



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Context Statement Historic Preservation Commission Case Report Adoption of *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950*

Hearing Date: April 3, 2013
Case No.: 2013.0313U
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The case before the Historic Preservation Commission is consideration to adopt the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement*.

The Planning Department (Department) developed the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* in order to provide a framework for consistent, informed evaluations of the neighborhood's single-family tract houses constructed from 1925 to 1950. The *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* documents the evolution of builders and building typologies; identifies significant themes, design elements, architectural styles, and character-defining features; and documents significance and integrity thresholds. This detailed information provides a consistent framework within which to contextually identify, interpret and evaluate individual properties and historic districts. It was used to guide the Sunset District Builders Historic Resource Survey (Sunset survey), which is in its final phase of documentation.

Development of the Sunset context statement was funded, in part, by a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant from the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). The *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* is intended to be used, along with past historic context statements such as *San Francisco's Parkside Neighborhood, 2010*; *San Francisco's Ocean View, Merced Heights, and Ingleside (OMI) Neighborhoods, 1862-1959*; *San Francisco Modern Architecture and Landscape Design, 1935-1970*; and *Historic Context Statement of the Oceanside*, to inform historic and cultural resource surveys and to ensure that property evaluations are consistent with local, state, and federal standards.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW STATUS

Historic context statements are exempt under Class 6 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Section 15306, *Information Collection* of the CEQA Guidelines states the following: "Class 6 consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environment resource. These may be strictly for information gathering purposes, or as part of a study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted or funded."

ISSUES AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Mary Brown, a Department preservation planner, researched and wrote the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* with significant assistance from Department interns. Lead intern Forrest Chamberlain spent considerable time reviewing historic newspapers and periodicals, documenting information from building permits, deeds, sales records, and city directories, and assisting with the writing of builder biographies. Alexandra Kirby photographed buildings, provided general archival research assistance, and assisted with writing the builder biographies. Jessica Childress researched and analyzed 1940 United States Census records. The context statement methodology is found on pages 13-16.
- The *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* was peer reviewed by Tim Frye, Department Preservation Coordinator; Gretchen Hilyard, Department preservation planner; and the Department's Survey Advisors Group (SAG). SAG members include Courtney Damkroger, former Historic Preservation Commissioner; Robert Cherny, former Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board member; Mike Buhler, executive director of San Francisco Architectural Heritage; and Woody LaBounty, co-founder and contributor to the Western Neighborhoods Project. The document was also reviewed by Lorri Ungaretti, a local Sunset District author.
- The Department is in the process of finalizing the Sunset survey findings. Department staff will conduct the necessary community outreach in spring 2013 and bring the survey findings to the Historic Preservation Commission for review and adoption in June 2013.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Department used a range of outreach strategies to inform and engage the public in the development of the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* and related Sunset survey. Outreach activities conducted since June 2012, include the creation of a project website, with Chinese translation, <http://sunsetsurvey.sfplanning.org>; mailing a project announcement to all 2,800 property owners within the Sunset survey area, with Chinese translation, in July 2012 (see attached); providing an informational presentation to Supervisor Carmen Chu's office, August 2012; and listing the project in the Department's August 2012 and December 2012 "Director's Report." The project was also highlighted in articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (John King, September 4, 2012) and *California Home + Design* (December 10, 2012).

<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/place/article/Sunset-District-architectural-gems-rise-from-fog-3838636.php>

<http://www.californiahomedesign.com/gallery/san-francisco-s-sunset-district-experiences-architectural-renaissance#1>

In addition, the Department developed and led a neighborhood history walking tour of the Sunset District, with Lorri Ungaretti, in November 2012. Despite the chilly weather, the tour generated overwhelming interest, with over 60 attendees. Outreach for the walking tour included listings on Supervisor Carmen Chu's newsletter and Facebook page, tour flyers posted within the Sunset survey area, and a short article/announcement in the *Sunset Beacon*. The Department distributed informational

flyers about the project at the tour. A follow-up walking tour is planned for spring 2013 in conjunction with outreach for the Sunset survey.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission adopt the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* for the following reasons:

- That the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* was prepared by a qualified historian in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and State Office of Historic Preservation Recordation Manual as outlined in Resolution No. 527 of June 7, 2000, adopted by the previous San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board.
- That the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* was reviewed by Department staff for accuracy and adequacy as an evaluative framework for historic and cultural resource surveys and individual property evaluations.
- That the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* may be used as a planning tool to evaluate significant themes, integrity, and character-defining features of individual buildings and clusters of buildings.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement*
- B. Draft Motion
- C. Property owner notification

I:\Preservation\Survey Team\Surveys & Contexts\Sunset Builders\Case Report



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Historic Preservation Commission Draft Motion

HEARING DATE: APRIL 3, 2013

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ADOPTION OF THE "SUNSET DISTRICT RESIDENTIAL BUILDERS, 1925–1950, HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT," AS FUNDED THROUGH A 2011/2012 CLG GRANT FROM THE OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION, PURSUANT TO SECTION 1002(8) OF ARTICLE 10 OF THE PLANNING CODE.

PREAMBLE

WHEREAS, that the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* was prepared by a qualified historian in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and State Office of Historic Preservation Recordation Manual as outlined in Resolution No. 527 of June 7, 2000, adopted by the previous San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board.

WHEREAS, the methodology for recording and evaluating historic resources contained in the Office of Historic Preservation publication *Instructions for Recording Historical Resources* of March 1995 and future editions of that publication is based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and National Register of Historic Places Criteria cited therein.

WHEREAS, that the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* was reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission for accuracy and adequacy and was adopted by the Historic Preservation Commission at a public meeting agendaed for this purpose.

WHEREAS, that a copy of the duly adopted *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* will be maintained in the Planning Department Preservation Library and on the Planning Department's website.

WHEREAS, that the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context* may be used as a planning tool to evaluate significant themes, integrity, and character-defining features of individual buildings and clusters of buildings.

WHEREAS, that in the future, in evaluating surveyed properties, historic significance may be demonstrated by reference to the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement*.

WHEREAS, that future Landmark and Landmark District Designation Reports and Nominations and Structures of Merit Nominations may demonstrate historic significance by reference to the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement*.

