

ATTACHMENT A:  
Applications & "Building Biography" by Tim Gregory



Application to Designate a Historic Resource as a  
**HISTORIC MONUMENT OR LANDMARK**

§17.52.050 of the Pasadena Municipal Code sets forth a procedure for designating any historic resource in the City as a historic monument or landmark. 1) The process begins with a preliminary evaluation by staff to determine if the nominated property meets the applicable criteria and is eligible for designation. 2) If staff determines that the nominated property is eligible for designation, the nomination is scheduled for a public hearing before the Historic Preservation Commission. 3) The Historic Preservation Commission determines if the historic resource meets the criteria for designation as a historic monument or landmark. If the Commission finds that the nominated resource qualifies for designation, it forwards a recommendation on the designation to the City Council. 4) At a noticed public hearing, the Council then determines whether to approve or deny the request for designation.

**PART I. PROPERTY PROPOSED FOR DESIGNATION**

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Name of Property:             | La Casa Torre   |
| 2. Property Address:             | 611-627 East California Boulevard - Pasadena CA 91106 |
| 3. Date of Original Construction | 1927  |
| 4. Architect / Builder:          | Everett Phipps Babcock / F.H. Ruppel                  |
| 5. Present Owner: (Name)         | Individual owners - 8 units                           |
| (Address)                        | 611-627 East California Boulevard - Pasadena CA 91106 |
| (State/ZIP)                      |   |
| (Phone/FAX)                      | 310 277 1757  |
| (E-mail)                         | mimi.fisher@earthlink.net                             |

**PART II. APPLICANT**

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Applicant: (if not property owner) | La Casa Torre, LICA  |
| (Address)                          | c/o M. Mills - President HOA<br>611 E. California Boulevard - Pasadena |
| (State/ZIP)                        | CA 91106   |
| (Phone/FAX)                        | 626 395 7567   also Mimi Fisher 310 277 1757<br>619 E California St    |
| (E-mail)                           | mimi.fisher@earthlink.net  |

Date 27 February 2008 Signature Mimi Fisher

PLN 2008-00113

Date received: 2/27/2008  
Planner: Jason Weismund



Application to Designate a Historic Resource as a  
**HISTORIC MONUMENT OR LANDMARK**

**PART III: TYPE OF DESIGNATION**

**PROPERTY TO BE DESIGNATED AS A:**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>HISTORIC MONUMENT</b> <input type="checkbox"/>  | <b>LANDMARK</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   |
| <i>A historic monument means any historic resource that is significant at a regional, state or national level, and is an exemplary representation of a particular type of historic resource.</i> | <i>A landmark means any historic resource that is significant at a local level, and is an exemplary representation of a particular type of historic resource.</i> |

**PART IV: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY**

Briefly describe the property proposed for designation, indicating whether the entire site or a portion of the site is the subject of the nomination (e.g., how many buildings on the site). A map may be used for the description. Please also submit recent photographs. Use continuation sheet if necessary.

Refer to continuation sheet, site plan and recent photographs.

- Please see Historic Resources Inventory \* for excellent description by Denver Miller.
- Site Plan is included in Tim Gregory's History of La Casa Torre
- Attached are recent photographs of La Casa Torre as well as views of other Babcock buildings in Pasadena and San Marino.

**PART V: SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ON SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPERTY.** With this application, please attach information that will assist staff with the preparation of a designation report. Books, photographs, articles, and other archival information will all be useful to document the significance of the historic resource.

Refer to bibliography, historical photographs, chronology, and other supporting information.

- Please see list on page 13 of Tim Gregory's report.



*Application to Designate a Historic Resource as a*  
**HISTORIC MONUMENT OR LANDMARK**

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION**

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING A HISTORIC MONUMENT**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the region, state or nation.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. It is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the region, state or nation.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. It is exceptional in the embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style or method of construction, or that is an exceptional representation of the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the region, state or nation, or that possesses high artistic values that are of regional, state-wide or national significance. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history of the region, state or nation.  |

A historic monument designation may include significant public or semi-public interior spaces and features.

