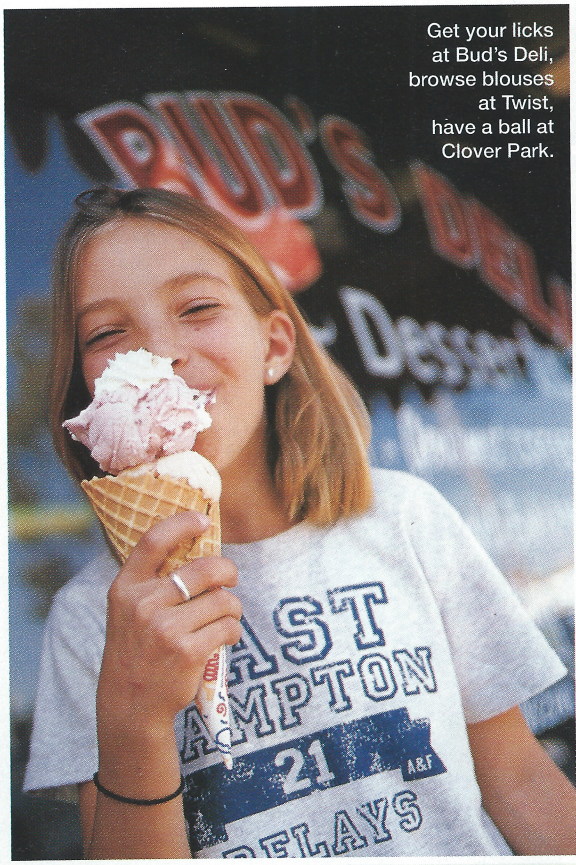
Sweet Sunset Park

This Santa Monica neighborhood charms with down-home style

By Wendy O'Dea
Photographs by David Zaitz



Get your licks at Bud's Deli, browse blouses at Twist, have a ball at Clover Park.

One long, tree-lined boulevard loaded with reasonably priced restaurants and simple boutiques. A park packed with families picnicking, friends playing ball, and children swinging on playground equipment. A market, a pizza joint, and a nursery overflowing with colorful blooms and greenery.

It sounds like a cozy Midwestern village. But it's actually Sunset Park, a neighborhood along Ocean Park Boulevard in Santa Monica, known more for its pier and busy Third Street Promenade than for small-town charm. Stretching west from Centinela Avenue, this neighborhood holds an array of mid-20th-century homes and a retro-looking community grocer, **Bob's Market** *(1650 Ocean Park Blvd.; 310/452-2493),* that make it look like a time capsule from the Eisenhower era. But Sunset Park is more interestingly eclectic than it first appears, infused with an assortment of independent galleries, coffee shops, and a health food market offering diverse foods like dandelion greens and fenugreek sprouts.

"It's not like the rest of Santa Monica," says resident Rosanna Zonni while grabbing lunch at the well-loved **Sunset Grill** *(closed Sun and holidays; 1701 Ocean Park; 310/450-7546).* "Sunset Park is sophisticated, but in an unpretentious way." As if to prove her point, owner John Lorda breaks into a friendly exchange with the postman … in French.

Clothing stores, Mexican bakeries, and ice cream shops are waiting to be discovered among the storefronts. For clothing, **Twist** *(2601 17th St.; 310/314-9161)* and its sister store, **Shout** *(2607 17th; 310/399-6959),* merit a visit for their Beatlesesque names alone. For food, **Cafe Bolívar** *(closed Sun; 1741 Ocean Park; 310/581-2344)* is a sandwich and coffee shop that exhibits original art. Farther east is **Gary's Grill** *(7:30–3:30 Mon–Fri; 2819½ Ocean Park; 310/450-9949),* a '50s-style burger joint serving Angus beef burgers for only $4.25. **Bud's Deli** *(closed Sun; 2727 Ocean Park; 310/450-6860)* sells 16 kinds of ice cream plus salads and sandwiches. And **Ocean Park Cafe** *(8–3 daily; 3117 Ocean Park; 310/452-5728)* is a grass green–colored diner so evocative of the open road, you'd expect to see Thelma and Louise chowing down on breakfast burritos.

Weekday afternoons find the courtyard at **2901 Ocean Park** teeming with folks sipping coffee or enjoying lunch at **Il Forno** *(310/450-1241),* a family-owned Italian restaurant. Next door, **Mrs. Winston's Green Grocery** *(Ste. 107; 310/452-7770),* a natural-food store, offers more than 140 hand-cut items at its salad bar. If you're looking for a good place for a picnic, try out **Clover Park** *(at 25th St. and Ocean Park).* Here you can relax and watch the surprising slice of Americana called Sunset Park go about its business, just as it did a half century ago. ◆

Seeing Sunset Park

WHERE: From the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10), exit at Bundy Dr. south and turn right onto Ocean Park Blvd.

CONTACT: Santa Monica Convention and Visitors Bureau, *www.santamonica.com or 800/544-5319.*