WHEREAS, that the San Francisco Planning Department, will further refine the document and make technical edits as required to recognize the history and significance of residential tract design in San Francisco’s preservation planning work, including cultural resource surveys and evaluation of properties or districts for potential local, state or national historic designation, as well as to address any comments of the Commission and the public resulting from the public hearing and any further comments of the staff of the Office of Historic Preservation.

THEREFORE BE IT MOVED, that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby adopts the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement*, and

BE IT FURTHER MOVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit a copy of the adopted *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950, Historic Context Statement* and this Motion No. XXX, to the State Office of Historic Preservation and to the Northwest Information Center at Sonoma State University for reference.

I hereby certify that the Historic Preservation Commission ADOPTED the foregoing Motion on April 3, 2013.

Jonas P. Ionin
Acting Commission Secretary

AYES:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

ADOPTED:

SUNSET DISTRICT RESIDENTIAL BUILDERS, 1925-1950

Historic Context Statement



April 3, 2013

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**SAN FRANCISCO
PLANNING
DEPARTMENT**

The activity which is the subject of this historic context statement has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, through the California Office of Historic Preservation. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or the California Office of Historic Preservation, nor does mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the California Office of Historic Preservation.

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U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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Chapter 1

Project Description

Introduction

The San Francisco Planning Department (Department) developed the Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950 Historic Context Statement (context statement) in order to provide the framework for consistent, informed evaluations of the Sunset District’s residential tract houses constructed from 1925 to 1950. Known for its rows of similarly massed single-family houses, the Sunset District neighborhood also contains clusters of extraordinary architecture by several master builders, as well as significant individual buildings designed in exuberant expressions of various Period Revival styles or the then cutting-edge Streamline Moderne style. The context statement documents the development history of the neighborhood, identifies key builders and architects, documents the primary architectural styles and character-defining features, and provides a guide for the evaluation of buildings constructed during this era. The Sunset Builders context statement links a specific property type—single-family houses—to identified themes, geographic patterns, and time periods. It provides a detailed discussion of significance, criteria considerations, and integrity thresholds.

The context statement was researched and developed in spring 2012 to provide an evaluative framework for the Sunset District Historic and Cultural Resource Survey (Sunset survey) area, a historic resource survey of approximately 2,800 buildings located in a central area of the Sunset District, undertaken by the Department in summer 2012. This is the first evaluative survey of residential tract buildings in the Sunset District. The context statement provides a consistent framework within which to contextually identify, interpret, and evaluate individual properties and clusters of buildings within the Sunset survey area.

The context statement will additionally be used to assist historic resource evaluation determinations in the larger Sunset District neighborhood and in builder tract neighborhoods, constructed citywide from 1925 to 1950. The factors and themes that influenced builder tract development in the Sunset District can be applied on a citywide scale.

Development of the context statement was funded, in part, by a grant from the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP). It was researched and written by Department staff, with support and review provided by an advisor group, local experts, and student interns. Mary Brown, Preservation Planner, was the lead researcher and writer. Oversight and review was provided by Preservation Planner Gretchen Hilyard and Preservation Coordinator Tim Frye. Department Preservation Planners meet the Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualifications Standards for Historic Preservation. Student interns Forrest Chamberlain, Jessica Childress, and Alexandra Kirby provided invaluable research and writing assistance. Lorri Ungaretti served as an expert reader. Additional review and guidance was provided by the Department’s Survey Advisors Group members Robert Cherny, Courtney Damkroger, Mike Buhler, and Woody LaBounty.