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING A HISTORIC LANDMARK**

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 1. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of the city.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 2. It is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the city.   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant historic resource property type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or that represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder who is locally significant, or that possesses high artistic values that are locally significant. |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 4. It has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important locally in prehistory or history.   |

# **LA CASA TORRE**

**A History**



**601 - 633 EAST CALIFORNIA BOULEVARD**

**PASADENA**

## THE OWNERS

Around 1901, Giovanni Lavagnino, a mining engineer, built a house for himself, his wife M. Lorena and their four children on Lot 3 of the St. John's Subdivision of Block J of the San Pasqual Tract in Pasadena. The address was 605 East California Street (re-designated as a Boulevard in the 1950s). In 1912, Mary L. Lavagnino, his daughter, was added to the title.

Giovanni Lavagnino was born in Piedmont, Italy around 1848 and received a civil engineering degree from the National University of Palermo. After teaching at several schools, he earned a graduate degree in mining and metallurgy from the Academy of Milling Engineering in Germany. He came to the United States in 1880, working first in Leadville, Colorado and then in Montana and Mexico. It wasn't long before he owned several mines. He settled for some years in Salt Lake City where he married his wife who had been born of Swedish parentage. While in Utah, Mr. Lavagnino invested in real estate and was president of the Conglomerate Mining and Milling Company. He came with his family to Pasadena not long before he built his house in 1901. Mr. Lavagnino died on March 27, 1919 at the age of 70. His obituary from the *Pasadena Star-News*, which called him a "man of many qualities of mind and character that have made him well-known throughout the West," is reproduced on page 14.

After Mr. Lavagnino's death, the California Street parcel was inherited by three of his four children: Mary (by then Mrs. Thomas W.) Osborn, Lars A.S. Lavagnino, and Gerald A. Lavagnino. They rented out 605 East California to Thomas H. Carroll, a private patrolman, and his wife Grace. In 1927, the Lavagnino family decided to develop the property into apartments, and the old family house was razed. Pasadena architect Everett Phipps Babcock was commissioned to design a new eight-unit complex in the then-popular Mediterranean style, including elements of Spanish, Italian, and Moorish architecture. Well-known local builder Frederick (Fritz) Ruppel was hired as the contractor, undoubtedly for "his special knowledge of antique methods." The inclusive address of the apartment building was 611 to 627 East California.

The new apartments began to be rented in March 1928. Tenants had the option of leasing them completely furnished or could bring in their own furnishings. City directories show the first tenants of each unit as:

- 611 Vacant until 1931 when Mrs. Sara Smith (widow of Alex Smith) moved in
- 615 Mrs. Lena S. Rankin
- 617 Mary L. Osborn (one of the owners) and her husband Thomas W. Osborn
- 619 Charles E. and Kittie M. McKinney
- 621 Vacant until 1931 when Daniel and Victoria B. Craig moved in

- 623 Mrs. Clara E. Keck
- 625 Roscoe R. Thomas, who worked as a clerk for Knight Storey & Knight, Inc., a Pasadena stocks-and-bonds firm
- 627 Vacant until at least 1933

In 1931, ownership of La Casa Torre was recorded in the name of Lavagnino-Osborn, Inc. In March 1976, title passed to Philip C. Lynch and Joanne R. Nemeroff. Just one month later, the recorded owner became the Philip Charles Lynch Company. The Maris Management Corporation of Los Angeles took over as owner in June 1979. In December of that year, the individual owners of the Maris firm, Esther and Marvin Schachter and Aris and Carolyn Anagnos, recorded ownership in their own names. During all this time, until 1981, La Casa Torre was operated as an apartment house.

