

# 1731 Lasuen Road

**Designation Status:** Eligible to be designated

**Assessor Parcel Number:** 019-182-001

**Constructed:** 1916

**Historic Name:** N/A

**Property Description:** Two-story Mediterranean style residence with low-pitched hipped, terra-cotta tile roofs. The door and window placement forms a symmetrical façade. The windows on the upper-story appears to be smaller and less elaborate than the windows below. The entrance area is accented by small classical columns, and the doors and windows on the north and south façades are in a symmetrical arrangement. The openings have contrasting rounded arches to rectilinear headers of the wood casement windows.

**Builder:** N/A

**Architect:** Reginald Davis Johnson, FAIA

**Architectural Style:** Mediterranean with Spanish Colonial Revival elements

**Property Type:** Residence

**Original Use:** Residence

**Significance:** The building qualifies to be designated a Structure of Merit under the following criteria provided by the Municipal Code, Section 22.22.040.

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

The Mediterranean style was key to Santa Barbara's spirit as the new American Riviera. Having both a climate and geography similar to the coastal hill-towns of the Italian Riviera, Santa Barbara embraced the Italian Villa as architecture and garden design well suited to the Santa Barbara lifestyle. With increased leisure travel to Europe during the late 1800's and early 1900's, patrons began to request architecture strongly based on particular regions of the Mediterranean. The Italian villa was seen as a perfect model for the American country house, as a counter to the Gothic-related forms of the Queen Anne and Shingle styles. With more advanced printing techniques, as well as carefully studied drawings and photographs, architects were able to base their designs on highly accurate academic books of Italian architecture. This contrasts with the earlier American Italian movement, the Victorian Italianate, whose source was primarily pattern books that were loosely based on Italian models. In Santa Barbara, Italian Mediterranean fit well with the Mediterranean-like climate and was easily mixed



*Original drawings of the house by Reginald Johnson, FAIA*



with the growing popularity of Spanish Mediterranean, as well as the thriving Mission Revival architecture. There are a few examples of commercial Italian Mediterranean style buildings in downtown Santa Barbara, as well as many large homes in the Upper East neighborhood and on the Riviera.

- **Massing:** The house mixes a more traditional Mediterranean symmetrical massing and symmetry on the rear of the house with intersecting of volumes of the Spanish Colonial Revival style on the front façade.
- **Roof, Cornice and Eave Details:** The roof of the Mediterranean house shows its connection to the other Mediterranean styles while differentiating itself as Italian in origin. Terra-cotta tiles cover the low sloped, hipped roof with narrow eaves.
- **Porch Columns:** Classical columns accentuate the recessed, shallow entrance.
- **Windows:** Elaborate rounded arch windows are on the first floor with more simplified window patterns on the second. Mediterranean windows are paired, true-divided light, wood casement windows sit in the stucco wall.
- **Doors:** The design deviates from traditional symmetry of a Mediterranean style house with the front door on the far end of the façade. Since the style has a strong adherence to order and symmetry, the Mediterranean entrance is centrally located with an opening above the entrance in the full second floor that is flanked by symmetrical openings in a symmetrical arrangement of rectangular openings on either side of an arched opening.
- **Wall Materials:** In Santa Barbara, Mediterranean walls are stucco and never wood siding to differentiate them from the Italianate. Other decorative features include quoins and belt courses that divide the plaster walls.



**Criterion F. Its identification as the creation, design or work of a person or persons whose effort has significantly influenced the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation:**

Its identification as the creation and design of architect Reginald Davis Johnson, FAIA, whose efforts on Cate School, the world-renowned Biltmore Hotel, Bellosguardo/Clark Estate, Santa Barbara Downtown Post Office, and other buildings have won acclaim while contributing to the emerging aesthetic and heritage of the City and the State. All these structures show the hallmarks of Johnson's work: consideration for the past, love of beauty, and dedication to the principles of sound composition and proportion. Johnson was a Pasadena resident who based his architecture practice in Los Angeles. Born in Westchester, New York on July 19, 1882, his family lived in Detroit for some time before moving to Los Angeles. Johnson spent the summers as a teenager in Santa Barbara and Montecito. He received a degree from Williams College and an architectural degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Johnson's first professional designs were two small California bungalows. He designed these and other early works around rear patios with banks of windows on all sides streaming light into the interior rooms. Impressed with the Balboa Park buildings by Bertram Goodhue, Johnson developed his own interpretation of the Spanish Colonial Revival and Italian Mediterranean styles. He designed the Music Academy of the West and Ganna Walska Lotusland and

other impressive homes in the 1920s, he developed a good reputation as was one of the master architects who brought the Spanish Revival in Santa Barbara to national prominence. He strived for a livable quality in his homes and wanted to fuse the romance of the Mediterranean and Spanish house with the comfort of an English home. Johnson won the Better Homes Gold Medal in the National Small Homes competition of 1930 for his gardner's cottage on the William Dickenson estate as it lent itself to a wide geographical application and was simple in character, charming in detail and an excellent piece of design in harmony with the setting.