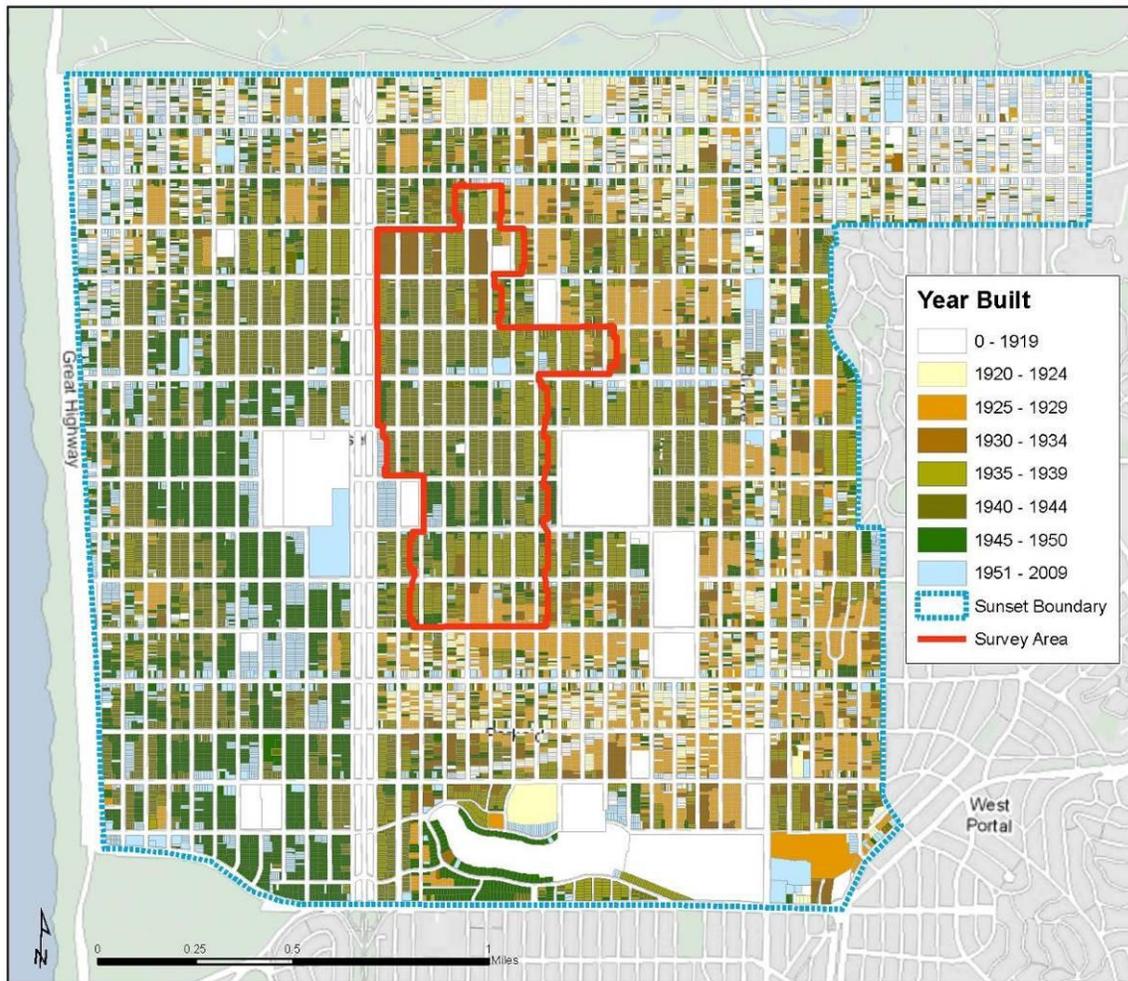
Period Justification

The period 1925–1950 was chosen because it covers the primary eras of development in the Sunset District. Tract buildings constructed during this period range from blocks of barrel front Mediterranean Revival houses to individual examples of Streamline Moderne design to picturesque groupings of buildings constructed in myriad Period Revival styles, to the restrained design of houses that resulted from large-scale mass-production in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The vast majority of construction activity in the Sunset District occurred between 1925 and 1950. The mid-1920s witnessed the introduction of the form and massing of residential buildings constructed in the neighborhood for the following 25 years: a stucco-clad, single-family house, with integrated garage at the ground story and living spaces above. The houses were tightly packed on 25-foot-wide lots, giving the appearance of small-scale attached row houses. The end date of 1950 was chosen to mark the slowing down of the frenzied construction activity that occurred following the end of World War II and the shift from single-family houses to multi-family complexes and residential towers. Major factors that influenced design and construction of residential tracts during this 25-year period included infrastructure development, such as the construction of streetcar tunnels and graded streets to cross the sand dunes, the mass adoption of automobiles, the Great Depression and resultant federal government intervention to stimulate building and increase home ownership, population shifts associated with the defense industry, and the postwar population boom.

Sunset Neighborhood Boundary

The Sunset District is San Francisco's largest neighborhood, covering 4.5 square miles at the southwest quadrant of the City. It is roughly bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the west, Golden Gate Park to the north, 4th Avenue and 15th Avenue to the east, and Sloat Boulevard to the south. Within this large area are several smaller neighborhoods including the Parkside, Oceanside, Inner Sunset, Outer Sunset, Golden Gate Heights, Parkway Terrace, and portions of West Portal. The Sunset District contains over 25,000 buildings—more than 15% of the City's building stock.



Above: Map showing construction dates of the larger Sunset District neighborhood (blue line) and smaller Sunset survey area boundary (red line).

Sunset Survey Area

A representative area of the Sunset District was selected for an intensive historic and cultural resource survey. Located in the center of the Sunset District, the Sunset survey area is focused on buildings constructed during the identified 1925–1950 period of development. Initial reconnaissance site visits informed the survey’s finalized boundary, which was drawn to capture the following types of properties:

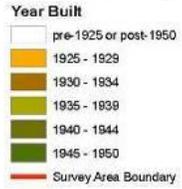
- The dominant mid-1920s building type—barrel front Mediterranean Revival
- Depression-era tracts
- Picturesque “old world” tracts, including high-style blocks designed by Oliver Rousseau and Henry Doelger
- Mass-produced houses associated with the Federal Housing Act in the late 1930s
- Houses designed in the Streamline Moderne style, which represents an early adaptation of Modern styles to middle-income housing
- Postwar housing tracts

The Sunset survey area contains buildings constructed by major builders—including Henry Doelger, Oliver Rousseau, Ray F. Galli, the Stoneson Brothers, and Standard Building Company—as well as smaller builders and contractors. The boundary was drawn to capture portions of the Middle and Outer Sunset, as well as the Parkside. Approximately 2,800 buildings are located within the survey area, the vast majority of which (96%) are single-family houses constructed during the identified period of significance. The survey area boundary was drawn to capture houses located on both sides of the street. The boundary of the Avenue streets was typically drawn to correspond with the rear yard fence line.

The purpose of the survey was to document individual buildings and clusters of buildings eligible for the local, state, or national historic registers. Importantly, the survey will also document and evaluate buildings that do not qualify as eligible historic resources.



Sunset Residential Tract Survey Area



BACKGROUND

Survey Program

The foundation of a successful preservation program is an understanding of the location, distribution, and significance of historic, cultural, and archeological resources, which can include buildings, sites, structures, objects, districts, or cultural landscapes. This understanding is achieved through the historic and cultural resource survey process. In addition to identifying important individual historic or cultural resources and potential historic districts, a survey can help identify buildings that qualify for local or national preservation incentives and/or inform the development of neighborhood-specific design guidelines to protect neighborhood character.

To facilitate these and other preservation efforts, the Department has established the Comprehensive Citywide Cultural and Historical Resource Survey Program (Survey Program) to manage and conduct historic and cultural resource surveys. The Survey Program provides guidance for the development of neighborhood-specific historic context statements and large-scale surveys, in support of the Department's Area Plans and other local planning efforts. Survey evaluation informs the public, property owners, government officials, and those who do business in San Francisco, making environmental review more transparent.

Historic Context Statements

A Historic Context Statement creates a framework for interpreting history by grouping information around a common theme, geographical area, and time period. Context statements are established evaluative tools for surveying historic and cultural resources in San Francisco, as well as throughout California and the nation. In its instructions for documenting historic and cultural resources, the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) references the National Park Service's context based methodology: "The significance of a historical resource is best understood and judged in relation to historic context. A historic context consists of: a theme, pattern, or research topic; geographical area; and chronological period. The theme, pattern or research topic provides a basis for evaluating the significance of a resource when it is defined in relation to established criteria."

