

Venice Fieldwork

Designed by Abbott Kinney in 1905, Venice was intended to be 'fantasy playground' for the downtown business elite to have second homes. He bought the land from Southern California and aimed to recreate the romantic vision of Venice, Italy, mimicking the seawater canals, authentic bridges and colonnaded facades. Oil was struck off the coast of the area in 1927 leading to it being amalgamated into the city of LA. Pressure for development soon arose from the corroded houses and stagnant canals, which still extends into the society today. In the post-war period of 1950s and 60s, 'beatnik' enclaves began to appear, with hippies moving into the area and settling in developing sites, which subsequently shaped the image of the district giving it a counterculture edge. This caused an alternative gentrification was spawned in Kinney's infrastructure, including coffee houses, jazz-poetry venues and makeshift residencies making a rise. As always, this gentrification brought along disputes about the redevelopment, being based around the repurposed vision of the original architecture, and so this ongoing attack on 'weird' architecture and landscape of the Venice district is also an attack of some of the locals' lifestyle. From the 1970s onward, the first gentrification wave experienced by Venice introduced affluent groups with a sense of 'hipness'. Today, Venice beach is a fully gentrified space and is currently contesting its independence from wider LA.

This blog will look into the ways in which Venice is portrayed in the media and wider representation, analysing how the architecture and facilities available portray Venice to onlookers, It will then go on to talk about the 'Free Venice' movement, comparing the old and new architecture within the residential area, and linking this movement of gentrification to that occurring in Brighton. We will finish by looking at the *New Age* culture, discussing the remnants of the hippy culture from the 1970s, as well as the vanguard of new environmental consciousness rising in the area and why its flourishing here and not somewhere else.

The Presentation of Venice

With the Atlantic area and Venice being regarded as the "toughest place in the United States to build new housing", there is a clear sense of gentrification that's impacted the area. It is an anti-growth neighbourhood, meaning the area incentivised residents to move there for the view and scenery instead of the transport links or high paying jobs. The group that entered the area at this time began to gentrify it, with the street art, coffee shops and food making it an attractive place to live. With the continuing waves of gentrification came reconstruction and redevelopment of houses, introducing a more contemporary style that we found to largely be brutalistic - defined by its concrete and glass, with sharp edges and bold structures. This led to the 'Stop the Monster' campaign that is discussed later in this blog. The area experiences constant foot traffic from tourists, health fanatics and social media influencers due to the

accessibility of the area and the contrasting lifestyles that Venice Beach presents. As mentioned the area experience vast amounts of gentrification in which the current population is trying to resist, however could this lead to the eradication of the prominent bohemian lifestyle.

The presentation of Venice Beach in current media contrasts how it was formerly presented, what once was a bohemian lifestyle, or even overly attractive lifeguards frolicking on the beach as seen in Baywatch. It seem Venice Beach isn't what it used to be. Although 'Venetians' find distaste in Venice Beach being referred to as a tourist destination, it's whole concept historically was to be a town of holiday homes, making this a case of historical irony. The media is highly critical of the current residents of Venice Beach and its opposition to further development, claiming that soon the only people that will be living there are rich and old (as they could afford the houses when they bought them), therefore, this could lead to a loss in the bohemian lifestyle that Venice is so widely known for. Within a local newspaper called the Argonaut we read through, the only article on Venice was about a recent shooting on a homeless encampment, with locals commenting on the growing homeless population in Venice bringing crime, in the form of prostitution and drug deals, highlighted by the needles found on the streets. This shines a light on the negative view that not only outsiders have on Venice but also those who live there.



