

The Hollywood Sign: Nine Letters on Top of a Hill [C1]

Il simbolo di Hollywood è un'affascinante testimonianza dei sogni e del glamour della città: Jeff Zarrinnam, presidente dell'Hollywood Sign Trust, racconta l'evoluzione dell'insegna, considerata oggi un simbolo globale di fascino e aspirazione.



On 8 December 2023, the world-famous Hollywood Sign [will be lit up](#) once again to celebrate its centenary. Although it is no longer illuminated on a daily basis, the lights were first turned when it was inaugurated, as an advert to sell land, on 8 December 1923. The property sign was only [meant to](#) stay there for eighteen months. However, in 1929 the stock market [crashed](#), [real estate stagnated](#), and the sign was abandoned. Today, the sign is synonymous with the glamour and promise of Hollywood. It represents Los Angeles as a creative city and the US entertainment industry as a whole. As one of the most photographed icons in the world, its preservation is important and the donation-based Hollywood Sign [Trust](#) was formed in 1978 to maintain the sign.

THE HOLLYWOOD SIGN TRUST

Visitors can hike to the top of Mount Lee to admire it and the 360-degree view of the valley of Los Angeles, all the way to the Pacific Ocean. There are plans for a visitor centre to be built to accommodate them. To find out more, Speak Up took a hike with Jeff Zarrinnam, [chairman](#) of the Hollywood Sign [Trust](#). We began by asking him why an advert for [real estate](#) became so iconic. **Jeff Zarrinnam** (American accent): If you go back to the early 1920s, there was nothing up there in the [hillsides](#). The [hillsides](#) were [barren](#) and land [developers](#) were starting to sell land to build new homes, and most of the people were living in Downtown Los Angeles. So they had to attract people up into Hollywood. And one of the ways that they did it was by building this gigantic Hollywoodland sign and they [flashed](#) it at night to attract people to come up there during the daytime and buy [lots](#), which they sold anywhere from \2,000 to \50,000. So they sold about 450 [some odd lots](#) up there and people would build their own homes. That went on from 1923 to around World War Two. So they closed down the development company and the remaining land, which is where the Hollywood sign is, they donated between 400 and 450 acres to the City of Los Angeles for \$1. And that included a broken Hollywoodland sign which actually said "OLLYWOODLAND" because the 'H' had fallen down. Because the developing company was no longer maintaining the sign. And it remained that way for about three years, until the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce [stepped in](#), in 1949, and said, "This is not a good image for Hollywood."

MAINTENANCE

The Hollywood Sign is very exposed to the weather. Zarrinnam talked about its maintenance. **Jeff Zarrinnam**: The Hollywood Sign [Trust](#) is [tasked](#) for taking care of everything Hollywood Sign. So that means taking care of the physical structure, painting, seismic topography, the [landscaping](#) around it. We have to make sure that the [brush](#) doesn't get too high. We have to take care of it for fire reasons. We have infrared cameras, we have motion detectors... I mean every kind of security [device](#) that you can think of we have up there because we have to keep the Hollywood Sign safe.

A COMPLEX SYMBOL

The sign is a complex symbol. It represents glamour and success, but also [battered](#) dreams and lost hope. **Jeff Zarrinnam**: It's a [beacon](#) for hopes and dreams. It's an aspiration, a motivator for people to say, "I can follow my hopes and dreams," remembering who their favourite actor or actress is. That if "They [made it big](#), maybe I can make it big." It's a representation of freedom that America is so famous for. It's only nine letters on top of the hill, but it has a very special connection with so many billions of people around the world.

I'M HOME

For Zarrinnam, the former property sign signifies home. **Jeff Zarrinnam**: I'm now in my sixth decade, and was born looking up at the sign from when I was a baby. But even today I made sure that my house had a view of the Hollywood Sign, looking outside of my bedroom or my living room. And every time I walk out of the front door, I look up and I see that Hollywood Sign up there, to make sure it's still looking good. Because that's what I am [tasked](#) to do or honoured to do, you know. It means that I'm home.
www.hollywoodsign.org

Glossary

- **flashed** = mostrare
- **some odd** = circa
- **landscaping** = prendersi cura del paesaggio
- **device** = dispositivo
- **will be lit up** = accendere
- **stagnated** = ristagnare
- **hillsides** = fianco, versante
- **barren** = arido
- **beacon** = segnale luminoso
- **made it big** = avere successo
- **meant to** = essere destinato a
- **crashed** = precipitare
- **tasked** = avere il compito
- **real estate** = mercato immobiliare
- **lots** = appezzamento
- **stepped in** = intervenire
- **battered** = sogni infranti
- **Trust** = fondazione
- **chairman** = presidente
- **developers** = promotori
- **brush** = sterpaglie