On June 7, 2000, the former San Francisco Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board (Landmarks Board), by Resolution No. 527, adopted the OHP's Instructions for Recording Historical Resources (1995) as the methodology for documenting historic and cultural properties in San Francisco. This resolution specified that context statements prepared in accordance with the OHP recordation manual, and reviewed for accuracy and adequacy by the Landmarks Board (now the Historic Preservation Commission), may be recommended for use in associated property evaluations, and that the Department shall maintain a library of adopted context statements. Towards these ends, several area-based and thematic-based context statements have been developed for use in San Francisco surveys by the Department, the Historic Preservation Commission, and various other public agencies and community organizations.

Recent historic context statements managed or produced by the Department's Survey Program include: San Francisco Modern Architectural and Landscape Design, 1935–1970; Inner Mission North; Mission District—City Within a City; The Golden Age of Schools; Market & Octavia; South of Market; Showplace Square; Japantown; Transit Center; Balboa Park; Central Waterfront; and Automotive Support Structures.

Context statements commissioned by neighborhood organizations tilt toward area-specific, rather than thematic context statements. In-progress and recently completed community-managed context statements include: Mission

Dolores, West Slope of Russian Hill, Oceanview-Merced Heights-Ingleside, Oceanside, Parkside, and Bayview-Hunter's Point.

The content and organization of the context statement is consistent with federal, state, and local guidelines that have been adopted for developing historic contexts. Numerous National Park Service publications were consulted to inform the organization and evaluative frameworks for the context statement, including:

- National Register Bulletin No. 15 "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation"
- Bulletin No. 16B "How to Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form"
- "Historic Residential Suburbs, Guidelines for the Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places"

The OHP developed several guidelines pertaining to the development of historic contexts including "Writing Historic Contexts," "OHP Preferred Format for Historic Context Statements," and "Instructions for Recording Historical Resources." Related San Francisco Planning Department guidelines include: "Suggested Outline for a Fully Developed Context Statement" and "Outline for the San Francisco Context Statement." The Secretary of the Interior's "Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation" also includes guidelines for the development of historic contexts.

REGULATORY BASIS FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Federal Level

In the United States, the concept of preserving a community's architectural past emerged during the decades preceding the Civil War and focused on colonial buildings and other structures connected with important figures in American history. Public concern over the possible loss of historic sites and buildings of importance to the nation's heritage prompted Congress to adopt the Antiquities Act of 1906, offering protection to prehistoric and historic sites located on federal properties. The Historic Sites Act of 1935 established a national policy of preserving historic resources of national significance and created the National Historic Landmark Program. This legislation empowered the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the National Park Service, to use the Historic American Buildings Survey to survey, document, evaluate, acquire, and preserve archaeological and historic sites¹.

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 established a number of programs that deal with historic preservation at the federal and state levels. The National Register of Historic Places, maintained by the Secretary of the Interior, was created as a federal planning tool and contains a list of national, state, and local districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. In addition, the NHPA created the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, an independent federal agency that serves as the primary federal policy advisor to the President and Congress; recommends administrative and legislative improvements for protecting our nation's heritage; advocates full consideration of historic values in federal decision-making; and reviews federal programs and policies to promote effectiveness, coordination, and consistency with national preservation policies. The NHPA also established the review process known as Section 106, in which federal undertakings must be assessed for potential impact on historic resources.²

¹Architectural Resources Group. 2009. Preservation Element (draft). (Commissioned by the San Francisco Planning Department).

² Ibid.

Both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 require consideration of a project's effects on historical, architectural, and archaeological resources as part of the environmental review process. In 1983, the Secretary of the Interior released Preservation Planning Standards and Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties that are used nationwide and under CEQA to guide appropriate preservation strategies.³

State Level

The State of California maintains preservation programs through the OHP within the California Department of Parks and Recreation. This office is administered by the State Historic Preservation Officer and overseen by the State Historical Resources Commission, whose members are appointed by the Governor. The office maintains the California Register of Historical Resources, which lists properties evaluated and/or designated by federal, state and local authorities.⁴

CEQA is the foundation of environmental policy and law in the state of California, and encourages the protection of all aspects of the environment, including historical resources. Under CEQA, state and local governmental agencies must consider the impact of proposed projects on historic resources.⁵

Local Level

At the local level, there are numerous studies, mandates and guidelines pertaining to the identification, evaluation, and preservation of historic and cultural resources in San Francisco. San Francisco's commitment to retaining its historic fabric is codified in Section 101.1 of the Planning Code, which sets forth eight Priority Policies, including Policy 7, which states that "landmarks and historic buildings be preserved."

The Department's 1966 study "The Preservation of Landmarks in San Francisco" outlined goals for City legislation to protect architectural and historic resources. In 1967, the Board of Supervisors adopted a landmarks ordinance, Article 10 of the Planning Code, which established the Landmarks Board.⁶ In 1985 the Downtown Plan was adopted as part of the General Plan, and Article 11 of the Planning Code created five categories of notable buildings and implemented the preservation policies created for that Plan. Finally, the General Plan's introduction incorporated a 1986 voter-approved initiative, known as Proposition M, which added Section 101.1 to the Planning Code.

In 1995, San Francisco became a Certified Local Government (CLG) under the provisions of the NHPA. CLGs must comply with five basic requirements:

- Enforce appropriate state and local laws and regulations for the designation and protection of historic properties
- Establish a historic preservation review commission by local ordinance
- Maintain a system for the survey and inventory of historic properties
- Provide for public participation in the local preservation program
- Satisfactorily perform responsibilities delegated to it by the state

In 2008, voters approved a charter amendment to replace the Landmarks Board with a newly created Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) that has expanded powers over historic resources in San Francisco. In June 2012, Articles 10 and 11 of the Planning Code were amended to reflect the duties and powers of the HPC. The HPC makes

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Historic Preservation Commission replaced the Landmarks Board in 2009.

recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on designations of Article 10 landmarks and landmark districts. The HPC may also review and comment on projects affecting historic resources that are subject to environmental review under the CEQA, and/or projects subject to review under Section 106 of the NHPA. The HPC also approves Certificates of Appropriateness for alterations of Landmarks and properties located within Article 10 Landmark Districts. The context statement will be brought to the HPC for adoption.

