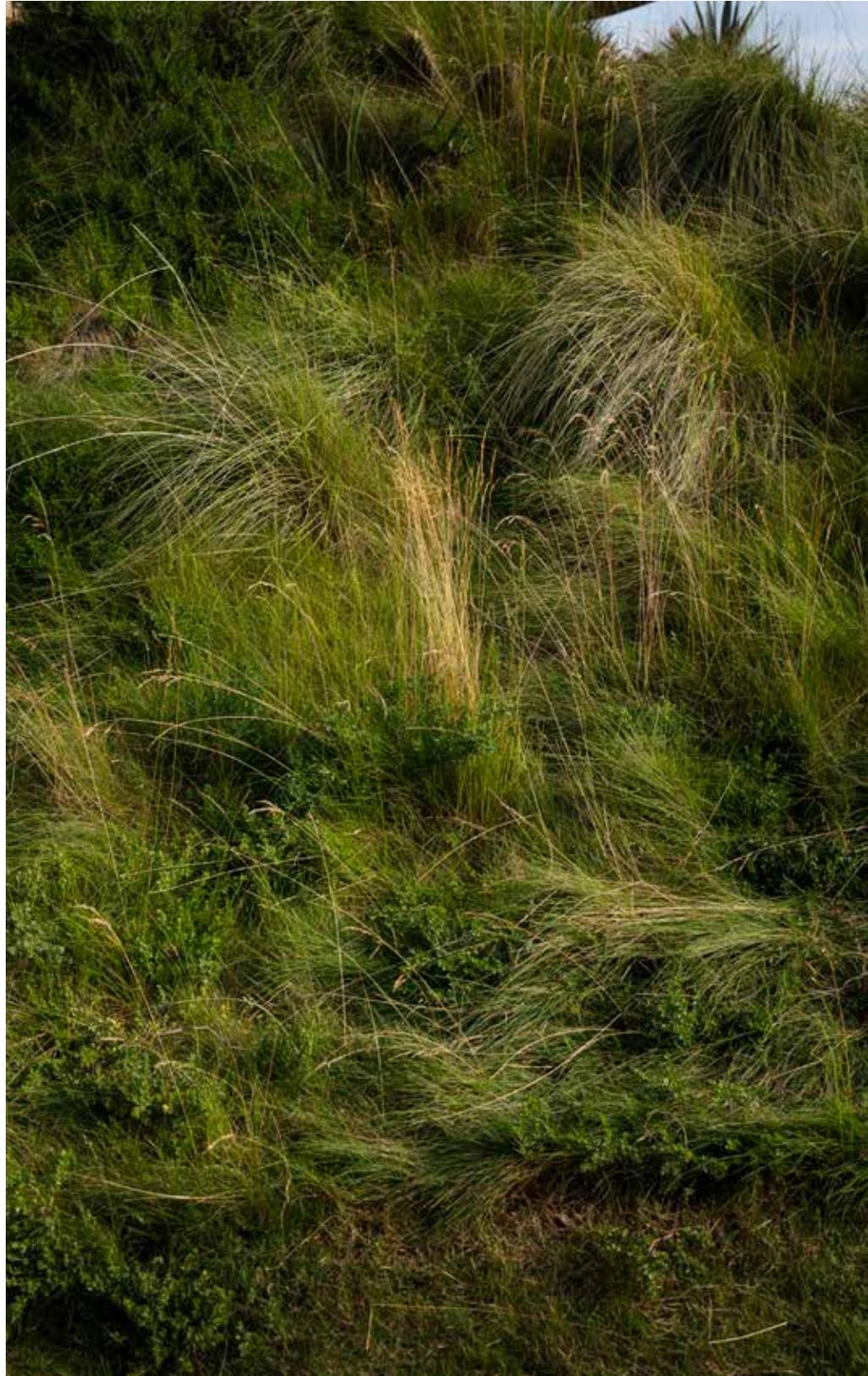
In 1999 the land was purchased by Majestic Realty from the Southern Pacific Railroad. They planned to turn the lot into one million square feet of industrial space. In opposition, the community formed the Chinatown Yard Alliance with the instrumental Chi Mui, a community activist, who lived in the neighborhood. The Alliance began an eleven year battle to stop the industrial park. They filed a lawsuit that stated the industrial park would disproportionately affect the health of the low income people of color who lived in the area and therefore was a form of discrimination. They argued that industrial sites do not create many jobs, and the pollution, constant transportation of goods and diesel fumes were far more harmful. At the time, California had just passed a referendum to create parks and this became the proposed alternative. After the Alliance used personal connections at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, funding for the industrial project was withdrawn. In 2000 the land was purchased by the State for the creation of a park. Unfortunately, it still took about two decades to build and open Los Angeles State Historic Park.

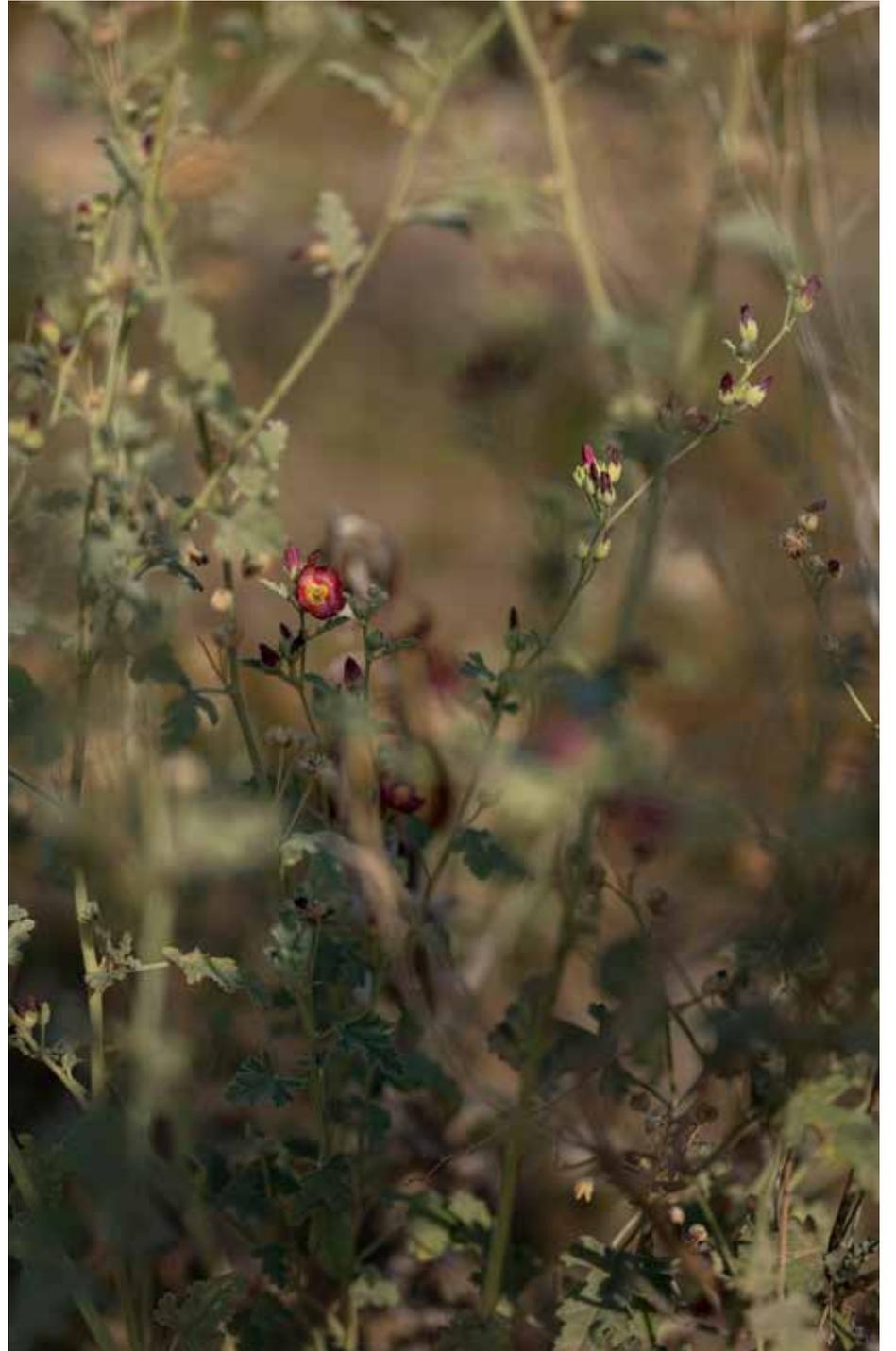
After a brief interlude in 2005 as Lauren Bon's sculptural cornfield, titled "Not a Cornfield", which helped clean and re-fertilize the soil, a preliminary park was opened in 2006. The current version of the park was completed in 2018, though there are still pieces of the original design that have not yet been realized. The park is filled with reminders of this history. There are information signs where visitors can call a phone number and learn more about the creation and history of the park. A 1.2 mile track runs along the perimeter.

The park is divided into three zones, the Cultural Zone, the Great Lawn and the Habitat Zone. The Cultural Zone includes an observation deck and amphitheater. Here you find non-native, but culturally important, trees and plants of Los Angeles. Pepper trees, jacarandas, olive trees, and a grove of 32 orange trees planted by Fallen Fruit, titled "A Monument to Sharing". Here, grape vines can also be found, referencing the site's time as a wine vineyard. The Great Lawn is a unique open space to Los Angeles and can hold up to 15,000 people. There are a few small rolling hills that add interest to the topography, along with trees for shade. The Habitat Zone features over 3,000 native plants. A small seasonal creek runs along the parking lot and the area is filled with a beautiful mix of toyons, ceanothus, rush grass, sages and buckwheats. The north-east corner has a bioswale filled with riparian plants and fills with water in the winter. These thoughtful moments of ecological support have brought many animals into the park, migrating ducks, butterflies (without looking I saw three different species in a short period of time) and even a few coyotes. Los Angeles Historic Park takes the complexity of the history of Los Angeles, public desires and the needs of the environment and creates a space that we can be proud of and that manages to serve us all.

For access to the history of the creation of the park and the site featured in the informational signs please visit <https://thisparkismadebypeople.net/>

Los Angeles State Historic Park
1245 N Spring St
Los Angeles, CA 90012







16. Oso Park/Orso Green Street/Steelhead Park

Oso Park and Steelhead Park are found at the beginning and the end, respectively, of Orso Street. Because of their proximity they are grouped together. Both Steelhead and Oso Park were completed and opened on Earth Day in the year 2000. Steelhead Park and Orso Street especially, form an important water filtration system helping to clean water before it heads to the LA River.

Oso Park is a small pocket-park filled with sculptures of the wildlife that once roamed the LA River. It is a shady park with many mature sycamores and coast live oaks. There is a small wildflower hill that is now mostly covered with Matilija Poppies. Oso and Steelhead Park mark the end of the Los Angeles Recreation Zone. On summer weekends this is where you see the river kayakers ending their trips on the river.

To the north side of Oso Park is Orso Street and the site of the Orso Green Street Project. The project was started by the nonprofit Northeast Trees and completed in 2007. It was a pilot project and has since started many other "green streets" around Los Angeles. It is designed to collect and filter stormwater and dry weather urban runoff before it reaches the LA River. Part of the sidewalk was demolished and trenches were created and filled with perforated piping and a gravel filter. This captures 90 percent of the polluted water. French drains were then installed through the driveways of the residences, allowing water to infiltrate the ground to replenish the groundwater. Then, once the construction was completed, native and low water plants were planted along the newly created sidewalk. At the end of Orso Street is Steelhead Park. Underneath the park are infiltration galleries that capture the remaining water from the street and the nearby runoff. Steelhead Park is named for the gates featuring Steelhead trout. The park features an amphitheater, access to the river and the river bike path, as well as interpretive signs about the Anza Trail.

