

**F**at, failure, gravity and poverty are not things you want to contemplate in Los Angeles. All the clichés about never being too thin or too rich ring true in this city of dreams, where I spent the beginning of the year.

Only in LA could someone rent 20 pseudo-revellers on New Year's Eve for their party. Those 20 people stood at the door trying to gatecrash, the obvious intention to make the bash seem even more desirable to its guests. It sums up LA - where art imitates life.

America is an odd place, and LA an odd city. American novelist AM Homes recently spent several months at the Chateau Marmont, one of the city's most famous hotels, on Sunset Boulevard, observing how the American Dream has mutated, using LA as a metaphor. For her the dream has become inflated, distracting us from the nothingness of modern life.

Americans are notoriously insular (most couldn't find Canada let alone Iraq) and patriotic, but the effects of September 11th have not made the Angelenos I met war crazy or indeed gun crazy, always an issue with so many murders and the on-going arguments about self-defence.

No one in this Californian Shangri-La I came across wanted the US to go into Iraq and few had much sympathy with George W Bush.

Friends Matt and Marty have an amazing home just up the street from this landmark establishment in the Hollywood Hills, just down from Cameron Diaz's home, and around the corner from a Frank Lloyd Wright house that a Hollywood mogul owns.

LA is seductive visually - if you get away from the blandness of architecture, chain stores and fast food outlets that blight America from top to bottom.

# Image is all in Los Angeles

## On the AGENDA



**HEIDI  
KINGSTONE**

The weather and light have an enormous part to play in LA's ability to pull you in and make you want to stay forever. I felt like a solar panel soaking up the sun and storing it before leaving the tropical climate for winter in Toronto.

New Year's Day brunch at the Bel-Air Hotel formed a nice little microcosm of LA. All the waiters, my guess, were Mexican. The woman sitting beside me had had Pamela Anderson-type pneumatic instalments implanted that sat unnaturally at armpit level. So abnormal were they that

not staring practically became an Olympic sport.

Apparently new gizmos make it possible for you to inflate your assets to whatever size you fancy depending on your mood and, no doubt, dress. By the end of the meal she was in tears. Perhaps the weeping was also self-induced. Is there a lachrymal implant that has just hit the market?

In the unusually hot weather, the thermometer rose to the mid-20s, another woman wore a fur coat.

How she didn't end up in a puddle of sweat in the heat remained as gripping as what went on with Ms Pneumatic. But image is all.

No visit to LA is complete without a spin down Rodeo Drive and an enforced encounter with Cartier, where on display was a \$1,7-million emerald-cut diamond.

Dominating this street, on which every major big brand has an outlet, was a huge Bulgari billboard, the Italian jewellery house, advertising an enormous diamond necklace in the same way that others advertise vacuum bags.

Most major cities have been rejuvenated in the last half decade and this is also true of LA. The seediest bits have been tidied up, the new metro has made long abandoned areas cool again, but not everywhere.

As we drove down Wilshire Boulevard back to Hollywood from downtown we passed a restaurant called Perino's. Marty's father, Al, was with us and made a point of showing me this forsaken, lonely building that had once been the trendiest, most desirable restaurant in a very hip city. Now it stood abandoned and few remembered its name.

After all, LA is where the American Dream was manufactured, but it is also the city of illusions, and many unrequited dreams.