Article 10 of the San Francisco Planning Code provides for official designation of landmarks, landmark districts, and structures of merit that have “a special character or special historical, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.” In addition to properties officially designated under Article 10, the City and County of San Francisco also recognizes those properties identified as eligible resources in adopted informational historic and cultural surveys. Properties lacking official designation at the local, state, or federal levels, and also lacking documentation in an adopted informational survey, may still be considered potential resources pursuant to San Francisco Preservation Bulletin No. 16, “City and County of San Francisco Planning Department CEQA Review Procedures for Historic Resources.”

Article 11 of the Planning Code was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1985 and governs approximately 430 downtown buildings. These buildings include those that are designated Category I through IV (Significant and/or Contributory), or Category V buildings located within a Conservation District.

Residential Design Guidelines

First adopted in 1989 and revised in 2004, the Department’s Residential Design Guidelines (Guidelines) articulate expectations regarding the character of the built environment in residential zoning districts and are intended to promote design that will protect neighborhood character, enhancing the attractiveness and quality of life in the City. The Guidelines address basic principles of urban design that will result in residential development that maintains cohesive neighborhood identity, preserves historic resources, and enhances the unique setting and character of the City and its residential neighborhoods. The Guidelines apply to the design of new buildings and the alterations of existing residential buildings, regardless of historic status. Application of the Guidelines is a mandatory step in the permit review process and all residential permit applications must comply with both the Planning Code and the Guidelines.

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

At present, there is very little historical documentation or scholarly research focused on San Francisco’s tract houses constructed citywide from 1925 to 1950. The context statement will provide the necessary historic context to identify, document and evaluate this Sunset District property type. However, its utility extends beyond this particular survey effort and geographic area. It can also be used to assist in the evaluation of builder tract houses constructed citywide from 1925 to 1950.

Objectives of the context statement:

1. Identify and document the themes and building typologies associated with Sunset District builders (1925–1950);
2. Identify character-defining features of the common architectural styles of Sunset District tract houses (1925–1950);
3. Provide a tailored framework for the identification and evaluation of Sunset District tract houses (1925–1950), including significance and integrity thresholds;
4. Provide examples to guide the evaluation of residential tract houses constructed citywide in San Francisco (1925–1950);
5. Provide recommendations for future efforts to aid in the identification, rehabilitation, and recognition of significant historic resources.

Chapter 2

Historic Context Methodology

Development of the context statement relied upon a range of primary and secondary sources, field visits, GIS mapping, and synthesis of previously prepared neighborhood-based historic context statements. This section briefly describes the archival sources, historic context statements, and other environmental review documents consulted in the preparation of the context statement.

HISTORIC AND ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Archives and Repositories	San Francisco Public Library History Center, San Francisco Planning Department archives, San Francisco Public Library Historic Photograph Collection, David Rumsey Historic Map Collection, San Francisco Assessor and Recorder’s Office, Prelinger Archives, Internet Archive (www.archives.org), San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority (SFMTA) digital photograph collection, www.OpenLibrary.org
Primary Sources	<p>Municipal Sources: Property deeds, sales ledgers, original building permit applications and architectural plans, 1976 Department of City Planning Architectural Survey field forms</p> <p>Photograph Collections: San Francisco aerial photography (1937-1938, 1940), San Francisco Public Library Digital Photograph Collection</p> <p>Maps: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (1950), Works Progress Administration Land Use Maps (1948–1960), Assessor’s Block Book Maps (1937)</p> <p>Periodicals: <i>Pacific Constructor</i>, <i>Building & Engineering News</i>, <i>Architect & Engineer</i>, weekend Real Estate sections of the <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> and <i>San Francisco Examiner</i>, San Francisco City Directories 1925–1950, and House Plan Catalogs (1920s-1950s)</p>

SURVEYS, EVALUATIONS & CONTEXT STATEMENTS

Several past surveys, context statements, and evaluations related to the Sunset District and residential tract architecture were consulted, including:

Department of City Planning 1976 Architectural Survey

Approximately 10,000 buildings were identified and ranked in the Architectural Survey conducted by the Department of City Planning from 1974 to 1976. This survey focused solely on architecture and did not identify or evaluate a property’s cultural or historic associations. Buildings included in this survey were considered at that time to be among the top 10% of architecturally significant buildings in San Francisco. Field survey forms for each individual property are located in a 61-volume set at the San Francisco Planning Department preservation library. Surveyed buildings were concentrated in the central and northern neighborhoods and included residential, industrial, commercial, religious, and institutional property types.

Fifty-three of the 1976 Architectural Survey properties—fewer than 1%—were constructed in the Sunset District from 1925 to 1950. Of these, nearly all were designed in the early 1930s by master architect/builder Oliver Rousseau in a range of Period Revival styles. In the Sunset District, just a handful of the 1976 survey properties were designed in Streamline Moderne or Art Deco inspired styles.

Property Evaluations

As part of its CEQA environmental review process, the Department requires research-based documentation and evaluation of certain historic properties in the form of Historic Resource Evaluations (HRE). A handful of completed HREs were consulted as they relate to Sunset District residential tract buildings.

Context Statements

Existing neighborhood-based context statements were consulted during preparation of the context statement. In particular, the “San Francisco’s Parkside District: 1905–1957, Historic Context Statement”; “San Francisco’s Ocean View, Merced Heights, and Ingleside (OMI) Neighborhoods, 1862–1959”; and “Historic Context Statement of the Oceanside” provided essential documentation of the early historical development of the wider Sunset neighborhood. Portions of these documents are included in the Sunset historical development section of this document. The “San Francisco Modern Architecture and Landscape Design Historic Context Statement, 1935–1970” also provided relevant information regarding the adaptation of Modern styles to residential builder tracts.

Several existing national, state, and regional historic contexts were consulted in the preparation of this context statement including “Historic Streetcar Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places”; “Historic Residential Suburbs of Metropolitan Denver, 1940–1965”; and Caltrans’ “Tract Housing in California, 1945–1973: A Context for National Register Evaluation.”

