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On Location: Film survey ranks Griffith Park, downtown warehouse and former hospital among busiest sites in 2010

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When producers of the ABC game show “Downfall” needed a building from which to hurl dishwashers, gumball machines and other “prizes,” they settled on a warehouse on the east side of downtown Los Angeles.

The six-story building on Terminal Street, near the corner of 7th and Alameda streets, was among the most popular on-location filming sites in the region in 2010, along with a long-shuttered hospital in Boyle Heights and a faux Route 66 pit stop on the edge of the Mojave Desert, according to a recent survey by the nonprofit group FilmLA Inc., which handles film permits for location filming in city of L.A. and much of L.A. County. The data track filming done outside the major studios on city streets and on soundstages that aren’t certified by the fire department.

Topping the list of the year’s 10 most popular sites was Griffith Park, a favorite of location scouts because of its diverse terrain that spans more than 4,210 acres, drawing shoots from such TV shows as CBS’ “Criminal Minds” and “NCIS: Los Angeles.”

More surprising was No. 2 on the list: the six-story building on Terminal Street, a former manufacturing facility built in 1913 that is housed in the same complex as clothing designer American Apparel Inc.

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Now called Central City Studio, the building has been remodeled with various stage sets. Along with a 10,000-square-foot warehouse, it includes a “fully dressed” hospital, complete with emergency room and morgue.

Last year, the studio catered heavily to low-budget cable shows, including multiple episodes of the Spike TV’s “1,000 Ways to Die,” the Discovery Channel series “I Didn’t Know I Was Pregnant” and Animal Planet’s “Virus Hunters.”

“I’m an RN so this is my area of expertise,” said Lucy Doty, who opened the facility a year and half ago and also serves as a medical consultant on shows.

Several low-budget feature films, including a drama about the homeless called “Monday” also shot there last year. “The building has excellent space for filming, it gives you a gritty, industrial look and it’s relatively cheap,” said Crystal Wortman, location manager for “Monday.”

Another downtown venue, the 20-acre Los Angeles Center Studios, was the third-busiest site for on-location filming. A private street runs through the property and it is often used for filming by the TV shows that are based at the studio, including AMC’s “Mad Men” “Law & Order: Los Angeles” and TNT’s “Southland,” said Sam Nicassio, the studio’s president.

“We try to continually add new sets to keep our location fresh,” Nicassio said.

In Boyle Heights, the former Linda Vista Community Hospital attracted several independent films and TV shows in 2010, and has played host over the years to such medical dramas as “E.R.” and movies that included director Wolfgang Petersen’s 1995 sci-fi thriller “Outbreak” about a deadly virus.

“What makes it a great location is that it’s large, you can really get lost in there, and it’s foreboding,” said Daniel Schwartz, executive producer of Travel Channel’s “Ghost Stories,” which filmed an episode at the hospital last year entitled “The Ghost of Dr. Edwards.”

Also among the most popular filming destinations last year was a desert outpost east of Lancaster called Club Ed, which includes a 1950s-style diner, motel and gas station built as a set for an obscure 1991 Dennis Hopper movie “Eye of the Storm.” The 12-acre ranch is popular for fashion shoots, commercials, music videos and some TV shows, such as “Southland.”

“I’m not going to be a millionaire out of it,” said ranch owner Randy Czajkowski, adding that his facility generates revenue of \$300,000 to \$550,000 a year. “But it’s a good business.”

-- Richard Verrier

Photo: Crew members get ready to film a scene for "NCIS: Los Angeles" on Ocean Front Walk in Venice. Venice Beach attracted 96 production days and 90 shoots in 2010, including the feature film "The Good Doctor." Credit: Al Seib / Los Angeles Times

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