Oso Park

Orso Street & Riverside Drive
Los Angeles, 90031

Steelhead Park

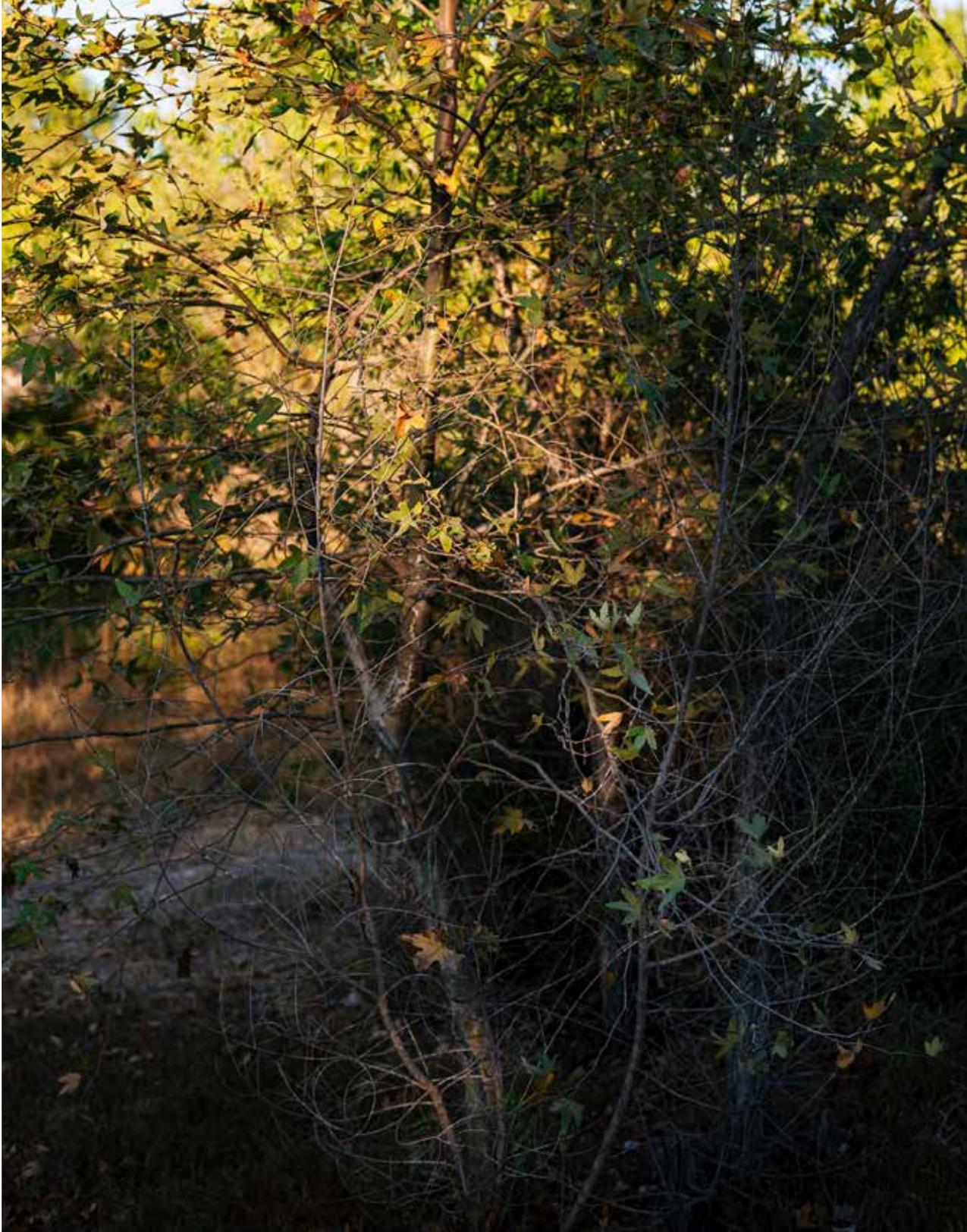
Orso Street & the Los Angeles River
Los Angeles, 90031

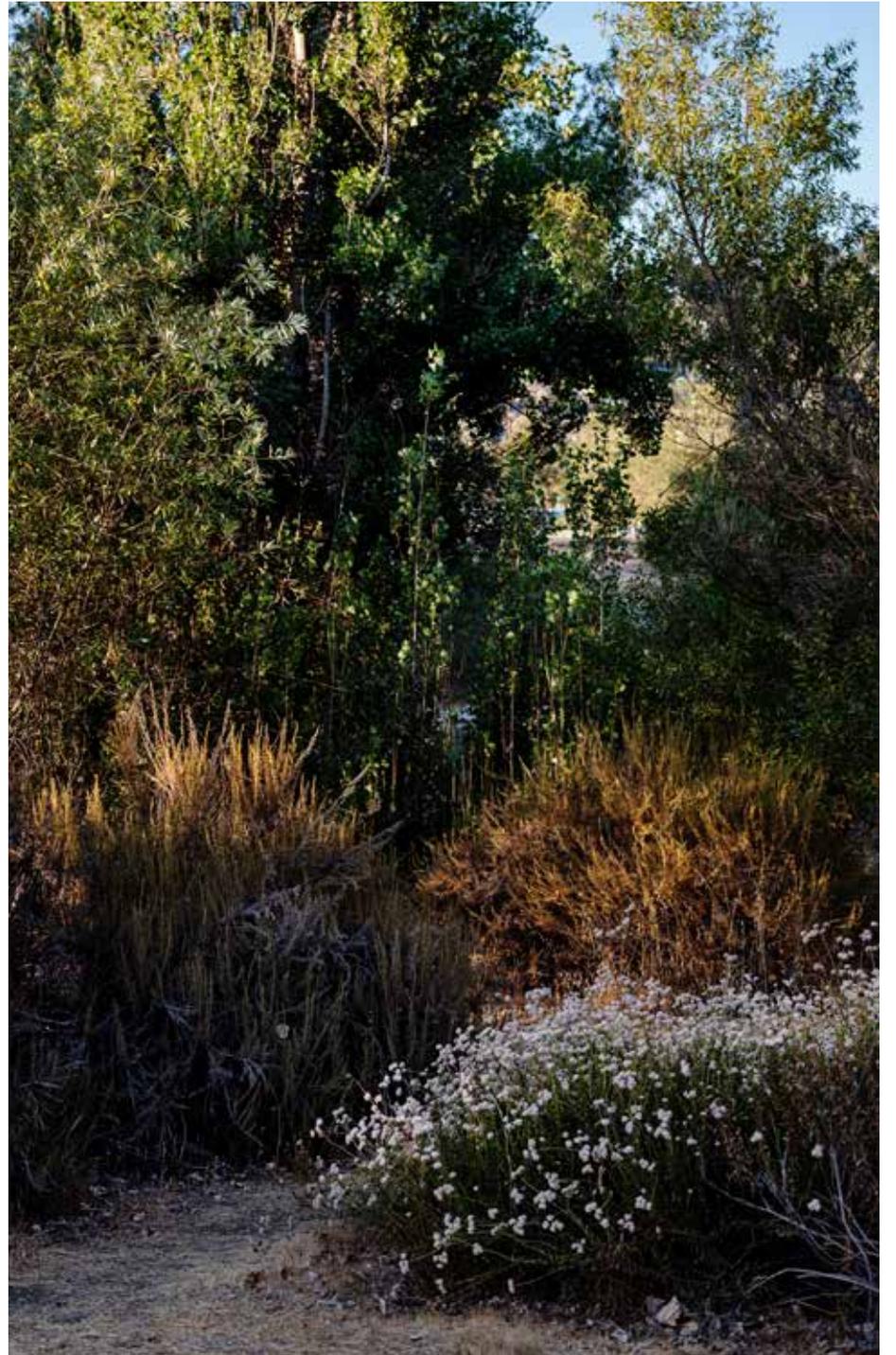
17. Rio De Los Angeles State Park

Rio de Los Angeles State Park sits on the 47 acre switching facility for the Union Pacific and later the Southern Pacific Railway, known as Taylor's Yard. The Yard was closed in 1985 and used for storage and maintenance. Efforts to turn the open land into a park began in 2000 and the park was completed in 2007. Rio de Los Angeles State Park represents a balance between the traditional park space and functioning habitat. It sits along portions of the LA River, though the river is not yet accessible from the park. The park represents the first step in the 100 Acre Project, which aims to revitalize 100 acres of the riverfront by Taylor's Yard. This extensive project includes the Bowtie, the strange shaped parcel on the edge of the river, the creation of an island in the river to allow the public to get close to and experience the river, and several pedestrian river crossings. The 100 Acre Project partnership consists of the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), the City of Los Angeles, and the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA). The land was purchased in 2017 and is still in the planning phase of the project.

Rio de Los Angeles is a great example of very traditional park amenities, sports fields and picnic areas, which make up the side closest to the San Fernando Rd and natural habitat which sits on the river side of the park. At just under one mile long, the walking trail leads you around the wetland area, past oak trees, sages, buckwheats, elderberries and fields of deer grass and wildflowers in the winter and spring. It is a lovely walk to take in the evening and experience the wetlands and, eventually, the river.