Designated Resources

Article 10 Landmarks

The City and County of San Francisco maintains a list of locally designated City Landmarks and Historic Districts, similar to the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) but at the local level. Landmarks can be buildings, sites, or landscape features. The regulations governing landmarks, as well as the list of individual landmarks and descriptions of each landmark district, are found in Article 10 of the Planning Code. Landmark status provides the greatest level of protection for historic resources in San Francisco. To date, Sunset District tract houses are not represented in the City’s 264 designated Article 10 landmarks or 11 landmark districts.

National Register

The National Register of Historic Places is a list of buildings and sites of local, state, or national importance. This program is administered by the National Park Service through the OHP. A handful of Sunset District residential buildings are listed in the National Register; none of these were constructed during the identified builder tract period of significance.

California Register

The California Register of Historical Places is a list of the State’s historical and archeological resources. It also includes all locally designated properties and all properties listed in the National Register. No Sunset District tract house constructed from 1925 to 1950 is listed in the California Register.

Research

Under Department staff supervision, interns, and teams of San Francisco State University students reviewed building permits and San Francisco Assessor's Office records and canvassed the microfilmed weekend real estate sections of the *San Francisco Chronicle* for related articles and advertisements. Using this information, interns created a Google Map that linked research data to specific parcels, blocks, and geographic locations. Property information (such as builder, owner, and architect) was also added to the project's master survey catalog spreadsheet. The San Francisco Public Library's historic photograph collection was consulted to compare historic building ornamentation, window muntin patterns, and garage openings and doors.

The builder biographies were compiled using data from the biographical clippings files at the San Francisco Public Library History room, original deeds and covenants from the San Francisco Assessor's Office, newspaper articles, city directories, and information provided by the Western Neighborhood Project's website, www.outsidelands.org. The genealogical website www.ancestry.com was consulted for U.S. Census data, World War I draft registration cards, and California death notices.

Department staff reviewed guidebooks, scholarly articles, and websites, and attended lectures and related walking tours. Several books proved particularly useful, including Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Marc Weiss' *The Rise of the Community Builders*, and Carolyn Loeb's *Entrepreneurial Vernacular: Developers' Subdivisions in the 1920s*. Ken Zinns' 1983 Master's thesis, *The Tradition Continued: The Sunset District Rowhouse of San Francisco, 1920–1945*, and Lorri Ungaretti's 2012 book, *Stories in the Sand: San Francisco's Sunset District, 1847–1964*, proved essential to understanding the neighborhood's development history.

Publications that assisted with the classification of architectural styles include *The Guide to Architecture in San Francisco and Northern California* by Gebhard, Winter, and Sandweiss; *California's Architectural Frontiers* by Harold Kirker; *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia & Lee McAlester; *The Abrams Guide to American House Styles* by William Morgan; *Storybook Style: America's Whimsical Homes of the Twenties* by Arrol Gellner; and various house plan catalogs from the 1920s to the 1940s accessed from Internet Archives.

Field Visits

Regular site visits were undertaken during the survey's scoping and boundary justification phase. Representative buildings were photographed in order to facilitate building permit research and to aid in the development of the context statement. Clusters of potentially eligible districts were noted for research and follow-up by Department staff and teams of San Francisco State University Urban Studies undergraduate students.

Public Participation

The Department created a project website <http://sunset.survey.sfplanning.gov> to provide an overview of the context statement and historic resource survey, to provide draft materials for public review, and to solicit volunteers and neighborhood histories. In addition, the Department mailed a survey notification postcard to property owners located within the Sunset survey area.

Outreach events and activities included an "Ask A Planner" event, where interested property owners could engage with Department planners regarding neighborhood history, the survey process, and implications and benefits of inclusion in a historic resource survey. In November 2012, the Department hosted a Sunset History Walking Tour to share research and documentation with interested residents and property owners regarding the neighborhood's unique historical development, influential builders, and common architectural styles. Numerous property owners

provided the Department with stories, building and neighborhood histories, and photographs of unique architectural features.

The Department's bimonthly Director's Report, which is transmitted to various city commissions, agencies, community groups, and media outlets, featured an August 2012 announcement regarding the context statement and survey. In addition, the Department briefed District 4 Supervisor Carmen Chu's office regarding development of the historic context statement and survey and provided related announcements for the supervisor's monthly email newsletter.

A team of experts well-versed in the history of the Sunset District and/or large-scale historic resource survey efforts helped shape and review the context statement. The Survey Advisors Group team includes Robert Cherny, Professor of History at San Francisco State University; Courtney Damkroger, member of the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission; Woody LaBounty, author and co-founder of the Western Neighborhoods Project; and Mike Buhler, Executive Director of San Francisco Architectural Heritage.

Chapter 3

Historical Development: San Francisco & Sunset District

San Francisco Overview

The character of San Francisco's built environment has been influenced over time by various factors, including significant historical events, cultural movements, technological advances, notable individuals and groups, and changing trends in urban design and architecture. Underlying all of these factors is the City's dramatic natural topography. The City is confined to roughly 49 square miles at the tip of a peninsula where the San Francisco Bay to the east drains through the northerly Golden Gate into the Pacific Ocean to the west. The terrain is distinguished by the famed hills of San Francisco, which offer myriad views of Ocean, Bay, and City skyline, as well as by broad valley floors that historically received the earliest and densest settlements and that contain many of the City's oldest neighborhoods.

The cultural landscape that has emerged in San Francisco within the past two centuries has resulted from purposeful alterations of the natural physical landscape by successive waves of settlement and development. Coves and tidal marshes along the Bay were filled; hills and dunes leveled; and inland streams and lakes were diverted, drained, and reclaimed. It is no accident that San Francisco is located at an important natural harbor, as maritime commerce played a vital role in the development of San Francisco. However, the vitality of the port was ultimately offset by the City's relative geographic isolation by land. Until the construction of the iconic sister bridges in the 1930s, the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge, the only direct ground approach to the City was from the south, while access to San Francisco from points north and east was achieved only by boat.

