

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

**THE SPOOR HOUSE, 424 PLAZA RUBIO
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA
APN 025-263-005**

SEPTEMBER 7, 2016



Vicinity Map of 424 Plaza Rubio



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. It is the opinion of the Historic Landmarks Commission Designations Subcommittee that the building at 424 Plaza Rubio is an excellent candidate for Structure of Merit designation per the following criteria:

Criterion A. Its character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation

The house is a Spanish Colonial Revival house designed by noted architect Mary Craig in 1925 along with six other

houses on Plaza Rubio that face Mission Santa Barbara. Davidson and Maitland were the building contractors for all of the houses except 414 or 420 Plaza Rubio and 530 Plaza Rubio. The first owner of the house was E. H. Spoor. The houses on Plaza Rubio represent a unique period of civic expansion in Santa Barbara in the 1920s. Development of unoccupied land and the last pieces of the rural setting of the Mission Santa Barbara occurred. The houses on Plaza Rubio neither intrude on the Mission Santa Barbara nor are upstaged by it. They are far enough away to remain differential, yet close enough to embrace the Mission Santa Barbara in a famed composition. In Santa Barbara, examples of Spanish Colonial Revival can be found throughout the City as one of its most defining styles of architecture. Mary Craig's work at Plaza Rubio received extraordinary civic recognition. Photographs of the first four houses were published in the *Morning Press* in Santa Barbara in January 1926, as first-prize winners of the newspaper's photographic competition. As one of the treasured Mary Craig houses on Plaza Rubio, the house is significant to the heritage of the City.



The horizontal divided light casement windows and French doors opening onto balconies are character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style. Photo taken June 2016.

Criterion C. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the culture and development of the City, the State, or the Nation

The significance of the houses on Plaza Rubio is enhanced by the association with the real estate developer Margaret Andrews. Andrews started acquiring real estate when she came to Santa Barbara in 1922. This included seven of the eight lots of land across from the Mission Santa Barbara. She was a proponent of Santa Barbara's Spanish architectural image. Not only was Andrews known for real estate development, but she was also a local philanthropist and member of the City Planning Commission from June 1931 to August 1932.

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

The house embodies the Spanish Colonial Revival style's character-defining features, including the largely unadorned, whitewashed stucco walls; terra-cotta roof tiles that create a decorative edge from the roof to the wall; deeply recessed, horizontally divided casement windows; French doors leading to balconies with iron railings; and wood-paneled front door with tile trim. In Santa Barbara, the Andalusian vernacular (southern-Spanish farmhouse) was the key inspiration for the simplicity in detail found in much of the region's architecture.

Because the house at 424 Plaza Rubio exemplifies its architectural style, it is eligible for listing as a City of Santa Barbara Structure of Merit under Criterion D.



The largely unadorned, whitewashed stucco walls are topped with terra-cotta roof tiles that create a decorative edge from the roof to the wall. Photo taken June 2016.



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

The house is the work of Mary McLaughlin Craig, who was the wife of noted Santa Barbara architect Osborne Craig. Osborne Craig died of poor health in 1922, at which time Mary Craig began using her husband's architecture office on the second floor of the Orena adobe. Mary Craig hired one of the area's most noted licensed architects, Ralph Armitage. With his talent and the inherited reputation of her husband as a California Spanish-style designer, Mary Craig was ready to establish her singular reputation through a masterful combination of persuasion, talent, trust,



The collection of Spanish Colonial Revival style houses on Plaza Rubio. Courtesy of Spanish Colonial Style: Santa Barbara and the Architecture of James Osborne Craig and Mary McLaughlin Craig.

and friendships. After the earthquake struck in 1925, it was the new Spanish Colonial Revival buildings that survived with little damage. The Spanish Colonial Style, which Mary Craig was intuitively understood, became the style for her plentiful work. Her patron, Margaret Andrews, held the strong aesthetic and the belief that the town should adhere to low building heights and its Spanish heritage. Andrews offered Mary Craig important opportunities, among them the Plaza Rubio houses. Mary Craig also designed large noteworthy homes in Montecito. At the time Mary Craig practiced architecture, there were very few women in the field. It was a considerable accomplishment to step into the role usually played by a man and become so successful.

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

The house embodies the following elements that demonstrate an outstanding attention to design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship: the design of the low-pitched roof with terra-cotta roof tiles that create a decorative edge from the roof to the wall; the largely unadorned, whitewashed, stucco walls; deeply recessed, wood, horizontally divided casement windows; French doors leading to wrought iron balconies, and the wood plank door surrounded by decorative tile. Because the house demonstrates these outstanding elements, it qualifies as a Structure of Merit under Criterion G.

Criterion H. Its relationship to any other landmark if its preservation is essential to the integrity of that Landmark

The Mary Craig houses of Plaza Rubio face the Mission Historical Park and the Mission Santa Barbara. These houses were conceived as an urban ensemble to complement these important elements of Santa Barbara, which are now designated City Landmarks. They create an important interaction with both the Mission Historical Park and Mission Santa Barbara and are essential to the integrity of setting of the City Landmarks.

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

The house at 424 Plaza Rubio is an essential part of the row of Spanish Colonial Revival houses across from Mission Santa Barbara and the rose garden of Mission Historical Park, as they sit

on a unique location and have been an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood since 1925-1926, when they were constructed.

Historic Integrity

The current owners have owned the house since 1989. Prior to this time, two campaigns of remodeling destroyed some of the original features of the property. In the 1940s, a small toilet room was inserted under the stairway to the second floor, and the internal stair to the basement was removed. In its stead, a steep ladder from a low door on the exterior was added, and since then that has been the only basement access, reducing its utility. In 1984, there was a major remodeling that entailed replacing the baths and kitchen, as well as removing original cabinets, finishes, and fixtures and replacing them with poor quality and historically incompatible finishes and materials. This year, in 2016, the owners are completing a major and total restoration to correct some of these earlier inappropriate changes and to restore the interior basement stair, returning the house to something closer to what would have been its original character in terms of details and finishes. At the same time, a total replacement and upgrade of all systems (electrical, plumbing, heating, and ventilation) is being undertaken as well as a continuing and projected program of maintenance and restoration in keeping with the historical and architectural character of this exceptional house. The house is in good condition, with almost all of the original materials still present. In addition, the surrounding area has also maintained much of its historic integrity. The house retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, allowing it to convey its original appearance.



The simple and elegant front entry door is made of wood planks with decorative tiles in the door surround that are character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and show outstanding attention to materials. Photo taken June 2016.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Historic Landmarks Commission adopt a resolution to designate 424 Plaza Rubio as a Structure of Merit.

Works Cited

Skewes-Cox, Pamela, and Sweeney, Robert. *Spanish Colonial Style: Santa Barbara and the Architecture of James Osborn Craig and Mary McLaughlin Craig*. Rizzoli, New York. 2015.

Attachments:

1. (Draft) Resolution to designate
2. Mills Act Ten-Year Rehabilitation Plan