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Side by Side: Chic and Raffish in Manhattan Beach

By AUDREY DAVIDOW

IN the last few years, as climbing real estate prices keep the party-hearty crowd out, and the hip and rich in, the Los Angeles suburb of Manhattan Beach has morphed from a surf-by-day, keg-stand-by-night beach town into a legitimately hip destination, home to sushi bars, chic boutiques and more than a few Hollywood producers barking into hands-free cell phones.



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

The XO Wine Bistro is one of the trendy places that have opened in Manhattan Beach.

But it's not - as is so often the case in Hollywood - a case of the old skulking off to make room for the new. Manhattan Beachers are still more impressed with their local volleyball heroes, than the stream of starlets floating in from the nearby Raleigh Studios, where shows like "The O.C.," "Boston Legal" and "C.S.I. Miami" have set up shop. It's just that now a day spent skating down the strand can be capped off with a Soju martini at XO Wine Bistro, 1209 Highland Avenue, (310) 545-3509, or a Botox blast at the new Trilogy Spa, a 6,000-square-foot pampering zone with ocean views scheduled to open this fall at 451 Manhattan Beach Boulevard, (310) 318-3511.

And now Manhattan Beach is soon to have its first boutique hotel: Shade at 1221 North

Valley Drive, (310) 546-4995; www.shadehotel.com, which is scheduled to open in the fall. Decorated by the Discovery Home Channel design expert Christopher Lowell, every detail has been carefully calibrated to attract a Schrager-chic crowd. A 16-foot river-rock waterfall races down the courtyard wall. And in the lobby, receptionists will sport silvery shrugs from the local designer Michael Stars, whose flagship store is down the street at 1114 Manhattan Avenue, (310) 376-8700.

The Shade, a 38-room hotel, will anchor the new Metlox Plaza, a 64,000-square-foot shopping village named for the pottery factory that stood on the property from 1927 to 1989. Still under construction, the village will have a handful of new boutiques and restaurants, including True Religion, the first freestanding store of the trendy denim line. "I'm not exactly sure what True Religion is," said Shade's owner, Michael Zislis, who also owns the popular restaurant Rock'N Fish, at 120 Manhattan Beach Boulevard, (310) 379-9900. "But my daughter is flipping out, so it must be a good thing."

Not that the area has been starved for style. A number of sophisticated boutiques have opened in the last few years, drawing the fashion forward out of Beverly Hills and onto to the blue-tiled sidewalks of the city's main drag, Manhattan Beach Boulevard.

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At Lulu's, at No. 300, (310) 798-4577, offerings might include a \$150 La Perla bra or a \$128 beaded lace bustier by the rising Brazilian designer Clo. Down the street, Wright's, at No. 232, (310) 376-8553, is a favorite for billowy bohemian skirts by Dosa and distressed leather jackets by Rozae Nichols.

The MTV party-to-go night life scene of the late 90's has moved south to Hermosa Beach and given way to sleeker spots like 900 Manhattan, 900 Manhattan Avenue, (310) 318-0834, a members-only bar whose clientele includes Matthew Fox of "Lost." Avenue, 1141 Manhattan Avenue, (310) 802-1973, a cozy French spot that opened last fall, is a hangout for hipsters in Hugo Boss and flip-flops who come for ambitious menu offerings like escargot pot pie.

But the longest lines still snake outside Ercole's, 1101 Manhattan Avenue (310) 372-1997, a 78-year-old dive bar where a crew of aged regulars drink \$3 pints and appreciate the fact that not everything in town has to keep pace with the times.