Phases of Development

Native American, Spanish, and Mexican Periods, ca. 5,000 years ago to 1848⁷

The earliest known inhabitants of the San Francisco Peninsula were indigenous Native Americans. Archeological remains of the settlements of indigenous peoples in San Francisco date to at least 5,000 years ago. The indigenous groups that most recently inhabited the Peninsula were Ohlone tribes of the Costanoan linguistic family who led riparian-based lifestyles along the shores of the Bay. At the time of European contact in the late 18th century, an Ohlone tribelet called the Yeluma lived in seasonal villages that dotted the eastern portion of the San Francisco Peninsula. Seasonal villages consisted of impermanent, lightly framed structures covered with willows and tule reeds. While none of the structures of indigenous peoples remains extant, numerous archeological sites in San Francisco, including shell mounds and burials, provide insight into the earliest settlements.

Non-native explorers, settlers, and colonists began to arrive on the San Francisco Peninsula in the late 18th century. The government of Spain established a military outpost, or presidio, at the northern tip of the peninsula near the mouth of the Golden Gate in 1776. Concurrently, Catholic missionaries of the Franciscan order established the sixth, and then-northernmost, mission in a chain that would eventually number 21 missions along the California coast. The permanent chapel of the Misión San Francisco de Asís was completed in 1791 near present-day 16th and Dolores Streets. Commonly called Mission Dolores, the chapel is the last of the mission compound buildings to remain standing and is the oldest extant building in San Francisco.

When Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, the territory that included present-day California became a possession of the Mexican government, which secularized the missions and conferred vast rancho tracts across the entire San Francisco peninsula and beyond. The Spanish and, later, Mexican settlements utilized primarily adobe

⁷ Information related to historical development citywide is excerpted from the Department's draft Preservation Element (2009).

construction, reflecting the scarcity of native wood for building. Adobe construction was largely vernacular, with architectural flourishes reserved for edifices such as the Mission Dolores chapel. Another change brought by Mexican governance was international trade, which had not been permitted by Spain. By 1835, a small civilian commercial port settlement, the Pueblo of Yerba Buena, was established in the area of California and Montgomery Streets, initially supported by the export of California hides and tallow and the import of goods from the eastern United States and Europe.

Enduring development patterns were established in Yerba Buena. In 1839, the pueblo's first survey platted the area around Portsmouth Square in what became known as the 50 Vara Survey. The survey established a rectangular grid of blocks aligned to the cardinal directions. In 1847, Market Street was laid out on a diagonal to the earlier street grid, running from the center of the shoreline of Yerba Buena Cove (approximately at the intersection of present-day Battery and Market Streets) toward Mission Dolores and Twin Peaks, with much of its route along an old path to the mission. Soon thereafter, the 100 Vara Survey platted the area south of Market Street on a street grid aligned diagonally with Market, and with quadruple-sized lots, in conflict with the 50 Vara grid to the north. This unconventional mismatch of surveys, platted at the birth of the City, is apparent today in the enduring street-and-block patterns north and south of Market Street.

Sunset District

There were no known Native American settlements in what is now the Sunset District and the area is not identified as likely to yield archeological information according to the Department's data on archeologically sensitive areas. Authors Richard Brandi and Woody LaBounty describe the Spanish and Mexican era in the Sunset District in their historic context statement focused on the Parkside neighborhood:

...the entire Sunset area of San Francisco, was largely ignored by the Spanish and Mexicans. There is no mention of the Spanish using the area for grazing cattle or growing crops, although one source says cattle from the Presidio grazed at Lake Merced in 1798. The Parkside and Sunset areas were not part of the several "ranchos" or Mexican land grants awarded to Mexican citizens during the 1830s and 1840s. Instead, the Parkside and Sunset areas were called "pueblo" lands on early maps, referring to lands under the jurisdiction of the pueblo or town, as distinct from lands controlled by the Spanish missions or military.⁸

Nineteenth Century American Period, 1848–1906⁹

In 1846, the U.S. Navy took over Yerba Buena without conflict during the Mexican-American War and raised the American flag at Portsmouth Square. The following year, the U.S. changed the name of the settlement from Yerba Buena to San Francisco, and by 1848 the population had reached about 400, including traders from the eastern U.S. and Europe. The settlement changed dramatically, however, with the discovery of gold on the American River in the Sierra Nevada foothills that same year. San Francisco, already the primary port on the West Coast, was also the closest harbor to the strike, and by 1849 the city was growing exponentially as fortune-seeking men flooded in, primarily by sea, bound for gold country. Many of the newcomers remained in, or returned to, San Francisco, which transformed from a quiet harbor into an instant city teeming with a diverse, international population. By 1852 the population stood at approximately 35,000, and the character of the place had entirely changed from four years before.

As the Gold Rush gave way to more normal patterns of growth and development, the instant city that had sprung up from tents, shacks, and cabins began a long and fitful transition into a permanent city of repute. With an increasing population, which also became more diversified with respect to ancestry, gender, age, and household type, came new

⁸ Richard Brandi and Woody LaBounty. *San Francisco's Parkside District 1905-1957, Historic Context Statement*, March 2008, 9.

⁹ Information related to historical development citywide is excerpted from the Department's draft Preservation Element (2009).

construction to support housing, commerce, and industry. The City boundary line was sequentially expanded southward and westward, ultimately reaching its current location (and merger with the County line) in 1856 through the Van Ness Consolidation Act. Nonetheless, most of the City's commercial development remained concentrated near the port, the natural location of trade in goods and services. Related industrial activities were located near the port as well, primarily in the South of Market area, with rail spurs providing connections to move materials and goods to and from warehouses and manufacturing plants. Locations for housing were generally linked to early transportation corridors, some of which perpetuated the courses of the trails that had connected the three earliest Spanish-Mexican settlements (mission, presidio, and pueblo). In the 1850s and 1860s, expansion of residential neighborhoods was limited by sparse transportation, by the young municipality's reluctance to provide costly services to outlying areas, and by Mexican landowners defending legal claims to their ranchos. However, these issues were resolved and by the 1870s, residential streetcar suburbs had begun westerly and southerly marches that would continue through the turn of the century, notably in the large Western Addition and Mission Districts. Citywide, building booms and busts were closely linked to regional economic events, including the discovery of the Comstock Silver Lode in 1859, and the economic depressions of the 1870s and 1890s.

