

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION
STRUCTURE OF MERIT DESIGNATION REPORT
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WRIGHT HOUSE
1919 LAS TUNAS ROAD
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

Designation Status: Eligible to be designated a Structure of Merit

Assessor Parcel Number: 019-013-009

Constructed: 1921

Historic Name: Wright House

Architect: George Washington Smith

Architectural Style: Spanish Colonial Revival

Property Type: Commercial

Original Use: Residence

Property Description: The two-story, "V" shaped, side-gable building has a terra-cotta tile roof and expressive chimney on the open side gable end. The windows are recessed casements with sets of wood, horizontally divided lights, some with operable louvered shutters. The house has a Monterey style balcony on the front elevation.



Significance: The building meets the following criteria outlined in the Santa Barbara Municipal Code 30.157.25.

Historic Integrity:

1919 Las Tunas is in excellent condition. The building conveys integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling and association and can convey its 1921 original appearance.

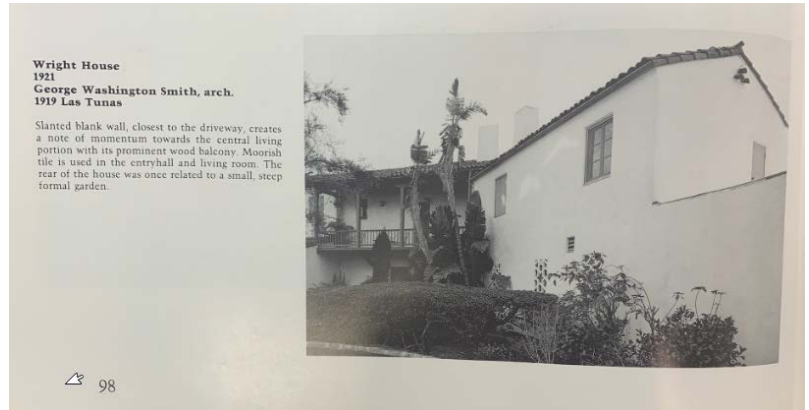
Criterion 3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic or historic value, or represents a significant and distinguishable collection whose individual components may lack distinction.

One of Santa Barbara’s most noted architects, George Washington Smith, designed the Spanish Colonial Revival style building in 1921.

Spanish Colonial Revival was introduced in California in 1916, when Bertram Goodhue, author of a book on Spanish Colonial architecture, helped to kick-start the new Spanish style with his designs for the Panama California Expo in San Diego. Until then, the only Spanish themed architecture mimicked Mission prototypes.

Soon, however, architects and patrons began to look to Spain itself for detailed examples of the Spanish style. Throughout the territories initially settled by the Spanish in the Southwest, as well as Texas and Florida, the Spanish Colonial Revival flourished. Santa Barbara had many architects including George Washington Smith, Lutah Maria Riggs, Winsor Soule, Reginald Johnson, William Edwards, and Joseph Plunkett talented in designing in the style. Another key to the success of the Spanish Colonial Revival in Santa Barbara was the Plans and Planting Committee who, in the 1920s planned for the City to deliberately transform its architecture and look from an ordinary western style town into a romantic Spanish Colonial Revival/Mediterranean style city. This transformation was the result of the planning vision of a number of Santa Barbara citizens in the early 1920s with the founding of the Santa Barbara Community Arts Association, which urged that the town identify its individual character and then use planning principles to develop it. Noted leaders of the movement were Bernhard Hoffman and Pearl Chase that helped to sway Santa Barbara towards a more unified architectural style based on the City’s Spanish Colonial and Mexican past. As an excellent example of an original Spanish Colonial Revival style house the building is essential to the identity of Santa Barbara, and a work of one of the most noted practitioners of the style, the building is important to the heritage of the City.

The building exemplifies the Spanish Colonial Revival style which emphasizes the interplay of cubic volumes, patios, pergolas, and verandas; each interpreted and redefined by local architects or regions in their own oeuvre of the form, massing, and decorative treatments. Santa Barbara has examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style throughout the city from the distinct commercial buildings on State Street, to large homes and estates on the Riviera, to multi-family housing and hotels in the West Beach



Photograph of the Wright House from the book *Santa Barbara Architects*



neighborhood along the waterfront.

The Wright House is an excellent example of an original and authentic Spanish Colonial Revival Style. The house employs the following character-defining elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival style:

- Roofs covered in terra cotta tiles with emphasis on the terra cotta tile edge that creates a decorative edge from the roof to the wall.
- Emphasis on expansive planer wall surfaces with carefully placed stucco grills on the front elevation.
- A combination of complex voids and masses creating an interplay of volumes.
- Windows recessed at the wall plane with a stucco return and no trim. Windows are paired casement windows with lights divided by horizontal mullions.
- The large wood Monterey style balcony on the front elevation with heavy wood posts.
- The stucco chimney is a tower-like element at the peak of the side gable.

One of the regions most noted architect George Washington Smith (1876-1930) designed the front building. Born in East Liberty, Pennsylvania, George Washington Smith developed much of his talent as a well-trained artist where he honed his knowledge of spatial relationships, he then applied these attributes to what many might consider the profession of a straight-line architect. This experience as a trained artist and an architect gave Smith his unique perspective and his sense of interior spaces are the result of a well-schooled artist's attention to proportions and perspective. Smith became one of the preeminent practitioners of the interpretive Andalusian vernacular (southern-Spanish Farmhouse) as the key inspiration for the simplicity in detail found in much of his oeuvre of Spanish Colonial Revival style architecture. The architectural historian David Gebhard wrote that Smith's Spanish Colonial Revival signature was the "picturesque simplicity" of his use of extensive plain wall surfaces, arches, clay tile roofs, iron grille work, heavy wood components and deeply recessed wall openings.

Smith's architectural career extended from about 1918 until his death in 1930, at the age of only 54. From among the approximately 116 designed projects within Mr. Smith's small office, 86 of these projects were actually constructed. Santa Barbara area is privileged to have 58 residences designed by this very special architect along with at least eight significant public buildings including, the News-Press Building, the Lobero Theatre, Meridian Studios, Little Town Club, Santa Barbara Chapel and Crematorium, La Cumbre Golf and Country Club Building, the Valley Club Building and the Frothingham House and the Robinson office building.

The Wright House embodies elements that demonstrate an outstanding attention to design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship. The building is noteworthy for its simple design reflecting the Andalusian vernacular with the low pitched gable covered terra cotta tiles, the simple white washed walls punctured by carefully placed, recessed openings with wood, horizontally divided light casement windows, elegant Monterey style balcony with heavy wood beams off the front elevation.

Conclusion: The house qualifies as a historic Structure of Merit under criteria 3, as a Spanish Colonial Revival steel house constructed in 1921 by one of the most noted architects of Santa Barbara, George Washington Smith and retains high historic integrity so that it can convey its original appearance.

Works Cited:

Andree, Herb; Young, Noel; Halloran Patricia. *Santa Barbara Architecture Third Edition*. Capra Press 1995

Grumbine, Anthony, Harrison Design. Hernandez, Nicole. *Santa Barbara Style Guides, Spanish Colonial Revival*. City of Santa Barbara, Community Development Department. November 2014.

Post/Hazeltine Associates Historic Structures/Sites Report News-Press Building, Santa Barbara

Community Development Office.