Both Mr. Schachter and Mr. Anagnos were active in the Southern California branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, Mr. Schachter serving as a director in the 1960s and Mr. Anagnos as president in the 1970s. Mr. Schachter, who lived in Pasadena, later became known as a peace activist and a lobbyist for senior citizen causes. Mr. Anagnos, a resident of Beverly Hills, was very involved in Greek-American organizations, serving as honorary Greek cultural consul in the 1980s and as vice-president of the American Hellenic Council of California. Both gentlemen entered the real estate development field in the 1980s.

The parcel to the east of La Casa Torre (Lot 2 of the St. John's Subdivision) had been developed around 1886 as a one-story wood-frame duplex. A barn was added around 1901. Residents of this structure, with the address 631/633 East California, included Edward E. Spalding, the owner of the Spalding Hotel located at 333 East Colorado Street, and his wife Marrietta. The duplex had disappeared by December 1941. The lot remained vacant until 1951, when Lavagnino-Osborn, Inc., was granted permission to build a ten-space carport at the rear of the property to serve residents of La Casa Torre.

In 1895, the Simons family had built a 4-room, 2 ½-story "substantial and comfortable" pressed-brick house and barn for themselves on Lot 4 of the St. John's Subdivision (the northeast corner of Madison Avenue and California). The address was 593 East California. The Simons were the owners of the Simons Brick Company, established in 1884. It was a well-known early Pasadena firm that supplied many of the building materials for local-area residential construction. By 1928, the Simons home had become the Pharos Fraternity House and at least three additional residential units had been added to the rear of the property along Madison Avenue. In 1944, the original house was cut up into seven apartments. At the time of its demolition in 1981, the old Simons house was said to be the oldest brick residence in Pasadena. An image of the house, possibly from an early Board of Trade book, is attached on page 15.

Attached to this report are four Sanborn Fire Insurance maps that show how the footprints of the various buildings on the current site of La Casa Torre appeared in 1903, 1910, 1931, and 1951. These can be found on pages 22 through 25.

In 1981, the Maris company's partners commissioned the construction of two new condominium buildings on the east and west sides of La Casa Torre on Lots 2 and 4, replacing the old Simons house and the 1951 carport (since resident parking would now be accommodated by subterranean spaces.) As part of the development, all the units in the 1927 building were to be converted to condos. Skinner/Bouey Architects & Associates of Santa Monica was the designer. The landscape designer was Robert H. Forrey of Beverly Hills. The owners were to act as their own contractors.

The developers chose a neo-Spanish Colonial style for the new buildings, with the intention of making them compatible with the older building, mainly through a similar color palette and use of tiles. The refurbishment of the original La Casa Torre and its landscaping came under close scrutiny from the City's Urban Design and Cultural Heritage committees due to the site's historical significance. The State Historic Building Code was to be followed wherever possible. Evidently only the kitchens of the eight original units were to be completely modernized, with luminous ceilings, new sinks, new oak cabinets, and modern appliances. The bathrooms were to retain their original pedestal sinks. New heating and air-conditioning systems were also to be added.

In October 1982, the *Los Angeles Times* announced the "grand opening" of the new 34-unit La Casa Torre, calling it "three extraordinary Mediterranean structures in the heart of Pasadena's finest neighborhood." Eight "distinctive heritage homes" (called the Heritage Group) and twenty-six "new luxurious condominiums," with eight different floor-plans, were on the market at prices ranging from \$120,000 to \$190,000. Copies of these ads from the *Times* can be found on pages 33 through 38.

## THE ARCHITECT IN 1927

During his brief career in Pasadena, designer Everett Phipps Babcock was responsible for a number of the City's most significant examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Born in New York City in 1874, Mr. Babcock began his architectural career in Tacoma, Washington and Portland, Oregon, where he lived for several years. Beyond this, local libraries contain little information about Mr. Babcock's early career.

