



Stardust marquee at the Neon Museum. **LEFT:** Burger Chef at the National Neon Sign Museum.

HERE & THERE

## Searching for signs of light

➤ Museums, tours, and classes devoted to neon are popping up all over the West—meaning there are more places than ever to trip the light fantastic.

Science can explain how neon signs work—electricity illuminates an inert gas sealed inside a glass tube—but it can't account for the sheer magic of their glow. "These signs are often landmarks that tie into memories," says Al Barna, coauthor of *San Francisco Neon: Survivors and Lost Icons*. Erected mainly from the 1930s to the 1960s and now considered folk art, neon signs have become hot attractions.

- More than 200 decommissioned signs, which once graced names big (the Stardust) and small (the Yucca Motel), fill the Boneyard at Las Vegas's **Neon Museum**. Walk among them on a daytime tour, or reserve a ticket for *Brilliant!* During this new nighttime program, projectors reilluminate about 60 marquees while period songs, such as Sinatra's "Luck Be a Lady," play.
- San Francisco's Chinatown, Union Square, and Castro neighborhoods are replete with neon—if you know where to look. On twilight walks, the

preservation experts behind **San Francisco Neon** guide the way. Book in advance to join the tour, and you might see an eye-popping movie palace marquee, a sparkling gold martini glass, or a rare three-sided Chinese lantern.

- By day, the **Museum of Neon Art** in Glendale, Calif., showcases vintage and modern neon, electric, and kinetic art. After dark, it's the launch point for bus cruises, which sail past neon-lined pagodas and other illuminated icons of Hollywood and downtown Los Angeles. And, if you're so inspired, MONA also offers DIY classes, where you can learn to bend glass tubes filled with neon.
- Stroll down a replica small-town-America Main Street awash in neon at the new **National Neon Sign Museum** in The Dalles, Ore. The renovated 1910 Elks building holds more than 100 pieces—all courtesy of David Benko, an enthusiast who has collected neon for over 30 years. —CHRISTOPHER HALL