Rio de Los Angeles State Park
1900 N. San Fernando Road
Los Angeles, CA 90065



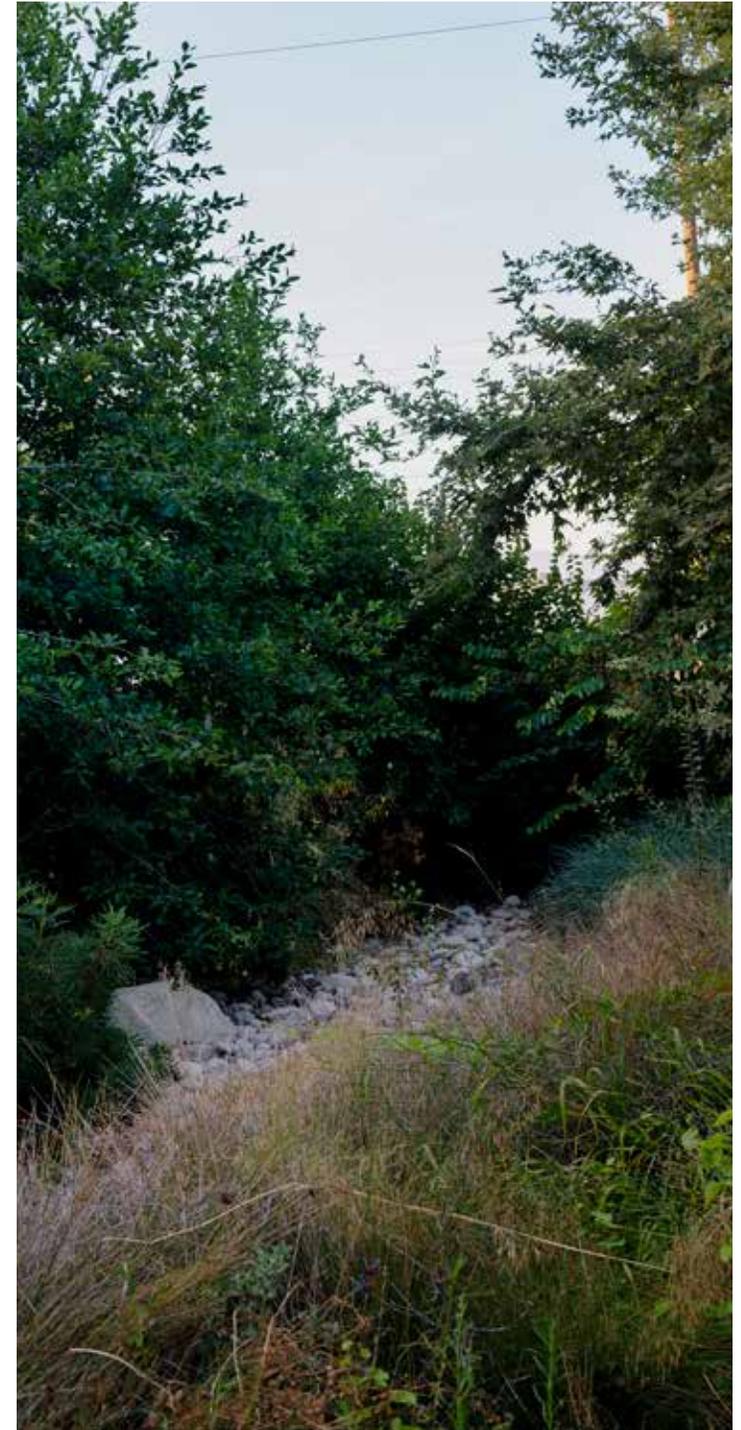


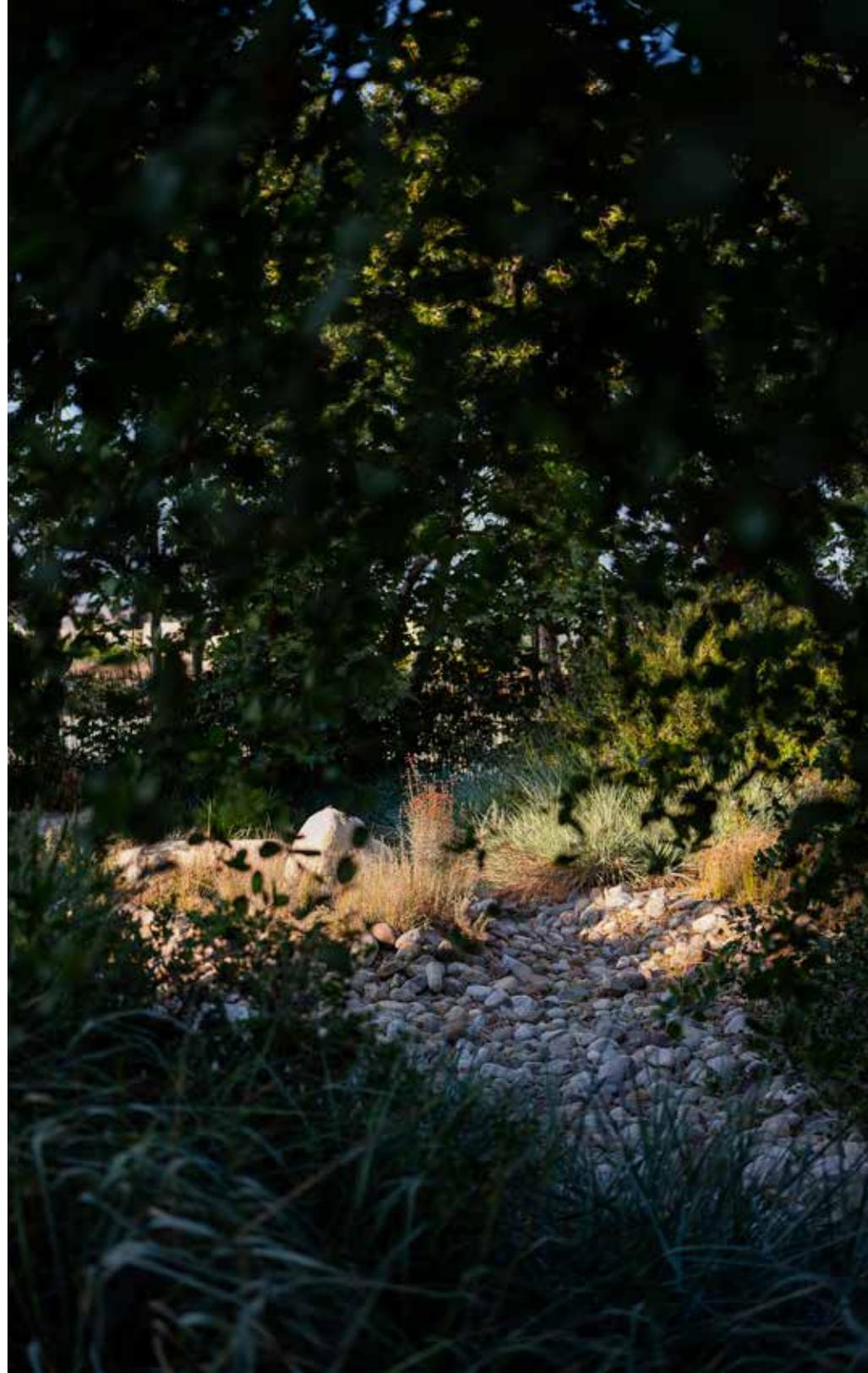
18. Lewis MacAdams Park

Lewis MacAdams was a poet, activist, writer and artist. His work with the LA River, as is said everytime MacAdams is mentioned, was a 40-year-long art piece. He was born in San Angelo, Texas in 1944 and came to LA by way of New York and the Bay Area. He would see the river from the bus stop as he traveled from the Downtown Arts District, where he lived, to Venice, where he worked. The river captivated him. While living in Bolinas two oil tankers crashed into each other and he witnessed the community successfully keeping the oil out of the Bolinas lagoon and estuary. He said that the event taught him two things “One, all politics is local. Two, that water politics is the foundation of all politics.”, two threads that he followed for the remainder of his life. His first work with the river was the one-man show “Friends of the LA River” where he painted himself green, wore a white suit and embodied William Mullholland, and then embodied other river animals. This was not a success. His girlfriend at the time hated it (they broke up afterwards) and the LA Times wrote “with friends like MacAdams, the river needs no enemies.” Thankfully MacAdams continued. A year later, with a few friends, bolt cutters spray painted silver and gold and with either caffeine or, as the FOLAR history says, “whiskey in their blood”, cut a human shaped hole in the fence that separated the river from the city and declared it open. They went to the water and asked the river if they could speak for it and because, over the sound of the machinery that was currently dredging the river, could not hear a ‘no’, took that as acceptance. MacAdams started “Friends of the LA River” (the organization, not the theater show) and everything began to change. The river is called a river. It can no longer be used as a sewage dump, the Glendale Narrows are no longer dredged, there are parks popping up all over the banks and, in 2015, 1.3 billion dollars was approved for habitat restoration. As we know, this did not happen overnight. MacAdams said, “I thought all I had to do was convince people that the river could be better and I quickly realized that the first thing I had to do is to convince people that the river even existed.” But we are moving forward and one of the examples of this progress is Lewis MacAdams Park.

Formerly Marsh Street Nature Center, it was renamed in honour of Lewis MacAdams and it is a fitting honour. Lewis MacAdams Park is so beautiful. While it has a parking lot complete with electric vehicle charging stations and a street entrance, the real entrance is from the river and the bike path, where it sits along the Glendale Narrows. At the river entrance there is a stone column with a carved frieze of Lewis MacAdams and verses of his poetry, as well as other information about his life and work. Behind the column, native grapes cover an open air pavilion that can accommodate over 200 people. The park is filled with bioswales and dry creek beds that help filter the water into the soil and clean it before it enters the river. It has a short loop trail that has exercise equipment stations and surrounds a large grassy area that doubles as a bioswale in the winter. The park is filled with fuschias, sages, oaks, currants, ceanothus, manzanitas and so many more. What is truly lovely about Lewis MacAdams Park is that, as the plants have grown and matured, parts of the landscaping have become obscured. Small vistas have become visible only from one angle. This not only invites visitors to look and observe more closely but, more importantly, it is a reminder that maybe the land is not only for us. That the landscape is not a performance for a viewer, but a larger, more complex system for which aesthetics is the least important aspect.