Everett Babcock and his wife Claire Delano Babcock moved to Pasadena around 1923, perhaps to join Mrs. Babcock's brother H. Lewis Delano, the vice-president of a real estate firm, who had lived here since 1919. Mr. Babcock's first job in Pasadena was as staff architect and general manager in the office of Wallace Neff, thought by many to be Southern California's most significant architect. It may have been under Neff's employ



that Mr. Babcock perfected his skill in the design of Spanish Colonial Revival buildings. By 1925, Mr. Babcock appears to have set up his own office at 14 North Fair Oaks Avenue, Room 401. After living at 649 La Loma Road for four years, in October 1927 Mr. and Mrs. Babcock moved to 855 Rosalind Road in San Marino--a house he designed himself. Mr. Babcock was a member of the American Institute of Architects and the Southern California Architectural Club. He was also active in his community, maintaining memberships in the Valley Hunt Club, the Ammandale Golf Club, and the Pasadena Garden Club.

Although not ill, Mr. Babcock elected to have his tonsils removed in May 1928. He unexpectedly died on the operating table. He was only 54 years old. His obituaries from the *Pasadena Star-News* and *Los Angeles Times*, copies of which are attached on pages 18 and 19, stated that he was "taking a distinguished place among architects of the Southland" and that "many charming residences in this community...testify to the quality of his artistic work...[and to] the wide range and diversity of his vision."

Mr. Babcock was said to pay special attention to the interior arrangements of the buildings he designed. Color schemes (both exterior and interior), possible furnishings, and appropriate landscaping were carefully thought out during the planning process. Mr. Babcock liked the careful use of massed bright colors as he strove to remain true to authentic Spanish characteristics.

Besides La Casa Torre, among the works of Mr. Babcock in Southern California most admired by architectural critics:

- Openbruch residence, 475 Lombardy Road, San Marino (1924)
- Hannah residence, 620 South Allen Avenue, San Marino (1925)
- Rose residence, 1000 Prospect Boulevard, Pasadena (1925)
- Residence, 420 South Hill Avenue, Pasadena (1926)
- Wheeler residence, 650 Landor Lane, San Marino (1926)
- Talcott residence, St. Petersburg, Florida (1926)
- Bradley residence, Flintridge (1926)
- Hamlin residence, Flintridge (1926)
- Peacock residence, Armada Drive, Pasadena (1926)
- Sherman residence, Alta Canyon (1926)
- Two residences, 560 and 570 South Orange Grove Avenue, Pasadena, designed for Dwight Hamlin (1926)
- Singer Building at 520 East Colorado (1926), a rare commercial design
- Residence at 660 South Allen Avenue, San Marino, designed for Babcock's brother-in-law H. Lewis Delano (1927)
- Jarvis Earle residence, 5357 Alta Canyon Road, La Canada Flintridge (1927)
- Wheeler residence, 930 Rosalind Road, San Marino (1927)
- Colonel Herman Hall residence, Sierra Madre (1928)

\* 1660 Prospect Boulevard (Alice Cheney Smith) Neff + Babcock (1924)

Commercial buildings, 247-249 East Colorado Street (1928)

Plans for the Union Labor Temple, southwest corner of Raymond Avenue  
and Walnut Street (1928)

Fulton Lane residence, Via Horquilla, Palos Verdes (1928)

Witney residence, 1947 San Pasqual Street, Pasadena (1928) *-not in city limit*

## THE BUILDER IN 1927

Frederick (“Fritz”) H. Ruppel (1897-1977) was a skilled and knowledgeable contractor who is remembered for his ability to recreate antique building materials and methods and for his insistence on period authenticity—a rare characteristic in an era that pre-dated the modern historic preservation movement. Mr. Ruppel was a recognized authority on the restoration of adobe buildings, particularly the missions of California.

Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Landmarks Club, under the guidance of Charles Fletcher Lummis, undertook a campaign to alert Californians to the deteriorating condition of the old Spanish missions. In fact, many of them were just crumbling ruins by that time. Frederick Ruppel became very involved with the movement and was responsible for directing the restoration of many of the missions, including Mission San Juan Capistrano. He also restored El Molino Viejo (the Old Mill) in San Marino in 1927.

Mr. Ruppel did not just restrict himself to restoration projects, however. In 1929 he was listed as an “estate construction specialist” for the community of Emerald Bay in Laguna Beach. But even with new construction, Mr. Ruppel was eager to recall the look of earlier California buildings. Many of the architects he worked with, such as Roland Coate and Palmer Sabin, were also in search of a true, unique California style. It is interesting to speculate what they might ultimately have come up with had not the Great Depression, with its devastating effects on the construction industry, intervened. Besides La Casa Torre, one of the most high-profile projects with which Mr. Ruppel was associated during the 1920s was the William Hart residence at 1230 South Orange Grove, designed by Roland Coate in 1929. Its walls are of hand-molded brick formed to resemble adobe—a product Mr. Ruppel called Adoblar.

Fritz Ruppel was also a pioneer in the integration of seismic safety into his residential and institutional projects. At times referred to in newspaper stories as a “structural engineer,” as early as 1934 (a year after the Long Beach earthquake) he espoused the use of braced steel and concrete plaster instead of the typical wood frame, which he said was not only economical and efficient, but also defended the building against earthquake, fire, termites, and energy loss. One of the first houses he built with this method is at 615 Castano Street.

A California native and a longtime resident of the local area, Mr. Ruppel during the 1920s maintained an office in the same building as famed architect Wallace Neff: 170 East California which Ruppel, in fact, had built. Across the street at 171 was another of his buildings—the furniture factory of George S. Hunt. Mr. Ruppel lived for many years at 2067 El Molino in Altadena with Myra D. A. Ruppel. He later moved to San Marino. Frederick Ruppel died in Gardnersville, Nevada on October 27, 1977 at the age of 80. His obituaries (copies attached on pages 20 and 21) rightly identified him as an “artisan” rather than as just a contractor.

## **THE ARCHITECTURAL STYLE**

The Mediterranean Revival style was very popular throughout America from about 1890 to 1930. (It has seen a resurgence in recent years as California Ranch has fallen out of favor as the style-of-choice of subdivision developers.) Prior to World War I, Italian Revival was primarily a style for architect-designed landmarks in major metropolitan areas, while Spanish Colonial Revival tended to predominate in suburbs and rural areas. Numerous books were published during this time illustrating Mediterranean villas and gardens. Wealthy Southern Californians were particularly drawn to these prototypes since the buildings, while obviously traditional, were also picturesque and well-suited to a Mediterranean-like climate. Thick plaster walls, low-pitched tile roofs, multi-paned wooden casement windows, and restrained use of wood and plaster decorative elements all blended to create an Old World feeling.

The original La Casa Torre of 1927 is a good example of the composite Mediterranean Revival style with its rustic tile roof, rough-plastered walls, and wooden small-paned sash and casement windows inset into the walls. Its walls present varying facades, with almost whimsical placement of openings and decorative elements, giving the feeling of an Old World street or town square rather than of a single building. The imposition of stylistic touches is done in a subtle way so that no two apartments are the same. These exterior details include window shutters, brick and tile detailing, Moorish arches, variously-pattered wood-paneled doors, stairway and balcony railings, wood and plaster moldings and pilasters, wooden balcony supports, and wrought-iron light fixtures.

Amanda Schechter wrote a report for the City in 1982, summarizing the appearance and “feeling” of old and new La Casa Torre from her viewpoint. Some of her observations follow:

The complex’s central courtyard emphasizes the importance of outdoor living and almost becomes a continuation of the indoor spaces. Paved in Padre antique block tile with grass interstices, the courtyard combines a central hexagonal tiled fountain with a large assortment of trees and shrubs, including orange and guava trees, camellias, a flowering eucalyptus tree, bougainvillea, roses, and birds of paradise. All the apartments exit onto the patio, while some feature balconies or private patios.

