

CLAREMONT, CA

EVERY SPRING, PROSPECTIVE students and their parents make the pilgrimage to Claremont, California, to tour the seven campuses of the renowned Claremont Colleges. They also discover a small city that blends world-class sophistication with small-town appeal.

About 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, and joined to it by Interstate 10 and Metrolink trains, Claremont is, geographically, a Los Angeles suburb. Spiritually, it's distinct. In the neighborhoods along Indian Hill Boulevard, American elms shade streets lined by vintage cottages and Craftsman bungalows. A few minutes' walk from the campuses, Claremont's compact downtown (known to everyone as The Village) mixes contemporary restaurants and boutiques with local landmarks—like the Some Crust Bakery, famed for its bear claws—that grads from the 1960s remember from their days at Scripps or Pomona.

Clockwise from top, near right: The Village, Claremont; Summer House, Pomona College; James Turrell Skyspace, Pomona College Museum of Art; Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden; Seal Court pond; Claremont Packing House; resident Vanessa Wilkie.



Claremont visitors always mean it as compliment when they conclude that this smart, leafy community ("the city of trees and PhDs") reminds them of a college town back East. But Claremont is no Wellesley wannabe. It's Californian through and through, a one-time citrus town with easy access to both the wilds of the San Gabriel Mountains and the culture of Los Angeles.

"People who live in Claremont have a strong sense of history and what makes it unique from the other towns in the area," says city resident Vanessa Wilkie, 30, a curator at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens. When she and her husband, Matthew Osmond, 38, an elementary school principal in nearby Redlands, were looking for a home, Claremont presented a middle ground between their work locations, as well as an unmistakable sense of place. Two years ago, they moved into a 1958 house that they



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renovated. "We pulled up the hokey carpet," she says, "but we wanted to preserve the character."

Claremont, too, strives to preserve its character, even as it evolves. Locals crowd the restaurants and the wine bar at The Claremont Packing House, a once-dérrière citrus facility turned into a retail and dining destination. Across the street, commuters and students sip craft cocktails around the firepit in the modern-meets-mission courtyard at the boutique Hotel Casa 425.

Not far away is another enduring Claremont institution, the Folk Music Center. Part instrument museum and part performance space and store, it's run by Ellen

Harper, whose parents founded it in 1958. Three-time Grammy Award-winner Ben Harper, Ellen's son and a Claremont native, bought the center from his grandparents to keep it in the family. "We get people from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and all over Europe. If they're on the West Coast, they make it a point to come here."

For Harper and for newer residents like Wilkie, it's that small-town-meets-big-world connection that defines Claremont. "Having the colleges creates a creative environment," Wilkie says. "Even though Claremont has a suburban feel, I don't feel that it's an isolated community, and I like that about it." —M.J.

Clockwise from above: Vintage and new guitars at the Folk Music Center; Claremont Packing House; Grove, a public artwork in The Village, by Lynn Bassi; the signature burger at The Bock Abbey gastropub; Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden.