Lewis MacAdams Park
2944 Gleneden St
Los Angeles, CA 90039







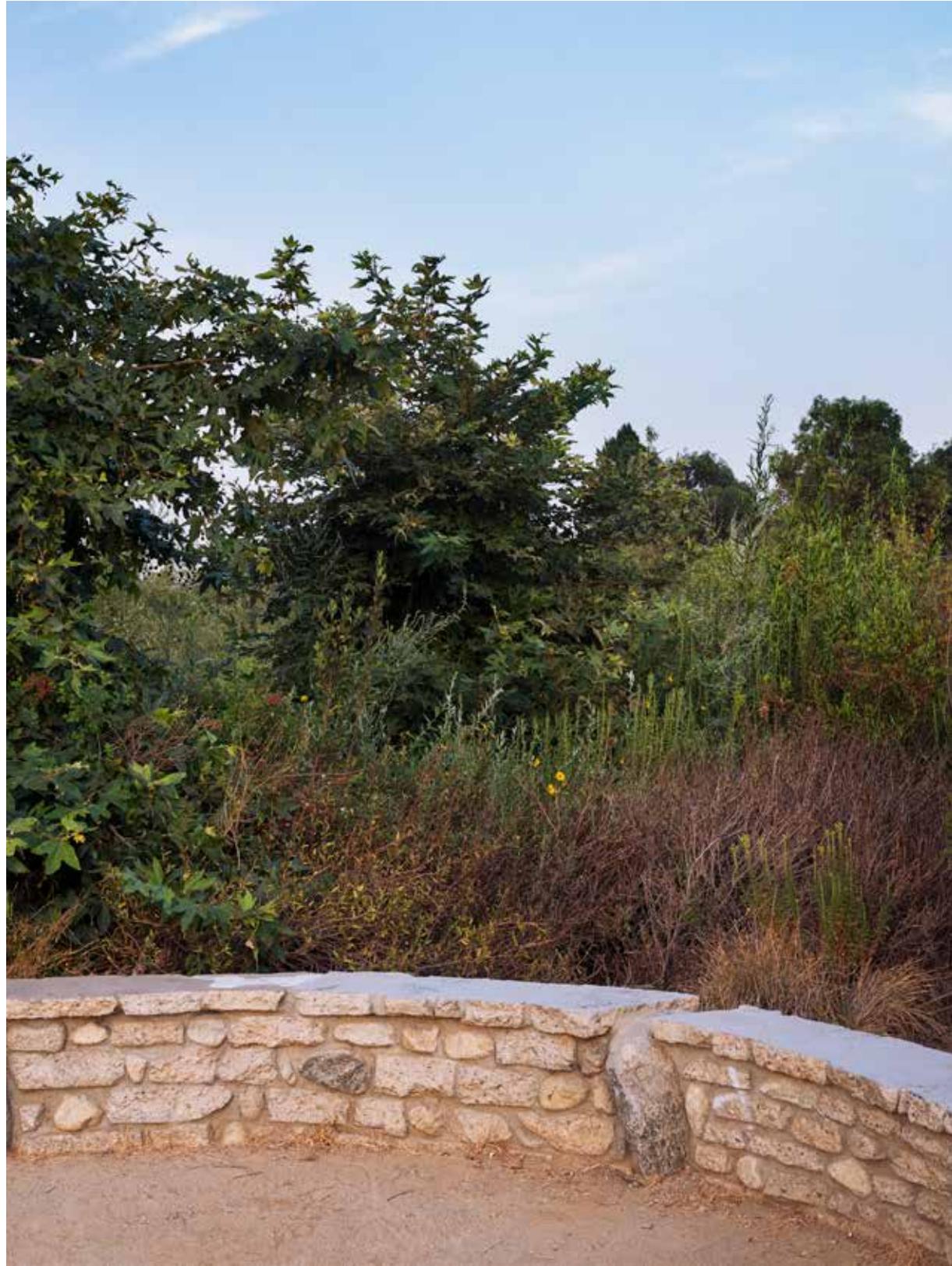
19. North Atwater Park

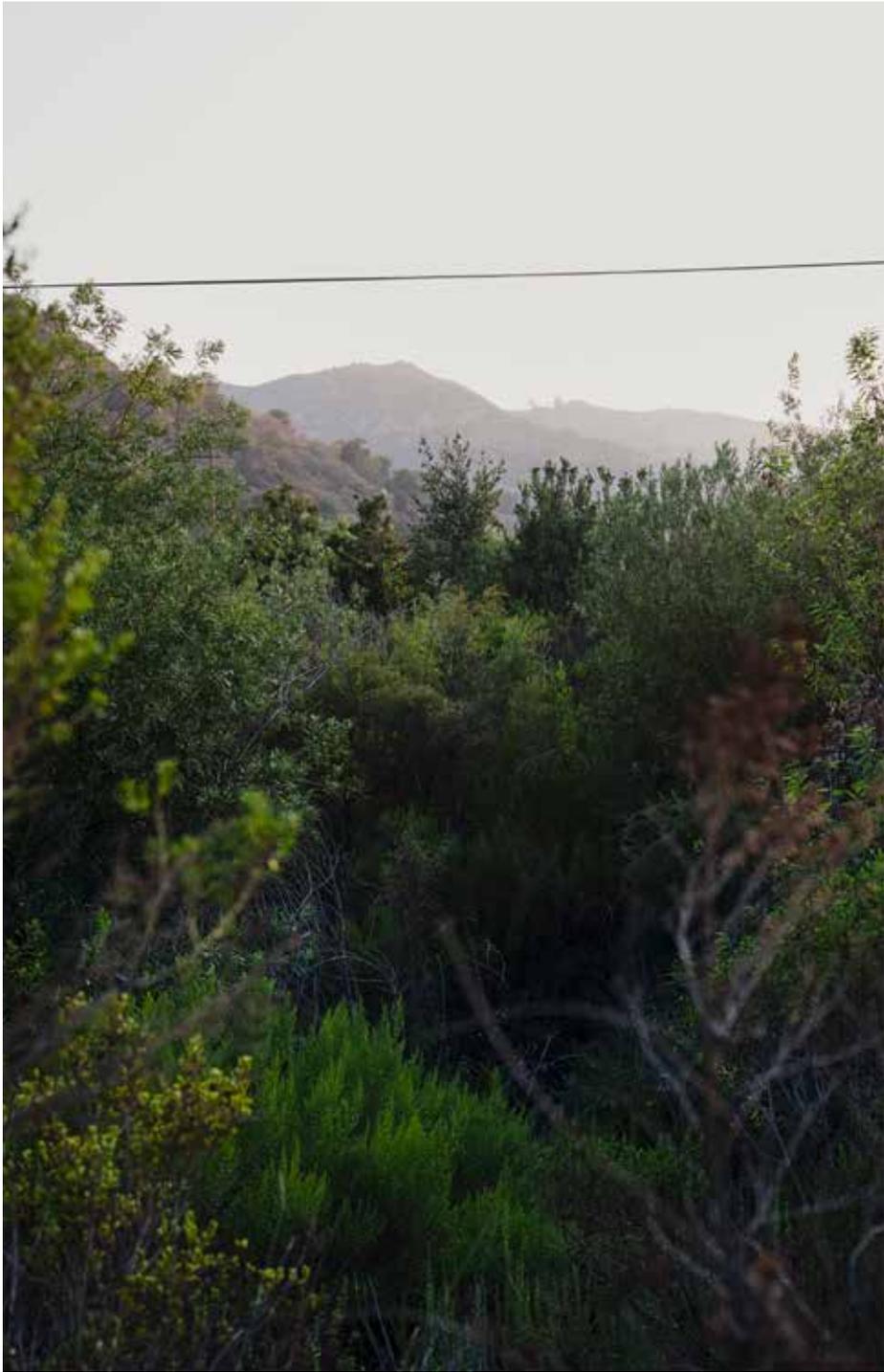
North Atwater Park is exceptional in many ways. It sits on the eastern side of the LA River and is primarily a seasonal riparian creekbed. It gives you the opportunity to walk on narrow trails that wind their way through mule fat, willows, grasses and other riparian plants which, during the winter, are flooded. It's a wonderful experience to walk along the trails and to be welcomed into what, under other circumstances, is inaccessible.

The park runs along and connects to the river path that leads to the stunning North Atwater Bridge. This suspension bridge is a link between the communities on the eastern side of the river to Griffith Park and has two separate walkways, one for pedestrians and the other for equestrians. As brilliant as the bridge and walking along the creek undoubtedly are, the real treasure of this park is the river. This is the start of what is referred to as the Glendale Narrows, which is an eleven mile long section of the river that still has its soft, earth bottom and is not, in fact, completely paved. The river in this section is not just beautiful in comparison to a street drain, but beautiful in comparison even to a river. It is filled with trees, grasses, water plants and life. The North Atwater Bridge is one of the few places that you can cross the river in relative peace (although it is hard, of course, to ignore the 5 freeway). Here you can see fish, water birds, hawks, and insects. In short, you can see a river.

Open from dawn to dusk every day of the week.

North Atwater Park
3900 W. Chevy Chase Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90039





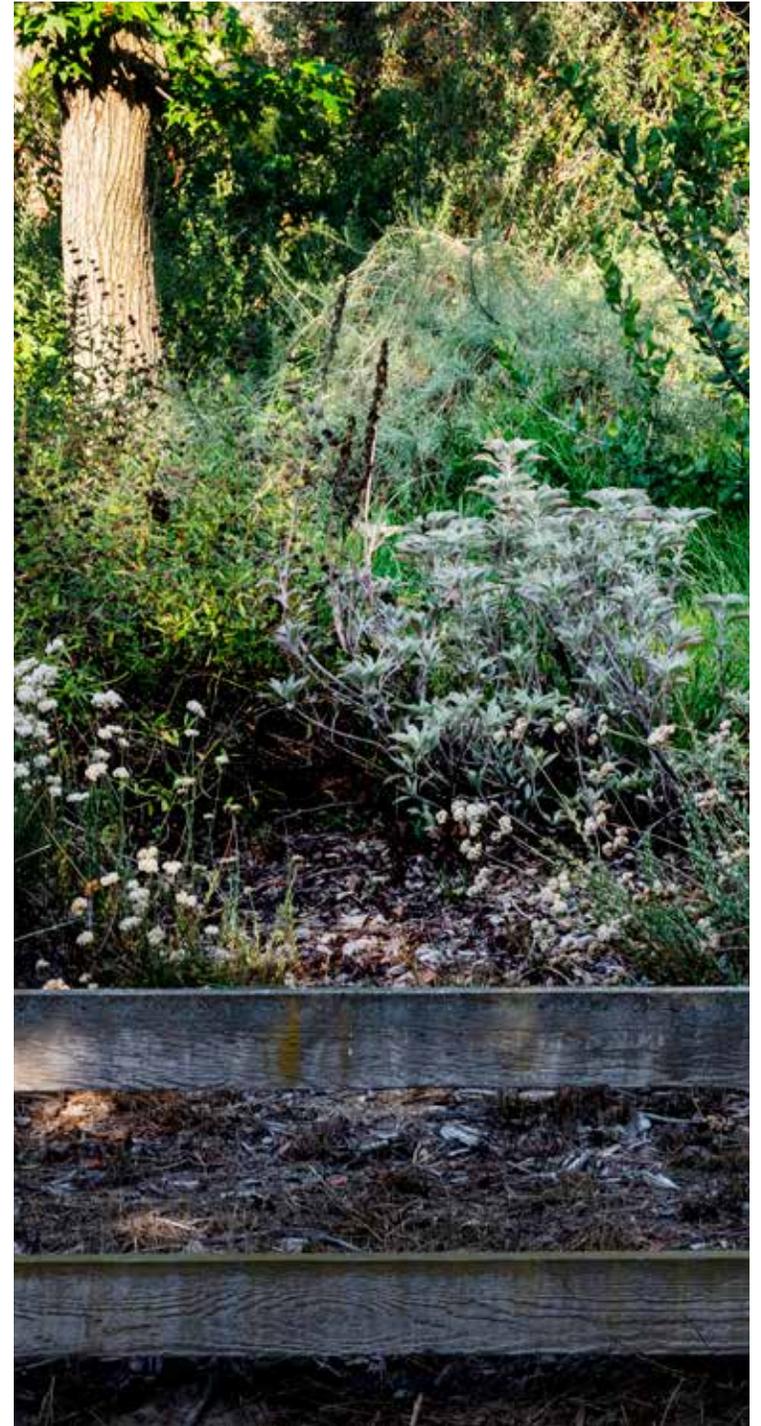
20. Anza Trail Native Garden

In October of 1775 a procession of people a mile long and half a mile wide traveled from Tubac, Arizona to colonize what would become San Jose, California. It was led by Juan Bautista and was made up of 240 soldiers and civilians, half of which were children, and a hundred head of livestock. Their path took them to Mission San Gabriel and, from there, through what would become the Pueblo of Los Angeles. They did not stop there, however, and, instead, traveled north and camped by a river. This would one day be part of the Land Grant given to Corporal Jose Vicente Feliz, and would become known as Rancho Los Feliz.

The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail spans the 1,200 miles that were traveled between 1775 and 1776, four miles of which reside in Griffith Park. According to the National Park Service Information and Map, "The 4-mile recreation trail in Griffith Park is one of the best places in the Los Angeles area to reflect on the legacy and impact of the historic Anza Expedition". At first this may seem like a strange suggestion, considering that the trail spends a fair amount of its time alongside two major freeways, at one point being separated only by a narrow break of trees from the roar of the 5 freeway. It follows the course of the LA River and skirts around a large golf course. But, upon reflection, perhaps this is a perfect place to think about the effects of colonialism, of expansion, the dreams of the west and the damage that they caused. To further drive home the point of destruction and misuse, there are two points that access the LA River, including one that takes you underneath the 5. The Anza Trail Native Garden is a vestige of a large wondrous ecosystem that had been largely destroyed in this area and had to be reintroduced. Even then it was only given a small corner and is not marked on any map that I could find. The Anza Trail Native Garden was created to reflect the native vegetation that the Spanish would have encountered on this section of the trail. It is a cross section of our local soft chaparral. California sagebrush, white sage, coastal sunflowers, penstemons, black sage and California buckwheats are all found in this corner planting. (Keep in mind though, the eucalyptus and maple trees that are still a part of the space are not native.) While small, it still brings a breath of life back to an area cornered between the 5 and a golf course. Most of the plants were propagated from seed collected in Griffith Park which has helped to preserve local genetics. There is, as always, a sign with information about the plant communities that exist in Southern California, as well as a list of the plants found in the garden.

This garden is not currently marked on any maps but is not difficult to find. It can be reached by navigating to the Crystal Springs Campground and then following the parking lot/road around until you reach the walking trail by the freeway. You will see the garden to your left, right at the intersection of the two walking trails and by the golf course. The address listed below is for the Crystal Springs Picnic area.

Crystal Springs Picnic Area
4659 Crystal Springs Dr
Los Angeles, CA 90027







21. Valleyheart North River Walk/ Valleyheart Greenway

Opened in June of 2014, the Valleyheart Riverwalk is a half mile long trail that follows the LA River from Fulton Avenue to Coldwater Canyon. Here we have the LA River in its classic “drainage ditch” variation, though that does not mean that it is devoid of life. In my time walking the trail I found several mallard ducks, one hen mallard with nine ducklings wading in the edge of the water. The trail runs along the north side of the river and the space between the road and the trail is packed with plants. There are five entrances along Valleyheart Drive North. The entrance at Ethel Avenue has a beautiful stone mosaic of a steelhead trout by artist Kevin Carman. Carman chose the steelhead trout as a reminder of what once lived in the river and of its tenuous and damaged ecosystem. The Ethel Avenue entrance also has a sign devoted to California’s role in the boreal migration as part of the Pacific Flyway. The plants grown here are aimed at supporting these birds, for here you can find oaks, elderberries, toyons, laurel sumac, white sage, and buckwheats, all of which are food providers. Every elderberry that I came across was filled with birds feeding on the berries. While there are many shady places to sit and rest along the riverwalk, it can get quite hot, though it must be very pleasant closer to dusk.