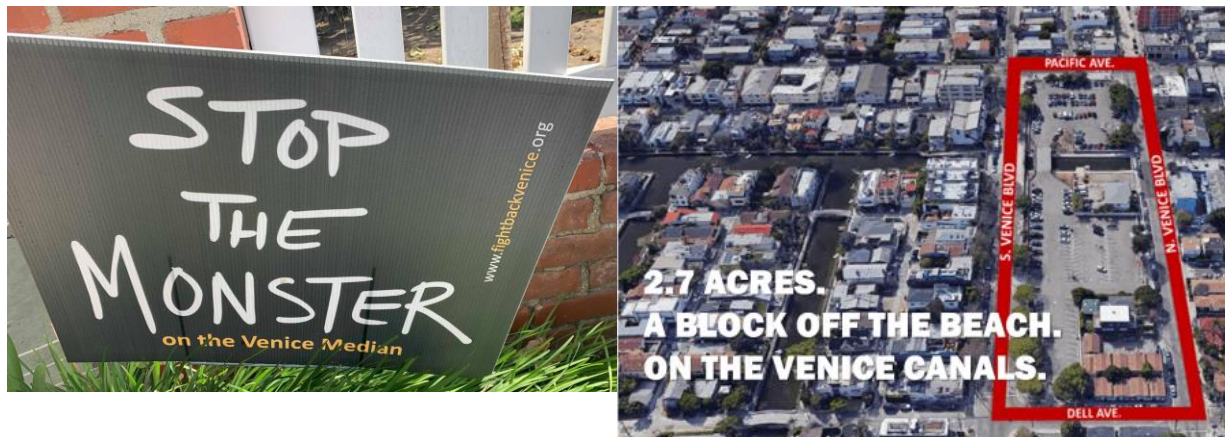
Walking down the Ocean Promenade it was obvious that Venice Beach catered to tourists, shops were selling slogan t-shirts, others selling lifeguard outfits and accessories definitely playing up to the media representation of the area. Street performers littered the streets, some garnering more attention the others. Street-performers also differed in the way they approached the tourists, some staying their respective boundaries, others were overbearing (such as this man with an Iguana). An uncomfortable situation arises with one of the street performers who came over bearing an iguana, insisting that we stroke it, others tried to force CD's into our hands, yet we were adamant we did no want them. In comparison to the seafront in Brighton the performers contrast, there is less performance with a focus on art and gifts shops. As well as contrasting atmospheres, Venice Beach radiated chaos; megaphones, signs and an overwhelming amount of people passing through the area whereas Brighton seems to be more relaxed.

Continuing Struggle for Independence in the district

From 1960s to 1990s, Venice was home to a beach bums and artistic rebels. On our visit it was clear to see that this counterculture was being either erased or commodified. There were still a few people who were still living this counterculture, however the commodification has become much more overpowering. We did not see any first hand evidence of a 'Free Venice' campaign however, through our perceptions of Venice and our post-fieldwork research we gained a better understanding of the movement.

Some 'Venetians' don't see themselves as 'Angelinos' and, many are against the changes that are brought by incoming businesses and residential development. There are a number of people that believe that the nation's second largest city, LA, being home to more than 4 million people is too big and bureaucratic to effectively govern the idiosyncratic beach community that has a comparatively small population of only 40,000. One person highlighted that 'there was one place that you could express yourself, and that was Venice' and now this has begun to be taken away from the community - thus why Vexit has become a more and more pressing problem within this southern California area.

While walking through the canals, we saw a number of "Stop the Monster" signs which were protesting the creation of a proposed 140-unit housing project in Venice.



Many locals are against this project but will be powerless to do anything about it. This has added fuel to the fire for the independence movement. On the official page of the 'Fightback Venice' movement, there is pro-'Vexit' rhetoric such as standing up "for ourselves" and saving "our families", "our community" and having to "man the barricades".

We noticed that a newer house with more modern architecture than the traditional Venice residential property, and an adjacent property under reconstruction, both had one of these "Stop the Monster" signs outside them. We speculated that these signs may have been placed outside these properties by other residents who disliked the modern aesthetic of these houses. Although this is purely speculation, we thought that acts such as this could be part of the general movement of Venice locals who are fighting against current and future development and even fighting for independence.