The interior design details include beam or arched ceilings, wood burning fireplaces trimmed with unglazed tile, Brazilian hardwood floors, massive front doors, and stained glass window panels. As noted in the original real estate brochure, La Casa Torre was meant to reflect and blend stylistic characteristics from “Moorish castles, Italian villas, and Spanish haciendas.” No apartment is identical. Some feature sunken doorways, others have sleeping porches or private patios. Fireplaces enhance all the main rooms and many of the bedrooms. Other details include handmade light fixtures, tiled stairways and windows with iron grills.

According to Ms. Schechter, the rehabilitation of the building in the 1980s maintained the old charm and character while at the same time bringing the conveniences, especially in bathrooms and kitchens, up to present-day standards. Plumbing was replaced where necessary without damaging existing fixtures and walls. Air conditioning was put in through existing duct work. (The building originally relied on the natural cooling effects of the basement, thick walls, and tiled roof.)

Ms. Schechter comments that the two new flanking condominium structures, although contemporary in design, were compatible with the old section through their use of similar major features, such as tiled roofs, ceramic tile trim, wrought iron gates, and quarry tile on linking patios.

## **THE PROPERTY IN THE PUBLIC RECORD**

In 1927, building permits #6550A and 6551A were issued by the City of Pasadena to Mrs. Thomas W. Osborn for the construction of an apartment house. The total cost was to be \$65,000.

A permit was issued in February 1951 for the construction of a large L-shaped carport and storage room structure at the back of the vacant lot to the east of La Casa Torre. It would encompass 1,794 square feet and cost \$4,000 to build.

Copies of these permits are no longer available in City files.

The Pasadena City Assessor first visited the property on March 8, 1928 and recorded a newly completed apartment house with a concrete foundation, plaster walls, and a hipped tile roof. Heat was provided by four fireplaces and a gas furnace. There were 97 plumbing fixtures. Interior finishes were primarily lath-and-plaster. The quality of the apartment interiors was rated “special”—the highest category on the Assessor’s form.

The Assessor estimated the total square footage at 13,642. On the first level were twelve living rooms (probably including dining rooms), seven bedrooms, six tiled bathrooms, and nine kitchens. The second level contained two living rooms, eighteen bedrooms,

eighteen tiled bathrooms, and two kitchens. The complex had a total of thirty-nine hardwood floors. There were also 9,580 cubic feet of basement area.

The Assessor returned on October 9, 1951 to record the completion of the carport-storage building that served La Casa Torre. It was L-shaped, its shorter 26-foot leg starting 127 feet north of California. The longer leg, measuring 62 feet, ran along the north boundary line of the property. Where the two legs joined was a 17-by-28-foot storage room. The building had a concrete foundation, walls of concrete block, a flat composition roof, and steel sash windows in the storage room. Construction was rated of "good" quality.

Copies of the City Assessor's building records are attached on pages 43 through 46.

(Note: The Pasadena City Assessor's Office ceased operations in 1974. Their square footage totals often differed from those of the Los Angeles County Assessor's Office, since they frequently included garages, terraces, patios, etc. in their computation. It is advisable to rely on the County Assessor's square footage figures since they are more up-to-date and consistent.)

## **THE WORLD AND COMMUNITY IN 1927**

This was but one year of peace and prosperity in an entire decade that seemed to engender nothing but exhilaration and optimism both at home and abroad. In 1927, Charles "Lucky" Lindbergh landed his "Spirit of St. Louis" in France after a 33-hour flight. He was later given a hero's welcome in New York. Under President Herbert Hoover, there indeed seemed to be more than one chicken in every pot. A dark spot of the year was the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, despite a six-year-long world-wide protest. They would be "posthumously rehabilitated" fifty years later. The United States was rapidly ascending as a world power--in fact, the Marines were sent to China to protect American interests during their civil war. Also in China, fossil remains of Peking Man were found. In 1927, Californians were basking in the then-accepted virtues of growth and free enterprise under recently elected Republican Governor Clement C. Young.