Not far from the Valleyheart North River walk is the Valleyheart Greenway. The Greenway sits on the southern side of the LA River between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and Radford Avenue. It was designed with the help of fourth and fifth grade students at Carpenter Elementary School. The gate at the Laurel Canyon entrance was designed by student Michael Harris. This lovely Toad Gate brings you into the Greenway with a trail winding through shrubs and trees to reach the river. Halfway along the path there is a large sculpture of a snake inscribed with the names of the children who helped with the Greenway’s creation. The Radford Avenue entrance has a butterfly garden with fairy duster, mallows, buckwheats and sage. Along the borders of the Greenway keep an eye out for the Island Mallows, a lovely mallow with bright green leaves and bright mauve flowers.

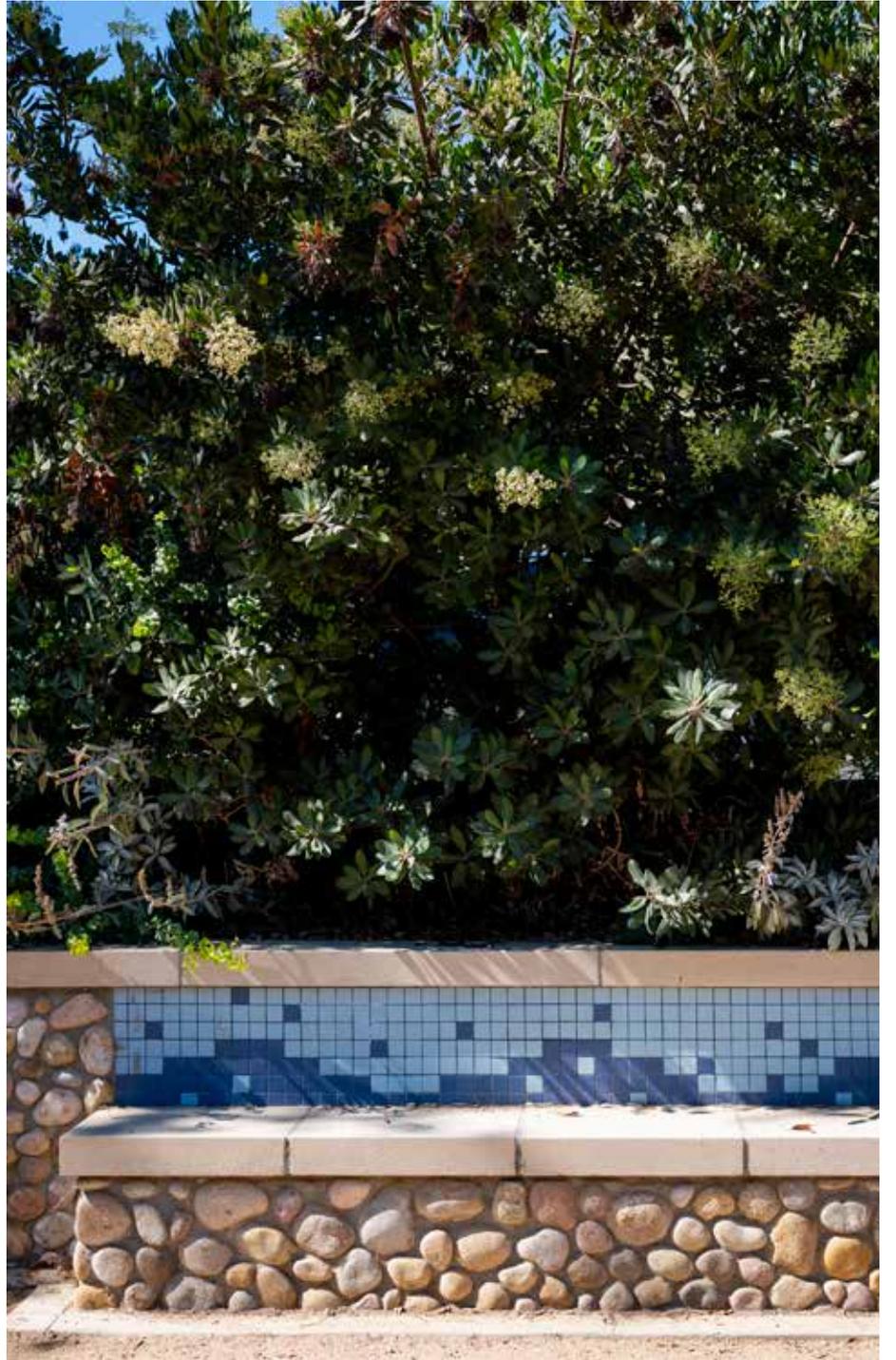
Valleyheart North River Walk

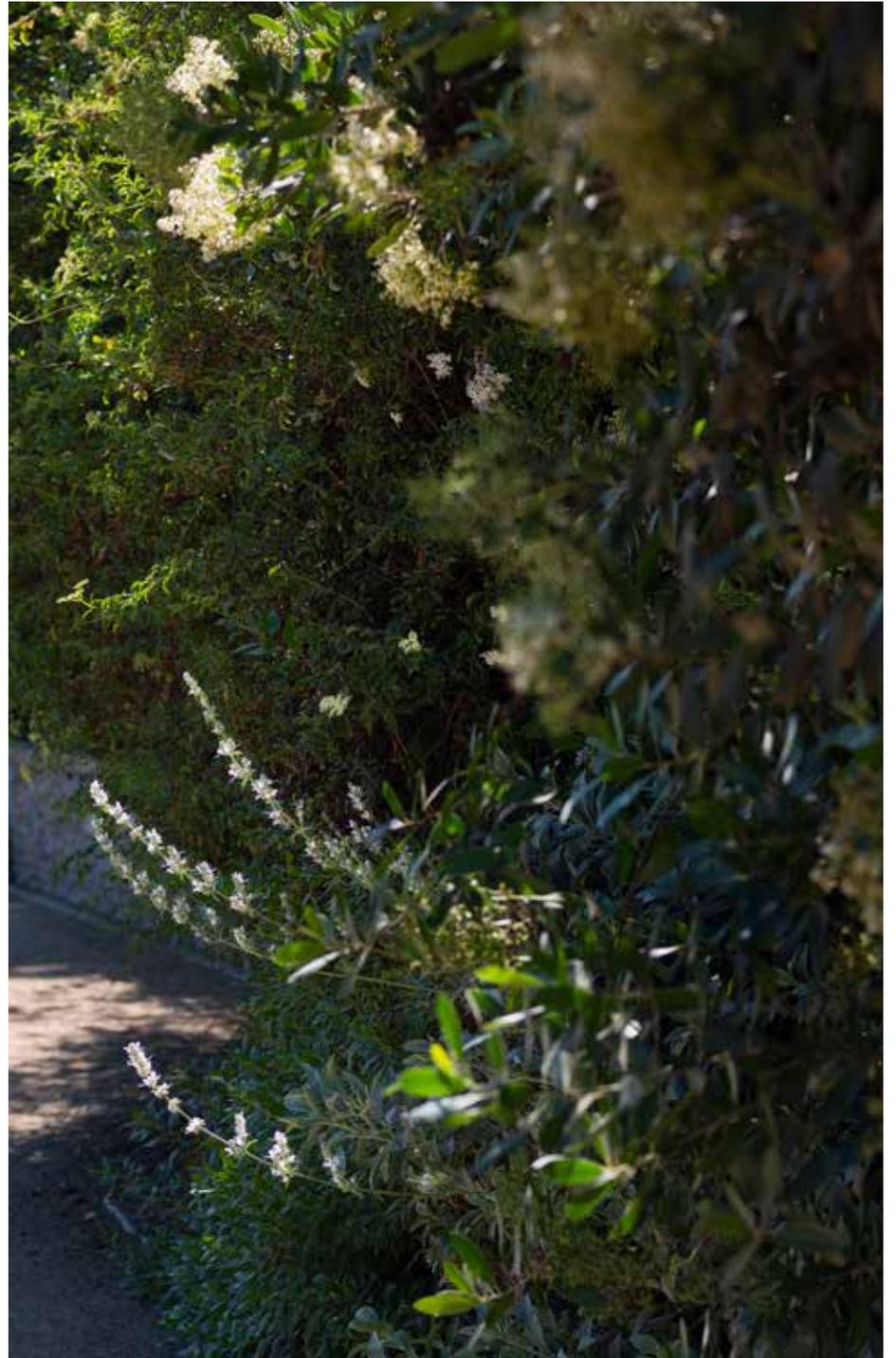
Bloomfield Street/Ethel Ave and Valleyheart Dr

Valleyheart Greenway

Laurel Canyon and Valleyheart Dr

Studio City, CA 91604



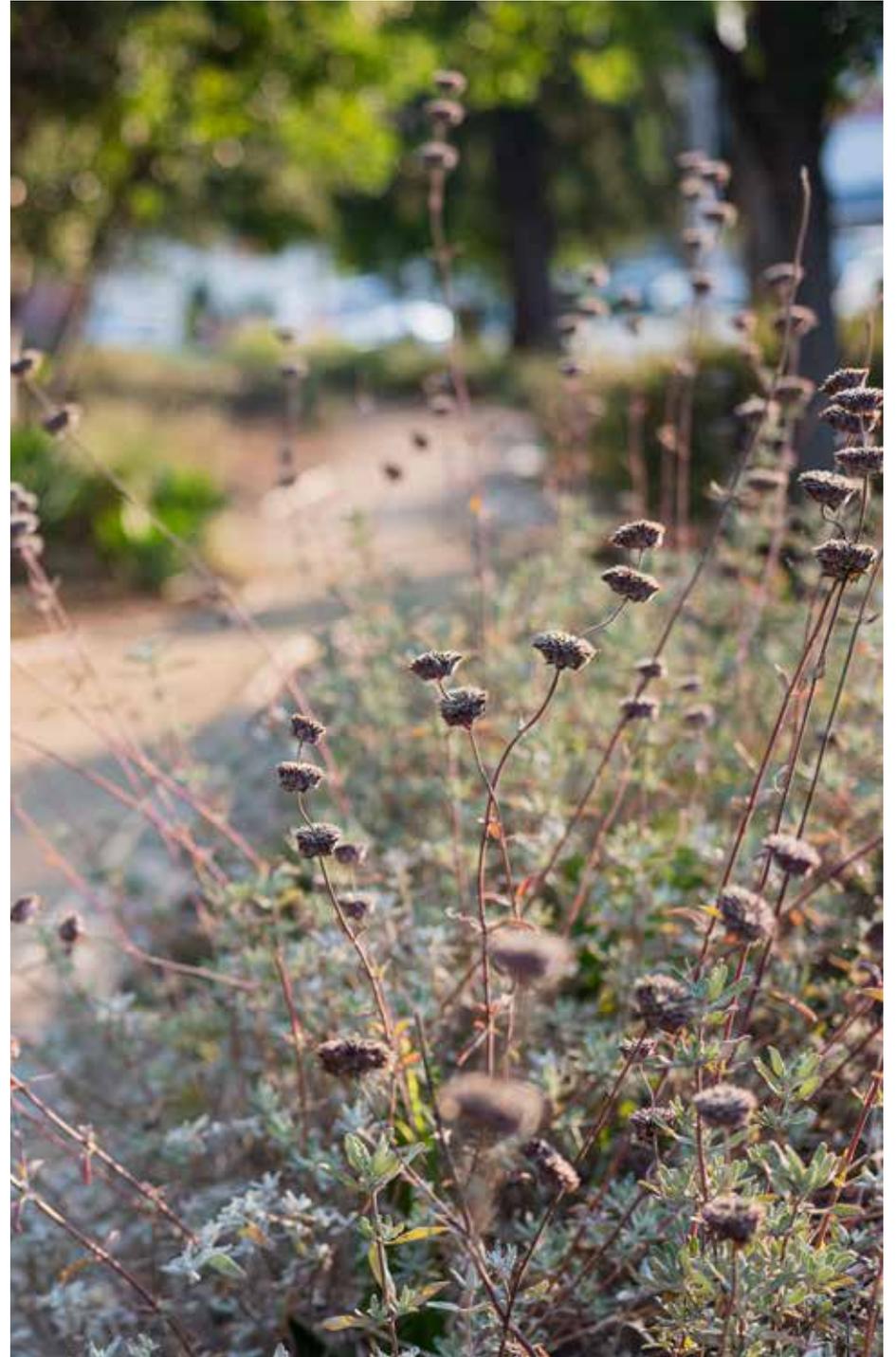


22. The Oasis

The Oasis, a product of the Studio City Beautification Association, was first completed in 2009 and then renovated in 2017. It sits between the hillside and Ventura Blvd. This beautiful pocket-park is filled with redbuds, deer grasses, ceanothus, a seasonal creek and fremontodendrons. In common with Oakdell Sanctuary, also created by the Association, this is a difficult site, right next to a busy road. Despite the traffic, it is a delightful experience to be walking down the sidewalk and then find yourself walking, not on concrete, but on a pathway surrounded by trees, shrubs and grasses. Spring is a show of blooms for this space with redbuds, fremontodendrons and ceanothus.