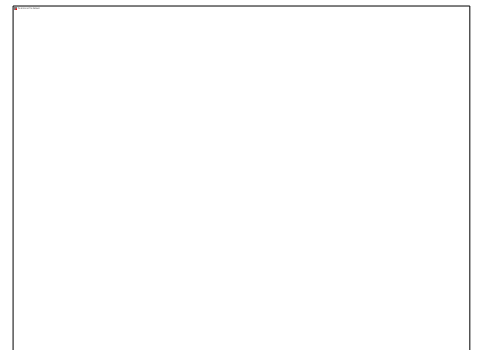


The 'Vexit' idea has had a short and unsuccessful lifetime so far. It gained traction in 2016 from a Venice Neighborhood Council committee which researched its viability. However, minorities and low income households have opposed it as a project run for/ by old, white, wealthy people.

The New Age

-Are there remnants of Venice's 1960's scene or is there a vanguard of a new environmental consciousness?

Throughout the district, schools of 'New Age' thought are visibly prevalent, in which Venice's 'alternative' attitudes and way of life are evident through its economies, atmosphere and related activities. Often described as an area which has exhibited a long-standing 'counterculture' of resistance, we as a group realised it has a visibly distinct identity in comparison to the rest of Los Angeles. With local shops and vendors lining the seafront, there is a distinct feel of bohemia; a large majority of shops relay spirituality including palm and psychic readings, crystal healings, Native American dreamcatchers and traditional pipes, chakra balancing and medical marijuana/CBD oils. Far removed from the chains and transnational corporations that characterise larger district such as Santa Monica or Glendale, its 'quirky' feel is strongly valued by locals who live there, protesting the invasion of capitalist investment. Such evidence of these 'individualistic' shops and recreational spaces are referenced below.



- Ceremony Meditation on Rose Avenue has a Zen Crystal Garden at the back of the shop. They also have classes and workshops to practice medication, healing, cleansing and self-growth.
- Moon Juice is part of the recent adaptogen renaissance. It represents a holistic lifestyle. These are super herbs, plants and mushrooms that are known for their healing and wellness properties. They all claim to have different benefits, mostly related to helping your body handle stress. Others have been shown to have anti-inflammatory effects, lower cholesterol, reduce blood pressure, boost the immune system, regulate blood sugar, and boost energy levels.
- Full Circle- Was set up to encourage and activate community through a curation of heart-centered, spirited programming that creates space for authentic connection. For example, weekly Activ888 ceremony on Sunday mornings at 10 AM. A diverse group of people sits together to converse, meditate, and experience music together.

-What is the nature of the New Age in Venice? Why here?

The 'New Age' is a movement characterised by alternative approaches to orthodox Western culture. Kickstarting its distinguished character and the start of gentrification, the 'Beatnik' hippy communes settled during the 1960s and 70s during the regeneration phase of Venice; this arguably sparked the first wave of affluent gentrification and was the catalyst for the swathes of 'afflu-hip' populations altogether shaping the current vibe and aesthetic of the area.

-What are the comparisons with Brighton in terms of Venice as a 'Place on the Margin' which gives space to such activities?

Upon observing Venice, it was apparent that a number of comparisons can be drawn between the areas, both arguably being labelled as places 'on the margin'. Such 'margins' often refer to the feel of 'disassociation' they possess in relation to their capitalistic, planned, more traditional surrounding counterparts. The rhetoric of 'fighting back' and 'resistance' is ocularly present through graffiti; a form of youth culture in Brighton, forms of art also perpetuate the streets of Venice, with such examples as below relaying Marxist anti-capitalist messages. The economies of both districts also mirror each other, with the collective of individual vendors mirroring the locality of the Brighton Laine. The eclectic and multicultural demographic of Venice moreover mirrors



Brighton's varied population which encompasses people from all walks of life. Both areas have a 'welcoming' and open feel, however Brighton more so as it's predominantly working-class citizens or students, whereas Venice as a whole is highly affluent.

The 'openness' of Venice was furthermore accentuated through our conversations with the the co founder of Saaltco (a menstrual awareness campaign) and why she chose Venice beach as the site of promotion considering she's from Idaho; she explained how she knew the population would be open and receptive, and then proceed to give us free sanitation and menstrual products, echoing Brighton's feminist and overall progressive sentiments.