Pasadena was developing into one of the most desirable and wealthiest per capita cities in the country. Several important local landmarks first opened to the public in 1927, among them: Alexander Hamilton Elementary School, Woodrow Wilson Junior High School, the magnificent Myron Hunt-designed Central Library on Walnut Street, the Lamanda Park Branch Library, and the Masonic Temple. Construction on the new City Hall was well under way in 1927. Also in that year, the Linda Vista Street Bridge opened, natural gas was piped to the city for the first time, the Visiting Nurse Association was organized, the Memorial Flagpole, on the corner of Orange Grove and Colorado Boulevards, was dedicated to those who died in World War I, and Christmas lights and decorations were

strung across Colorado Boulevard from Orange Grove to Catalina Avenue for the first time.

Among the literary classics published in 1927: *Elmer Gantry* by Sinclair Lewis, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, *Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse, Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (which won the Pulitzer Prize), and Don Marquis' humorous fiction *archy and mehitabel*. In that same year, the release of Al Jolson's sound film musical *The Jazz Singer* signaled the end of the silent-screen era. Other movies appearing in 1927 were *Seventh Heaven* with Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell, *Sunrise* (again starring Janet Gaynor), *Wings* (one of the last great silent films, which won the Oscar for best picture that year), and *It* (which established Clara Bow as the famous "it" girl). Also in 1927, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy began their long series of film comedies. On Broadway, the Kern-Hammerstein musical *Showboat* was a smash hit, introducing such notable songs as *Ol' Man River* and *Make Believe*. Other popular tunes in 1927 included *Blue Skies* by Irving Berlin and *S'Wonderful* by George and Ira Gershwin. Jelly Roll Morton recorded three big hits, and the Carter Family, the classic American country singing group, began performing. Martha Graham established her School of Contemporary Dance in 1927, but the dance world mourned the loss of Isadora Duncan.

## NOTES

The imminent construction of La Casa Torre was announced in the September 17, 1927 issue of the *Pasadena Star-News*. The article stated that "the preliminary plans show two frame and stucco buildings in the Spanish style. Wrought iron will [be featured, and] tile roofing typifying the Spanish tradition." A copy of this article can be found on page 16 in this report.

The construction project was reported in more detail in the February 11, 1928 issue of the *Star-News*. A copy of this illustrated article is included here on page 17. La Casa Torre was described as being:

a departure from the usual in apartment house designing...The architect has been successful in preserving the individuality and privacy of the home, while incorporating all the advantages of a modern apartment in the structure." Of special note was the Old World Mediterranean style which "enables the use of a wide diversity of lines, doing away with the monotony which usually accompanies the large number of window and door openings necessary in an apartment house.

The Spanish balcony and staircase on one side of the patio are offset on the other side by a typically Moorish staircase sparkling with many-colored Tunis tiles. The patio is exceptionally large for this type of building in order to ensure an abundance of air and light in all rooms. Dead-white walls will be brightened by vivid green shuttered windows and by hand-made red tile on the roof.

No two of these apartments are alike, which indicates the intention of the builder to make of each one of the eight units an individual and distinctive home. In some apartments all the rooms are on the same level; in others, the living rooms are downstairs and the master bedrooms above; in still a third type, the living room is a step lower than the rest of the apartment. The general effect is of eight different homes placed end to end around a large patio.

Each of the living rooms has a natural wood fireplace to supplement the electrically controlled heating units. All floors are planed mahogany, which, combined with the delicate Travertine walls, the warm red tint of the tiled fireplaces, and the simplicity of the wrought iron wall brackets create an atmosphere of old world comfort and spaciousness, unlooked for in a modern apartment. This impression is strengthened by the absence of interior woodwork.