The Oasis
11200 Ventura Blvd
Studio City, CA 91604



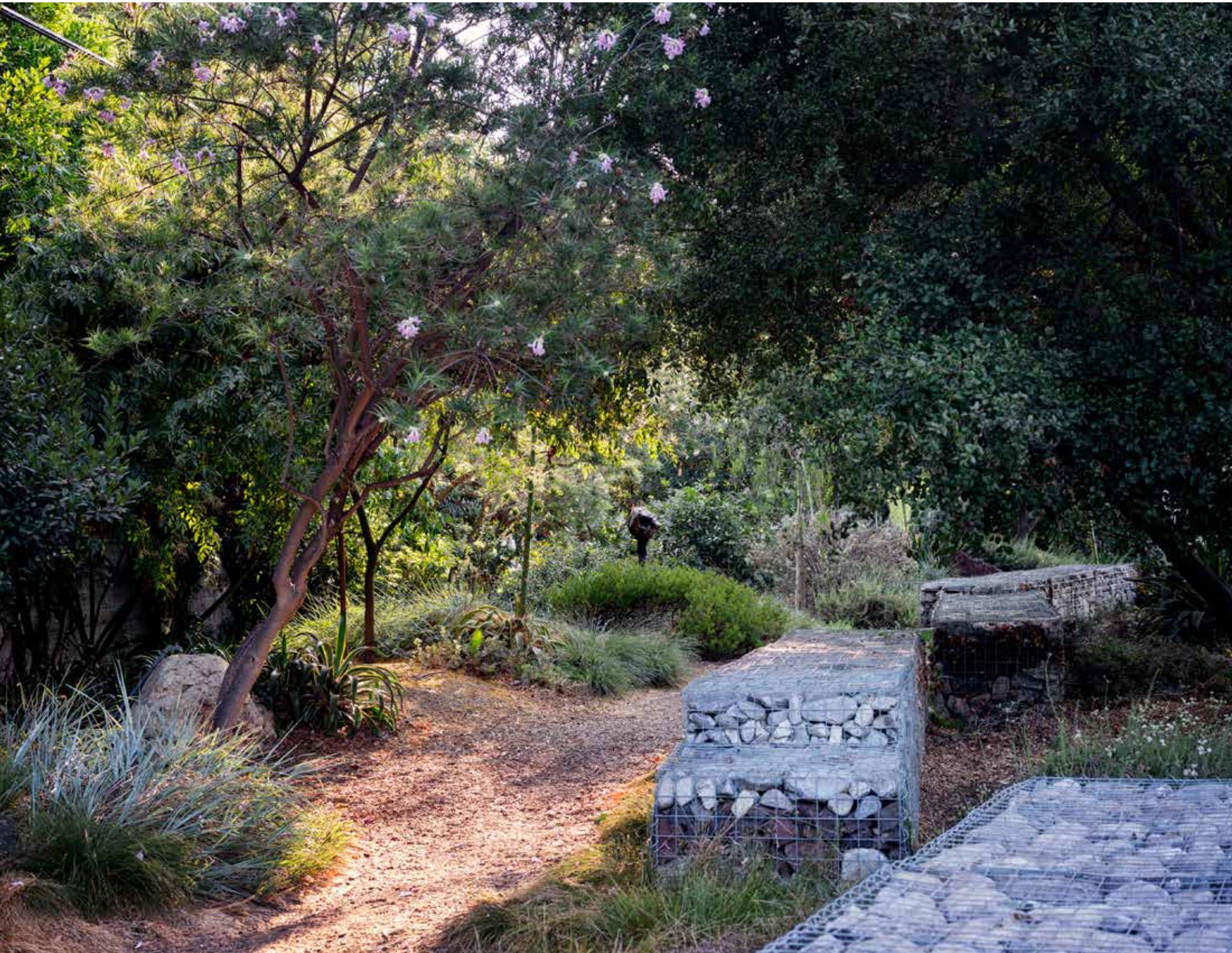




23. Oakdell Sanctuary

This community garden was completed in 2012 by the Studio City Beautification Association. The garden, which was once an empty, weedy lot, is narrow and covers 6,000 square feet. It sits right on Laurel Canyon Blvd and is planted primarily with native plants. This is a great park for those whose aesthetic runs more towards the pruned and controlled rather than the wild. Both the catalina perfume currants and the California buckwheats are pruned into traditional topiary shapes and they wear it well, especially the currants, with their round green leaves and fragrant foliage. The space features beautiful grasses and shade plants and douglas iris. The garden features numerous bird houses and water sources to help support the bird populations in the area.

Oakdell Sanctuary
Oakdell and Laurel Canyon Blvd
Studio City, CA 91604

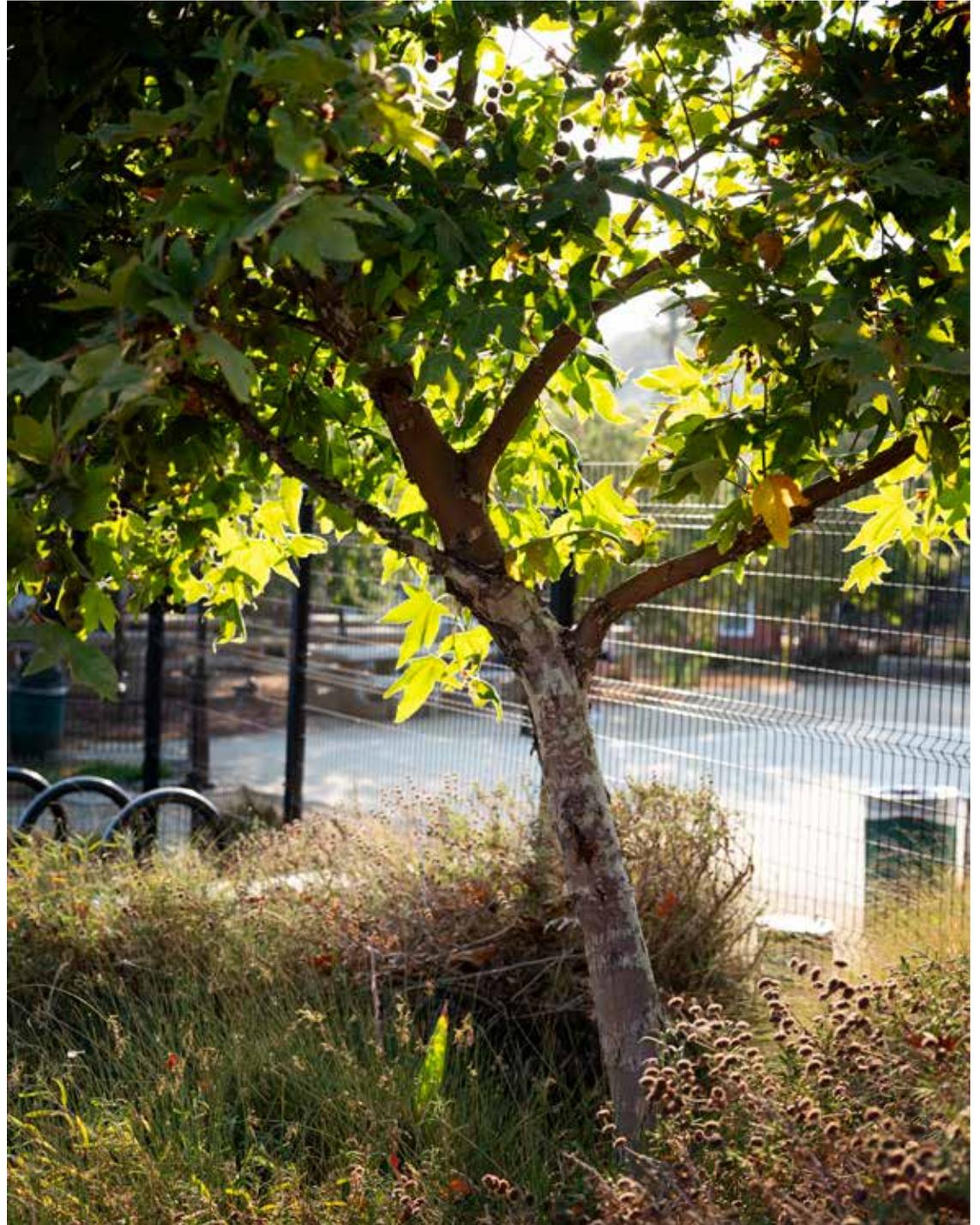


24. Franklin-Ivar Park

The Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority opened Franklin Ivar Park in 2017 on the site of a vacant lot. Studio-MLA, who designed the park, used the discovery that a creek once ran through the site as a starting point for the new park. While only three quarters of an acre, this small park boasts a picnic area, a play area, and an amphitheater. In addition to these amenities, the park has several environmental features as well. A bioswale along the edge of the picnic area captures rainwater and filters it back into the ground. The upper portions of the hill, which are referred to as the forest, are planted with trees and native shrubs, both to provide habitat and to help mitigate pollution. The majority of the plants featured here are native to the Santa Monica Mountains and are a way to rebuild habitat for migrating birds and insects. The picnic area is planted with desert willows, a lovely tree with bright magenta flowers. California buckwheats line the space between the park and Franklin Ave, giving the street a blast of color and life in the hottest and driest parts of the year.

This lovely little park was funded by a Proposition 84 Stormwater grant, which is a series of Water Board grants designed to help prevent contamination of rivers and lakes from stormwater.