By the mid-1930's Johnson had shifted from pure Spanish imagery to Art Deco as seen in his interpretation of the style in the Santa Barbara Post Office. After being deeply affected by the sufferings of people during the Great Depression, Johnson devoted his energies and the last fifteen years of his life to local, state, and national housing organizations to improve the lives of many. He firmly believed in the role architecture plays in people's daily lives and was responsive to social, cultural, and environmental conditions. By creating appealing places to live and work in, he not only contributed to the profession of architecture but enhanced the lives of clients and community members as well. He designed Baldwin Hills Housing complex in Los Angeles. The design of the affordable housing project illustrates his belief that architecture and planning can promote quality of life, a sense of community and integration with nature. The majority of his structures remain a testimony to the values of his beliefs.

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

- **Roof, Cornice and Eave Details:** The roof of the Mediterranean house shows its connection to the other Mediterranean styles while differentiating itself as Italian in origin. Low sloped with a hipped roof, the roof is distinguished from the Spanish Colonial Revival by using Roman pan and barrel terra-cotta roof tiles, rather than the Spanish barrel and barrel. The Roman pan is a long, flat tile, with ridges on either side. The barrel tiles then sit on top of the pans. The transition from wall to roof treatment features boxed in eaves with a classical cornice rather than open rafter tails. The cornice often includes large brackets like the Victorian Italianate style.
- **Porch Columns:** The recessed, shallow entrance area is typically accentuated by classical columns or pilasters, often of the Tuscan order, that flank the shallow entrance.
- **Windows:** Elaborate windows are on the first floor with more simplified window patterns on the second floor. Mediterranean windows are paired, true-divided light, wood casement windows with no trim as they sit deeply recessed in the stucco wall.
- **Doors:** Since the style has a strong adherence to order and symmetry, the Mediterranean entrance is centrally located with an opening above the entrance in the full second floor that is flanked by symmetrical openings in a symmetrical arrangement of rectangular openings on either side of an arched opening.
- **Wall Materials:** In Santa Barbara, Italian Mediterranean walls are stucco and never wood siding to differentiate them from the Italianate. Other decorative features include quoins and belt courses that divide the plaster walls.
- **Sandstone Wall:** There is a single course of ashlar cut sandstone under the front hedge lining the front streetscape. A feature that gives the region such distinction while offering a surprising and pleasing bit of artistry. Walls usually require far less engineering compared to bridges, so they offer more opportunity for stonemasons to express themselves and their artistry in the selection, carving, and setting of stones. Use of masonry for construction in the Santa Barbara area dates back to the time the Spanish arrived. Since it was necessary to travel some distance into the woods to obtain lumber, but rocks were found scattered on the ground, stone became the preferred building material. The tradition of building with stones continued in Santa

Barbara County through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This method of construction was often chosen because local brown sandstone was readily available and easily transformed from round or shapeless boulders into symmetrical smooth faced stone for building purposes. A local stonemason explained in July of 1883, “When a quantity of it is wanted, a blast of powder is drilled into the heart of one of the large boulders and exploded and a number of square edged building stones are produced” (Santa Barbara News-Press July 1883). Many residences, walls, bridges, and commercial structures were constructed out of local sandstone during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Immediately after World War I, Santa Barbara began a concerted effort to revamp its visual image. During this time, city planners carefully monitored all construction of any new structure to make sure it was consistent with the master plan that was based on Spanish Colonial Revival/Mediterranean streetscape mode (Conrad and Nelson, 1986: 14). The use of a traditional building material, sandstone, in the construction of the walls built during this period was in line with Santa Barbara’s planning and design efforts. In the years from 1870 to 1940, when Santa Barbara was quickly evolving into a vibrant, growing city, the period witnessed an extraordinary explosion of stone construction made possible by the abundant supply of sandstone, cadre of expert masons, and financing by private citizens. This period provided an atmosphere conducive to the building of public and private spaces of all kinds, walls, bridges, gardens, and an assortment of other stone works and encouraged some exceptional expressions of the mason’s art. Among the most apparent expressions of the beauty in stone that give the region such distinction are the stone walls.

### **Historic Integrity**

There was an addition added toward the rear of the house and a mirador style window added in the 1990s. However, the house and remaining features of its original hardscape and landscape, including sandstone retaining walls, stairs, and piers, as well as hedges and large specimen trees, contribute to the surrounding streetscape, which has preserved sufficient integrity to convey its appearance in 1916.

### **Works Cited**

“Italian Mediterranean.” Historic Resources Design Guidelines, *Santa Barbara - Historic Preservation*.

Santa Barbara Conservancy, Images of America, Stone Architecture in Santa Barbara. Arcadia

Publishing, 2009.

Thomas, Rose. “Building Community: Reginald D. Johnson, Architect,” La Campana, *Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation*, 2016.