

**HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION  
STRUCTURE OF MERIT DESIGNATION  
STAFF REPORT**

**EL PRADO INN  
1601 STATE STREET  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA  
APN 027-181-008 and 009**

**NOVEMBER 20, 2013**



## Significance

The City of Santa Barbara establishes historic significance as provided by the Municipal Code, Section 22.22.040. Any historic building that meets one or more of the eleven criteria (Criteria A through K) established for a City Landmark or a City Structure of Merit can be considered significant. El Prado Inn, constructed in 1959 in the vernacular mid-century modern style, is significant as a Structure of Merit per the following criteria:

### ***Criterion A. The building's character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation;***

Popular after World War II, motor inns were hotels designed for motorists, because they had a parking area for motor vehicles. Motor inns consisted of a single building of connected rooms whose doors faced a parking lot. As the provincial highways and the United States highway system began to develop in the 1920s, long-distance road journeys became more common, and the need for inexpensive, easily accessible overnight accommodation sited close to the main routes led to the growth of the motel concept. Motor Inns peaked in popularity in the 1960s with rising car travel, only to decline in response to competition from the newer chain hotels which became common place at highway interchanges as traffic was bypassed onto newly constructed freeways. As an intact example of a motor inn constructed in 1959, El Prado Inn is significant part of the heritage of the City and meets criterion A.



### ***Criterion C. The building is associated with a person who contributed to the community;***

The building is significant for its association with Lester A. Girsh, an optometrist, real estate investor, and philanthropist in Santa Barbara. Termed by the *News-Press* "The Man Who Owned State Street," due to his construction of several buildings in addition to the El Prado Inn. Therefore, the building's association with Lester A. Girsh meets criterion C.

### ***Criterion D. Its exemplification of a particular architectural style or way of life important to the City, the State, or the Nation;***

Designed by Carl Madsen and Albert Dothee in 1959, El Prado Inn is significant as an intact representation of a vernacular form of the mid-century modern style, popular from the 1940s to the 1960s. Noted by the rectangular walls and flat roofs with the 1950s design details of the canted balconies, pierced screens, open staircases, and over scale signs with jazzy script that were tacked on to satisfy popular taste for warmth and drama. This mid-century modern use of sculptural screens was modeled on Frank Lloyd Wright and

other twentieth century modern designs in Los Angeles and New York. In Santa Barbara, in the late 1950s, there were a few examples of this use of screens within the mid-century modern style, but many have been remodeled and removed the 1950s essence, making the El Prado one of the few remaining intact, mid-century modern designs in the State Street streetscape and it therefore meets criterion D.



***Criterion E. Its exemplification as the best remaining architectural type in its neighborhood;***

The building is the only example of the commercial vernacular offshoot of the mid-century modern style along State Street. Its dramatic presence is a physical reminder of the car-related architecture that developed after WWII. Therefore, it is considered significant under criterion E as it exemplifies the best remaining mid-century modern vernacular in its neighborhood.

***Criterion G. Its embodiment of elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials and craftsmanship;***

The character-defining features of the building are the pierced concrete screens, flat roof, canted balcony walls, open tread staircases, and jazzy script signs that demonstrate outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, and materials of the mid-century modern style of the 1950s, therefore meeting criterion G.

***Criterion I. Its unique location or singular physical characteristics representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood;***

The mid-century modern style of El Prado Inn and its exemplary façade anchored this block of West Arrellaga and State Streets since 1959, therefore it is eligible for listing under criterion I.

**Historic Integrity**

The El Prado Inn still retains its use as a hotel, the has integrity of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association that allow it to convey its original appearance. There have been no significant changes or additions to the structure, and its character-defining features remain in place.

**Recommendation**

Staff Recommends that the Historic Landmark Commission adopt a resolution to designate El Prado Inn as a Structure of Merit.

**Works Cited**

Cole, Alexandra C. *Historic Structures/Sites Report for El Prado Inn*. May 2013. The report is on file with the City Planning Division of the Community Development Department.

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS INFORMATION.

RECORDING REQUESTED BY:

City of Santa Barbara, Community Development

AND WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO:

Attn: Planning Division, Urban Historian

630 Garden Street

Santa Barbara, CA 93101

SPACE ABOVE FOR RECORDER'S USE ONLY

NO FILING FEE PER GOV. CODE 6103

**CITY OF SANTA BARBARA  
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION**

**RESOLUTION TO DESIGNATE AS A STRUCTURE OF MERIT  
EL PRADO INN AT 1601 STATE STREET  
ASSESSOR PARCEL NO. 027-181-008 AND 009**

**RESOLUTION 2013-8**

**November 20, 2013**

WHEREAS, Section 22.22.085 of the Municipal Code of the City of Santa Barbara grants the Historic Landmarks Commission the authority to initiate a Structure of Merit designation process of any structure, natural feature, site or area having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance; and

WHEREAS, historic research found that El Prado Inn qualifies for possible historic designation under City of Santa Barbara Master Environmental Assessment criteria as evidenced in the Historic Structures Report prepared by Alexandra C. Cole in May 2013, accepted by the Historic Landmarks Commission on June 5, 2013, and summarized in a staff report; and

WHEREAS, the Historic Structure Report of 2013 found the El Prado Inn constructed in 1959 in the vernacular form of the mid-century modern style is significant for its historical and architectural influence on the heritage of the City; and

WHEREAS, the property owner of El Prado Inn submitted a statement of support of the Structure of Merit designation on July 15, 2013; and

WHEREAS, the proposed boundary of the Structure of Merit designation is five feet around the perimeter of the main hotel building constructed in 1959 and excludes the 1963 addition to the site which was constructed after the period of significance; and

WHEREAS, on August 28, 2013, the Historic Landmark Commission adopted a Resolution of Intention No. 2013-3 to hold a public hearing to begin the Structure of Merit designation process for 1601 State Street, Assessor's Parcel No. 027-181-008 and 009; and

WHEREAS, in summary, the Historic Landmark Commission finds that 1601 State Street, Assessor's Parcel No. 027-181-008 and 009, meets the following criteria (A through K) listed in section 22.22.040 of the Municipal Code:

- A. Its character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation;
- C. Its association with a person who contributed to the community.
- D. Its exemplification of a particular architectural style or way of life important to the City, the State, or the Nation;
- E. Its exemplification of the best remaining architectural type in a neighborhood;
- G. Its embodiment of elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials and craftsmanship; and
- I. Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Landmarks Commission adopts this Resolution designating the El Prado Inn located at 1601 State Street, Assessor's Parcel No. 027-181-008 and 009, as a City of Santa Barbara Structure of Merit.

**CITY OF SANTA BARBARA  
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION**

**Adopted:**