Franklin Ivar Park
1900 Ivar Ave
Los Angeles, CA 90028



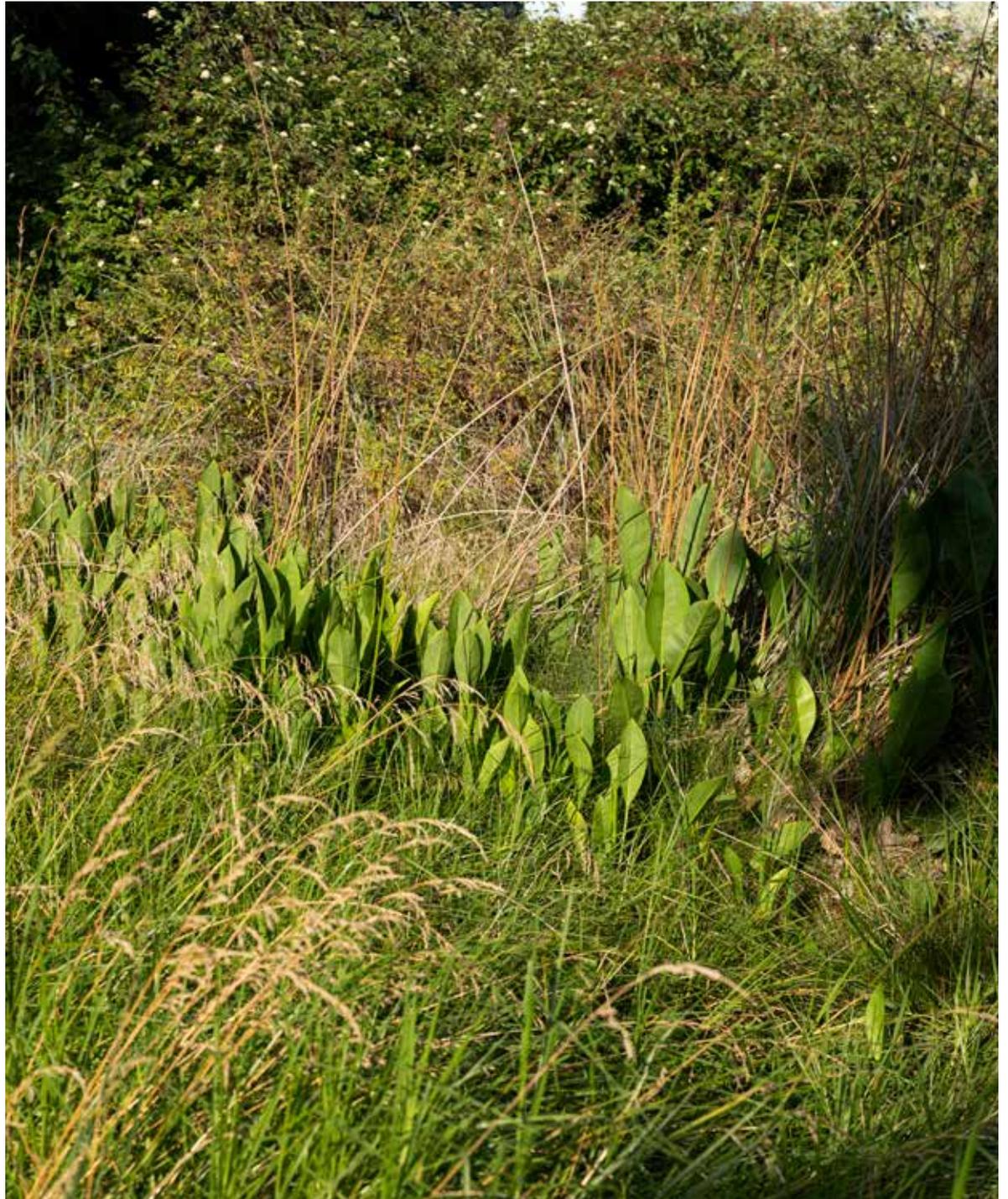


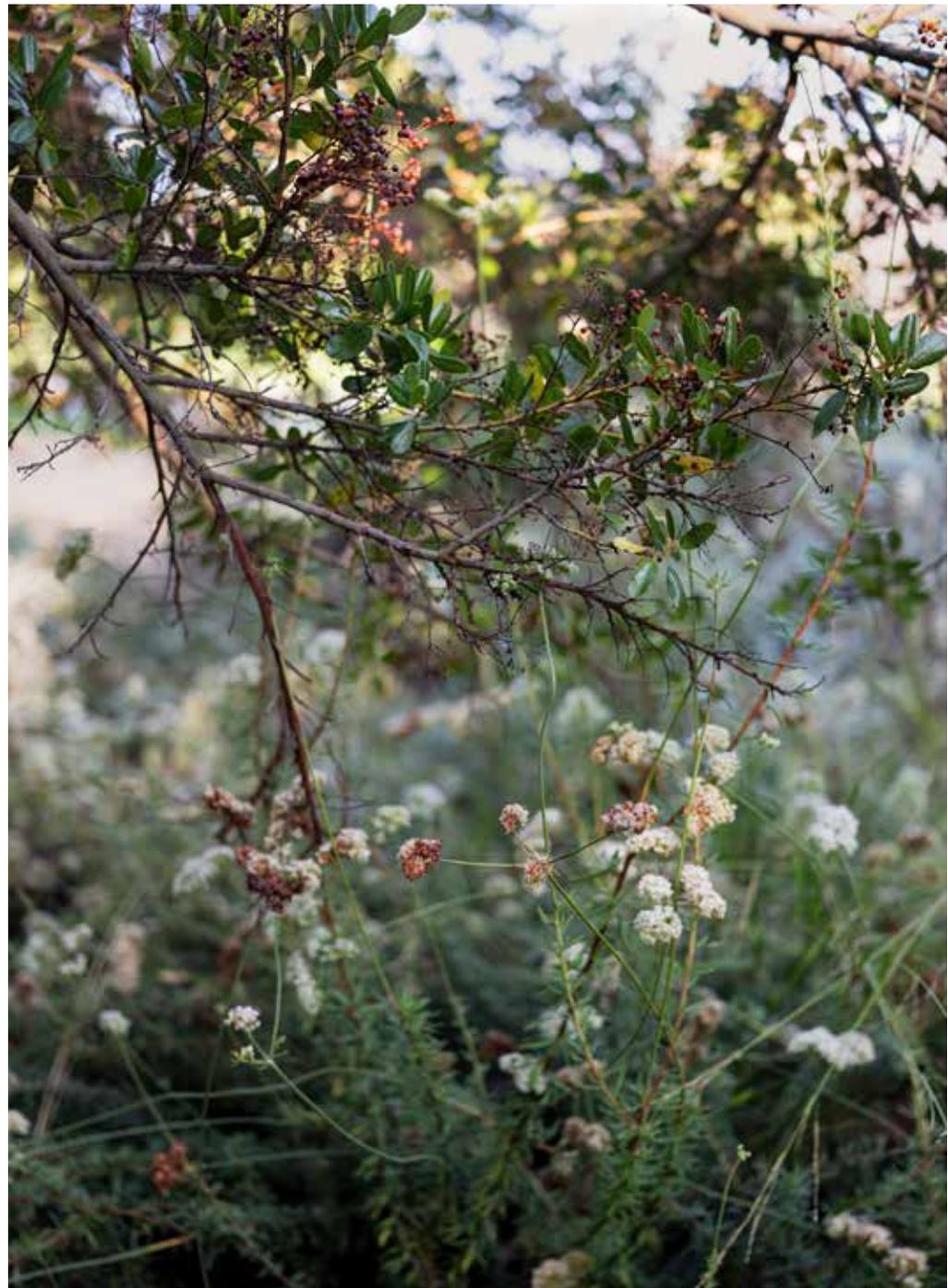
25. Pleistocene Garden

The Los Angeles Basin was a cooler and damper place 10,000-40,000 years ago when dire wolves and saber-toothed tigers roamed the area. It was more like modern day Monterey, misty and cool. The asphalt that bubbles in the pits is excellent at preserving pollen and organic material. Thirty-five years of research, most of which came from Pit 91, concluded that the Los Angeles Basin was filled with pine trees, sages and buckwheats and that the land was divided into coastal sage, riparian, mixed evergreen/redwood and chaparral ecological zones. Something like these ecosystems is represented in the Pleistocene Garden. The garden is filled with sages, ceanothus, barberries and, of course, buckwheats. There are several large Nevin's barberry bushes that are stunning when they are in bloom and covered with red and yellow berries. It is a wonderful thought that these plants have been present in the basin for tens of thousands of years.

The interpretive signs ask visitors to look at the gardens with three different viewpoints in mind, that of the extinct animals, the ancient cultures of the Los Angeles Basin and a modern day conservationist. The signs talk about what animals lived in the ecological region, then how the native people utilized the native plants and, lastly, how important planting native plants is to the future of Los Angeles. The information is fascinating and it is lovely to think of mammoths and giant ground sloths walking through buckwheats and sages. It is, however, a strange place. The modern conservationist paragraph of each sign makes a plea to the reader to plant native plants, yet everything up to that point has spoken about the ecosystem of Los Angeles in the past tense, that it is something that is gone, that passed out of our hands tens of thousands of years ago. This is supported when looking around the rest of the park, for, if there are other native plants, I could not find them. Perhaps the Pleistocene Garden shows what an uphill battle the rewilding of Los Angeles is because, first, we must be convinced that the ecosystem is not yet extinct, then, what it is and, then, that it has value.

Pleistocene Garden
5801 Wilshire Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90036







26. Eternal Meadows

Eternal Meadows is located at the Santa Monica Woodlawn Cemetery. Established in 2016, it is part of a natural burial site that is designed to have significantly less environmental impact than traditional burial methods. No cement, metal or formaldehyde is used in the burial process and all urns are biodegradable. The meadow that covers the plot is beautiful. It is a long rectangle that runs from the road to the edge of the cemetery. There are several crossing points that allow you to move from one side to the other but, for the most part, the meadow is left unbroken and inaccessible. The benefit is that, while walking along the edge, you are treated to large pristine sections of grassland. Wildflowers, small shrubs, and flowering plants are mixed with various grasses. The middle section of the meadow is filled with a mass planting of purple three-awn, which contrasts beautifully with the sedges that surround it. At the end of the plot is a small riparian area with monkey flowers and a giant chain fern. Meadows are hard to establish and to maintain, and this is an incredible example of one.

The Eternal Meadows section of the cemetery is accessible through the northeast entrance on 14th St.

Santa Monica Woodlawn Cemetery
1847 14th St
Santa Monica, CA 90404





27. Ballona Discovery Park

The Ballona Wetlands are the product of decades long community activism. After over a century of abuse and degradation, the 1960's saw the destruction of 900 acres of wetlands for the construction of Marina Del Rey and devastated the ecology of the region. In 1976, Howard Hughes, who owned the remaining wetlands, died and his heirs planned to develop the land. In response, the Friends of the Ballona Wetlands was formed. Finally, in 2003, the wetlands were purchased by the State of California and made an official reserve. Since then, extensive restoration of the wetlands has taken place with more projects planned for the future. Several endangered species live in the wetlands, the California least tern, Belding's savannah sparrow, and the El Segundo blue butterfly.

The Discovery Center is the gateway to the wetlands. The Friends of the Ballona Wetlands describe it as a museum without walls and it is packed full of information. Here one can learn about the history of the wetlands, their creation (they are man-made as there was nothing left of the habitat to preserve), the Tongva, how they lived, their culture and one can even listen to examples of their language and listen to a Tongva story inside a recreation of a kiiy. There is a section that is devoted to Tongvian medicinal plants and helpful information plaques give the names and uses of these plants. The watershed walk takes you through each habitat in California, from the mountains to the sea. The goal of the park is to connect visitors to the wetlands and to the complex and important role that the wetlands play in the greater ecosystem. The smooth rich brown walls and hard-scaping at the entrance to the garden give the wild meadow-like plantings structure and elegance and, as you move farther into the space, the design becomes less formal and blends into a wild landscape. Trails crisscross through the Discovery Center and connect with the long walking trail that runs the length of Bluff Creek Drive. There are picnic tables and benches scattered along the trails. Thoughtful planting creates year-round interest; there is always something blooming and something new to learn.

Ballona Discovery Park
13110 Bluff Creek Dr
Los Angeles, CA 90094





28. Gardena Willows Wetlands Preserve

Gardena Willows Wetlands Preserve was originally a part of the complex and extensive wetland system that linked the site of the preserve with Harbor Lake and, eventually, the Pacific Ocean. When the area was being dredged in the 1940's many Tongva artifacts were discovered, confirming the historical cultural importance of the area. During the Spanish and, later, the Mexican occupation, much of the surrounding area was used for cattle grazing and was named Sausal Redondo. After a series of bad droughts in 1875 and 1876 the land was sold and used successfully for dry-farming barley. It was not until the 1920's that the area began to be developed for housing and large portions were drained.

