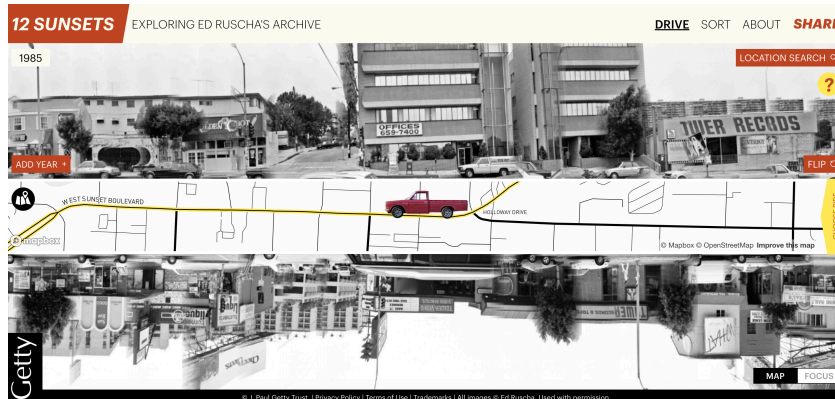


12 Sunsets

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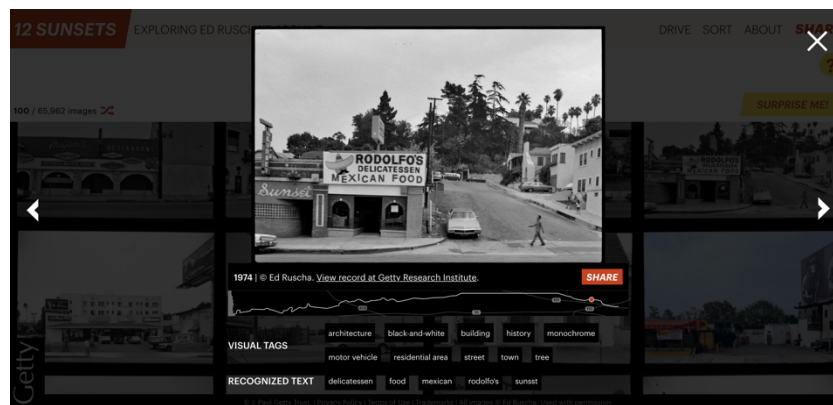


12 Sunsets is a collaborative project between the Getty Research Institute, the data visualization and design company Stamen, and the artist Ed Ruscha. It is an interactive website for exploring over 60,000 images of Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard, digitized from negatives shot by

Ruscha and others over the last half-century. The images are from the Ed Ruscha Streets of Los Angeles Archive, which the Getty acquired in 2012 and has been steadily working to make accessible to a range of audiences. In contrast to their recently launched Research Collections Viewer, a robust image-enhanced archival finding aid, 12 Sunsets was designed to engage users beyond the scholarly community. Per Andrew Perchuk, deputy director of the Getty Research Institute, it is meant to “invite curiosity and exploration without any technical know-how whatsoever...It’s just fun.”

The 12 Sunsets interface is dead-simple. When in the default “Drive” mode, there is a ribbon of map representing Sunset Boulevard in the middle of the page. Above and below the map are ribbons of photographs from the Archive that correspond to the map’s geospatial coordinates. Using the computer keyboard’s left/right arrow keys, users can navigate a vehicle -- a pickup truck, a Volkswagen Beetle, or a Volkswagen Vanagon -- east or west along Sunset and observe the changing scenery. The up/down arrow keys allow users to change the year in which the photos were taken -- there are twelve years to choose from, ranging between 1965 and 2007. There is also an option to view multiple years’ worth of photos simultaneously. If users tire of cruising Sunset, they can switch to the “Sort” mode, enabling an image search by metadata tags applied by Google’s Cloud Vision API (a machine learning image analysis tool). In either “Drive” or “Sort” modes, one can view single images along with their AI-applied tags. There is also a link to the image in the Research Collections Viewer. Though it is possible to explore the site on phones or other small mobile devices, it is most optimally viewed on a desktop, laptop, or tablet screen.

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A motorized camera mounted to the bed of a pickup truck was used to capture the shots featured in *12 Sunsets*. It automatically photographed both sides of the street as the truck moved, in a manner fascinatingly similar to Google’s Street View cars four decades later. A fraction of the mid-1960s images were used to make Ruscha’s 1966 artists’ book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, while the vast majority remained unseen (even to Ruscha) on photographic negatives until digitized by the Getty and made available on platforms like *12 Sunsets*. Given this, and the Getty’s decision to work with a data visualization design firm, the site can be seen as a way to explore and make sense of an overwhelming amount of visual information. Ruscha has described Sunset Boulevard as his “22 mile-long canvas,” which he has been regularly documenting over several decades, thereby providing witness to a wildly shifting Los Angeles cityscape. The Getty and Stamen’s representation of this documentation is its own sort of canvas, providing access to visual data that can be used to make observations and inspire further creative projects. While not in and of itself a scholarly resource or a work of scholarship, *12 Sunsets* successfully engages a broad audience with an important archival collection that might otherwise have been accessible to only a select few. It is an example of how libraries, archives, and other research collections (with admittedly deep pockets) can potentially encourage non-traditional means of knowledge creation.