Each bedroom has its own tiled bath, with individual electric heater, built-in porcelain medicine cabinet and Venetian scroll mirror. The built-in closets, cupboards, coolers, electrically controlled heating, electric refrigeration, and other features make the apartments homes of unusual convenience.

A reproduction of the original brochure for La Casa Torre can be found on pages 26 through 28. It was described as “one of the fine Mediterranean structures on the Riviera of Southern California: a home of unusual grace and beauty.” This brochure was especially enthusiastic about the patio which was “paved with Padre antique block tile, rich red in color, broken by large mazes of shrubbery on either side of a central fountain. A profusion of potted plants, both large and small, is placed around the patio as well as on the various balconies and stairways. These combine with multi-colored tile window boxes to heighten the impression of Continental atmosphere.”

Interior features of special interest included the ceilings, some of which “conform to the lines of the building; some are arched; while others are beamed with massive beams of the Trentini or the more delicate beams of Cordova and Seville.” Living rooms were unusually large, the smallest measuring sixteen by twenty-one feet, and had fireplaces of unglazed tile, “which is also used in the entryways.” Wrought-iron curtain rods were included. The “best sound insulation materials known to modern building” were to be incorporated—three times more effective than “the average structure of this kind.”

La Casa Torre was featured in the 1982 book *Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles*, with photographs by famed architectural photographer Julius Schulman. Copies of the relevant pages can be found in this report on pages 29 through 32. The text is a repetition of the 1928 promotional brochure cited above.

Photographic images of La Casa Torre, taken in 1986 by the City of Pasadena, are attached on pages 39 through 41.

La Casa Torre appears in Gebhard and Winter’s architectural guidebook. A copy of its entry can be found on page 42.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY**

The original La Casa Torre of 1927 was registered on an inventory of historical buildings at the State Office of Historic Preservation in 1982 and again in 2002. It was found potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a locally significant example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture with Moorish details as applied to a multiple-family garden court development in pre-World War II Pasadena. Copies of the inventory forms, which provide detailed architectural descriptions, can be found on pages 47 through 52.



## SOURCES CONSULTED

- Los Angeles County Assessor (Los Angeles archives)  
 Los Angeles Public Library  
 City of Pasadena, Planning and Development Dept., Design & Historic  
 Preservation Section (Archives)  
 Pasadena Public Library (Centennial Room)  
 Pasadena Museum of History (Archives)
- Gebhard, David and Robert Winter. *An Architectural Guidebook to Los Angeles*.  
 Salt Lake City, Gibbs-Smith, 2003.
- McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*.  
 New York, Knopf, 1984.
- Phillips, Steven J. *Old-House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American  
 Domestic Architecture (1600-1940)*. Lakewood, CO, American Source  
 Books, 1989.
- Pinney, Joyce Y. *A Pasadena Chronology 1769-1977: Remembering  
 When--Where*. Pasadena, Pasadena Public Library, 1978.
- Polyzoides, Stefanos. *Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles: A Typographical  
 Analysis*. Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1982.
- City Directories: 1927-
- Los Angeles Times*: May 17, 1928; October 3, 16, 23, and 31, 1982  
*Pasadena Star-News*: April 1, 1919; December 1, 1923; May 29, 1926;  
 September 17, 1927; February 11, 1928; May 16, 17, and 19, 1928;  
 November 10, 1977  
*San Marino Tribune*: November 17, 1977
- Internet Resources, including California Index, California Death Index,  
 Gale Biography Master Index, Ancestry.com and Historic *Los Angeles  
 Times* Database.

Tim Gregory  
 The Building Biographer  
 400 East California Blvd., #3  
 Pasadena, CA 91106-3763  
 Phone: 626-792-7465; Fax: 626-793-5219  
 e-mail: timgregory@sbcglobal.net

*Copyright*  
 June 2007