In the 1970's the city planned to fill in the last remaining section of the wetlands and replace it with a convention center. The local residents fought the city "to preserve its value as a green oasis, an historical vestige of the past, a migratory stop for ducks and other migrants, a permanent home for resident bird species, a safe haven for the frogs and other amphibians who live there, and a vital mechanism that cleans street water runoff before it reaches the Dominguez Channel and eventually, the Pacific Ocean." The community won and the preserve was created, though other progress was slow moving. It has only been this year that local political support has created two posts of Naturalists for the wetlands and there are hopes of further support for the project.

The preserve is a beautiful, wild place. The loop trail leads you around the edge of the space and the riparian area. The plants that border the trail are part of the restoration efforts of the preserve and were planted many years ago. Here you can find toyons, oaks, sages, buckwheats, catalina cherries and other mature coastal sage scrub plants. The profusion of water and dense habitat makes this a haven for butterflies, birds, amphibians and reptiles. There are two points where you can breach the tangle of willows and wild grapes, a small outlook and the zig-zag bridge that offers a shortcut from the entrance to the southern side of the preserve.

The very west side is where you can find the volunteer created demonstration garden, "Mother Nature's Backyard". While small, it is jam packed with beautiful flowering plants. Chest high buckwheats, a stunning elderberry tree, yarrows and a lovely ceanothus are all to be found here. Because this garden is volunteer run, the pandemic did have a toll on the care of the garden, but there is a charm to seeing the plants growing a bit wild and untamed. Far from looking neglected, they have escaped their allotted areas, covering hardscaping and turning pathways into narrow passages. It fits so well with the wild abundance of the preserve. If you visit in the early summer look for the puffy white seeds from the willow trees. You won't have to look too hard as they are not easy to miss and cover the nearby ground and trees and look like frost or snow.

The Gardena Willows Wetlands Preserve is open the second Sunday of each month from 1:00PM to 4:00PM and the fourth Saturday from 9:00AM to 12:00PM. Though keep an eye on their Instagram page for other events.

The Gardena Willows Wetlands Preserve
1200 West 170th St
Gardena, CA





29 .Madrona Marsh Nature Center Demonstration Garden

As the City of Torrance grew in the 1950's and 1960's the city found itself losing large tracts of open space and that it was falling behind the optimum ratio. The solution was to convert sites that were otherwise set aside for oil drilling. Madrona Marsh was one such area. It had been left open for drilling since 1920 but had never had more than one platform on the site and, therefore, was both undeveloped and relatively undisturbed. While mostly ignored by the general public, the site had already been recognized as having an ecological value. It was a popular birding destination and had been used in botany and zoological courses over the years. In 1972, a meeting was held to create support for the creation of a preserve and wildlife park. Not long after this meeting the Friends of Madrona Marsh was formed and they became the driving force behind the creation of the preserve. The city, however, was hesitant and sided with developers, Watt Industries, on one notable occasion, when it was suggested that the marsh be moved to Columbia Park. In fact, the Friends of Madrona Marsh would battle the city and developers from 1973 to 1987 when, finally, 42 acres were secured for the preserve. The Nature Center was built in the early 1990's.

The Madrona Marsh was once part of a much larger wetlands ecosystem that extended throughout the southern part of the Los Angeles Basin. The space is part of the larger El Segundo Dune system and is a mix of several micro habitats: back dune, coastal prairie, alkali margin vernal pool and vernal marsh. It is considered to be one of, if not the only, remaining vernal marshes in Los Angeles County. Because the vernal marsh is temporary, only existing in the wet season, and then slipping underneath the sand into the aquifer in the dry season, there is no continuous water source. To compensate for the disconnection from its historical water source, water is now pumped in during the rainy season. The site has a fascinating geological history as well. It was part of the historic route west of the Los Angeles river until the rise of the Palos Verdes peninsula routed the river south to Long Beach. This created a natural inland depression. The site is covered with fine sand that has been deposited through the aeolian process, which is the erosion, transportation and deposition of sediment by wind. This complex mix of rare ecosystems has been awarded a SEA designation, which stands for Significant Ecological Area, and is awarded to locations of irreplaceable biological resources that support valuable and threatened species and promote species movement through habitat linkages and corridors.

The demonstration gardens were created and are maintained by Tony Baker to encourage the community to use native plants in their own yards. Originally, the gardens were planned in specific sections, back dune, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, riparian and desert, though, through the thirty odd years of the gardens' life, some plants have moved around a little. The gardens have a saltbush hedge, large mature fremontodendrons, ceanothus, sages, a grass meadow and the rare mariposa lily that blooms in the spring.

Madrona Marsh Preserve and Nature Center
3201 Plaza del Amo
Torrance, CA 90503





30. George F Canyon Nature Center and Preserve

The George F Canyon Nature Center and Preserve protects 51 acres of pristine canyonland, with a seasonal creek, riparian willow and coastal sage scrub habitat. The land belongs to the Rolling Hills Estates and is run by the Palos Verdes Nature Conservancy. The nature trail is 1.8 miles out and back, and filled with informational stops, scenic overlooks and several points of geological interest. The demonstration gardens sit at the start of the trailhead next to the parking lot on Palos Verdes Drive E, though they can also be reached through a short walk past the creek from the Nature Center. The gardens are made up of beautiful mature coastal sage plants, many of which are labeled. The path is wide and well maintained, and edged with large chest-high hedges of various buckwheat varieties. Along the pathway are several shaded seating areas and a scenic overlook of the start of the canyon down towards the Nature Center. While spring is always beautiful, I would suggest visiting in summer for the unrivaled experience of walking through a sea of buckweats in full bloom.

The Preserve is open from 8 AM to 6 PM daily and the Nature Center is open on Friday 1 PM to 4 PM and Saturday and Sunday from 10 AM to 4 PM. Dogs are welcome on a leash and the trail is open to horses.

George F Canyon Nature Center and Preserve
27305 Palos Verdes Dr E,
Rolling Hills Estates, CA 90274



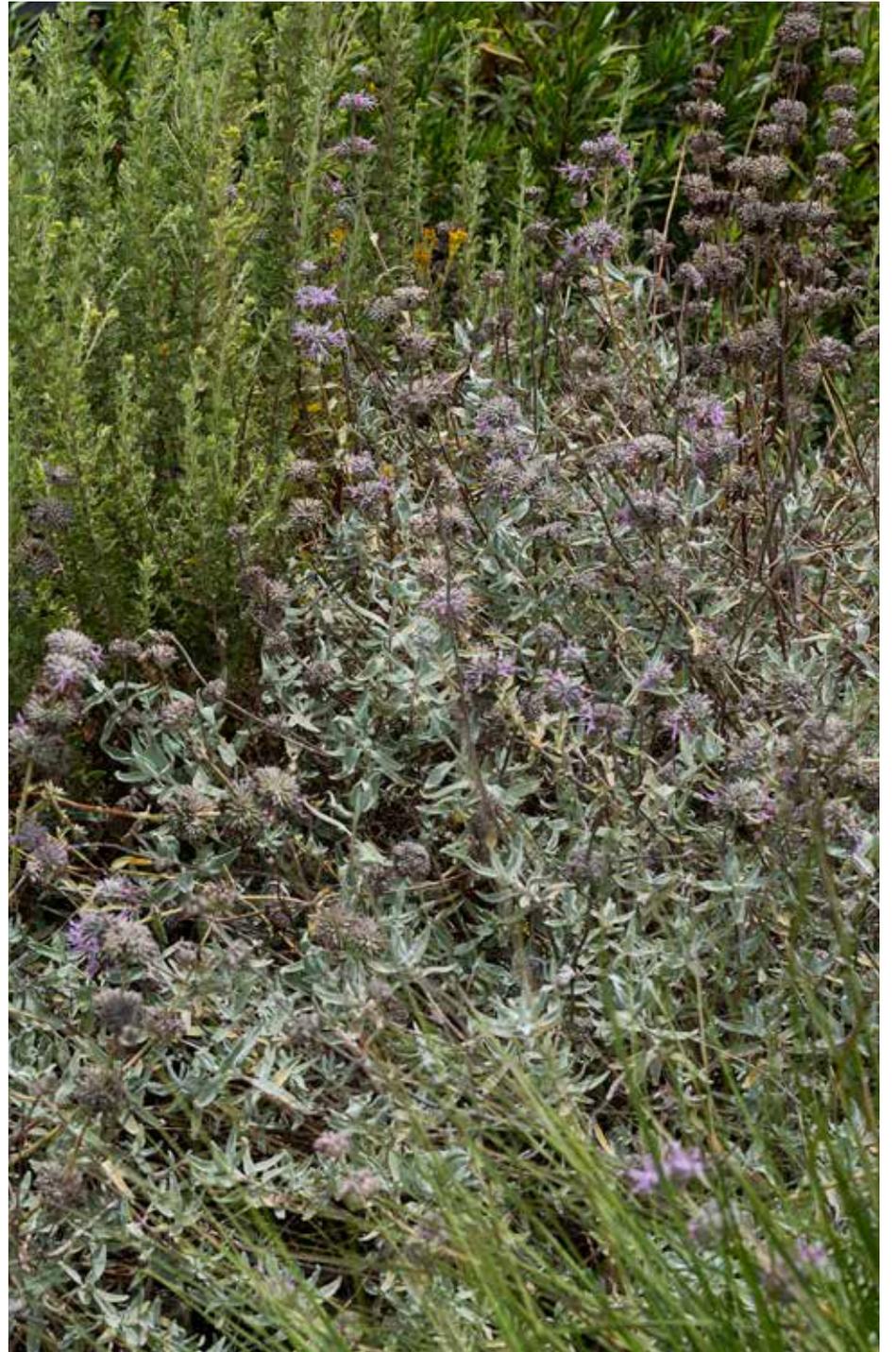




31. Point Vicente Interpretive Center

This beautiful native cottage-style garden is located around the buildings of the Interpretive Center which sits on the ocean. There is a small decomposed granite trail that runs through the garden allowing you to get closer to the plants. The Center features information on the cultural and natural history of the area and focuses on the Pacific Grey Whale which can be viewed from the cliff of the Center between April and December. The gardens are a small and beautiful example of how native plants can be used in more domestic settings. *A special thanks to volunteer Kathy Z. who mentioned this lovely garden to me while at the White Point Nature Center.*

Point Vicente Interpretive Center
31501 Palos Verdes Dr W
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275



32. White Point Nature Education Center and Preserve

The White Point area has a long and complicated past. Originally, it was open grassland that was maintained through controlled burning by the Tongva. There are five recorded archaeological sites within the White Point site, four of which are nationally registered, indicating that this was an area of use. Once the Spanish arrived, the land was part of the first private land concession of 75 acres that was given to Juan Jose Dominguez. In the 1820's the land was part of Jose Dolores Sepulveda cattle ranch. When drought, flooding and other difficulties affected the cattle ranch, the area was inhabited by Japanese fishermen and a Japanese community. In 1941 this community was forced from their homes and land and incarcerated in internment camps. White Point became a part of the Coastal Defense System during WWII. Afterwards, during the Cold War, White Point became home to numerous Nike Missiles. In 1978 the land was decommissioned as a military base and the 102 acres were gifted to the City of Los Angeles for the use of a public park. It was not until 2000 that the park was dedicated and it finally opened in 2003.

The White Point Nature Center was opened in 2010. The Center itself is housed in a repurposed missile assembly building and is surrounded by beautiful demonstration gardens. The gardens are divided into four sections, north, south, east and west. Each section has an information board with the significance of that area and houses the plants that are associated with it. The gardens move between carefully maintained and formally planted areas around the Center and wilder, more natural spaces as the demonstration gardens fade into the wilder areas of the preserve. The gardens show how well native plants can fit into a more stylized and formal garden. The front of the Center hosts a large meeting and sitting area with natural looking hardscape. Large California sycamores grow around the edges with grasses and small scrubs. The White Point Nature Center demonstration gardens are a stunning example of reclaimed land use and thoughtful, forward-thinking preservation.

White Point Nature Education Center and Preserve
1600 W Paseo Del Mar
San Pedro, CA 90731