Advances in transportation technologies and expansions in service, from the 1860s to 1890s, were key influences in the settlement of the City. On a macro scale, completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 facilitated the importation of people (laborers and consumers), trade, and building materials such as brick and stone. Locally, mass transit provided a means for people without independent transportation to live further from the commercial and industrial core, beyond a feasible walking distance. Mass transit vehicles were rudimentary at first, appearing in the form of horse-drawn cars on tracks in the late 1850s and early 1860s. A significant innovation occurred with Andrew Hallidie's invention of the cable car in 1873, providing the means to conquer San Francisco's hills and thereby making steeper slopes available to residential development. Electrification of the lines began gradually in the 1890s and accelerated after the turn of the century. By the late 19th century, cable car lines and electric streetcar lines ran on most major streets of San Francisco, extending earlier housing patterns further westward and southward. The closure and removal of cemeteries from the City, beginning around the turn of the century, except for the tiny graveyard at Mission Dolores, also opened up large tracts of land for residential development and a few public parks, primarily in the Inner Richmond and Laurel Heights neighborhoods.

Amidst the rapid growth of early San Francisco, founders recognized the urban population's needs for parks and recreation spaces. By the end of the 19th century, these concerns had resulted in the establishment of various public squares, neighborhood parks, and natural areas in eastern San Francisco, often at the tops of hills. The City's western half, as described below, remained largely untouched by development.

Sunset District

In the mid-1850s, much of the western half of what is now known as San Francisco was officially named the "Outside Lands," a vast area of sand dunes that was outside of the City's boundaries. The Outside Lands contained what is now Golden Gate Park and the neighborhoods adjacent to the park: the Sunset District (to the south) and Richmond District (to the north). A large portion of the Sunset District was labeled "Seal Rock Rancho" on an 1861 map.¹⁰ By the close of the 19th century, little residential development had occurred in the outlying western districts, though the newly developed Golden Gate Park, site of the 1894 California Midwinter Fair, became an enormously popular attraction.

Brandi and LaBounty detail the complex land development, court rulings, and street platting that surrounded San Francisco's early (pre-1900) expansion into the "Outside Lands":

¹⁰ Map of City and County of San Francisco, V. Wackenrueder, 1861. Published by Henry O. Langley. The area is likely named after a prominent rock near what is now the Cliff House.

Ownership of these former Spanish/Mexican pueblo lands was disputed between the City of San Francisco and the federal government until May 1865, when the U.S. Circuit Court ruled in San Francisco's favor. During the years of litigation, "settlers" had moved onto the land hoping they would be granted free homesteads if the federal government won the case. After the court ruled for San Francisco, a few influential squatters induced Congress to pass a bill effectively reversing the court's decision. This law, passed in March 1866, directed that Outside Lands property be conveyed to parties in actual possession of the land (i.e., the squatters), excepting parcels needed for federal or municipal purposes. This appeared to be a godsend for the squatters and a blow to the city, which received much of its revenue from selling lots. Mayor Frank McCoppin orchestrated a complex deal with the squatters. He offered clear title without further delay if the squatters donated 10% of their land and paid a tax to create several parks. This arrangement, approved in 1869, set aside the land for Golden Gate Park and several neighborhood parks ... During the course of the negotiations, the City commissioned George C. Potter and William T. Humphrey to plat the former Outside Lands, a project that was completed on May 18, 1868. They mapped the Richmond and Sunset Districts in the now familiar rectilinear grid pattern of blocks and streets. The platted streets existed only on paper for decades, and some were not graded and/or paved until the 1940s. In the meantime, many lots were bought and sold to hundreds of individuals with a few investors holding large sections. These purchases were speculative, since lack of transportation kept most of the land uninhabited and undeveloped for decades.¹¹

Early settlements and uses of the Sunset District were of the type that thrived in far-flung, unpopulated areas: roadhouses, a racetrack, explosives factories, and, in the few fertile areas, vegetable farming and chicken ranching. At the beach, abandoned streetcars and horse-cars were converted into clubhouses and rudimentary dwellings by an emergent bohemian beachside community. Originally named "Carville" this area grew to include small-scale beach cottages and evolved into a permanent neighborhood, known as Oceanside.¹² Located close to the beach and Golden Gate Park—and served by the Park & Ocean Railroad¹³—this beachside community was referred to as Oceanside until about 1920, when it was absorbed into the growing residential tract developments of the larger Sunset District.

In addition to the Oceanside community, the Sunset District sported several distinct neighborhoods that preceded the residential development boom of the mid-1920s. The Parkside neighborhood, roughly bounded by 15th Avenue on the east, 33rd Avenue on the west, Ortega Street on the north and Sloat Boulevard on the south, was developed by the Parkside Realty Company beginning in 1908. Served by a spur streetcar line that cut a jagged path, the Parkside was characterized primarily by small (800 square feet) cottages, constructed by the Parkside Realty Company, which were clad in wood or shingled siding and inspired by Craftsman, Colonial, Dutch Colonial, or Spanish styles.¹⁴ Other builders constructed woodsy, Craftsman-inspired houses in this isolated neighborhood. The Inner Sunset also saw scattered early residential and commercial development, concentrated just south of the eastern end of Golden Gate Park.

Early 20th Century, 1906–1925¹⁵

On April 18, 1906, a massive earthquake struck San Francisco, one of the most significant events in the City's history. Although the quake itself did relatively little damage to San Francisco structures not located on filled land, the many ruptured gas lines, overturned furnaces, and toppled brick chimneys soon produced scores of fires that quickly spread unchecked throughout the City, while damaged water mains made firefighting extraordinarily difficult. The downtown and industrial districts were consumed entirely before the intense fires turned on the City's residential

¹¹ Brandi and LaBounty, *San Francisco's Parkside Neighborhood*, 10-11.

¹² William Kostura, et. al., 2010. *Historic Context Statement of the Oceanside: A Neighborhood of the Sunset District of San Francisco*.

¹³ Originally a steam train which traveled on Lincoln Way from Stanyan Street to the beach, this line was converted to electric streetcar in 1898 (Source: Brandi and LaBounty, *San Francisco's Parkside Neighborhood, Historic Context Statement*, 2010, 17).

¹⁴ Brandi and LaBounty, *San Francisco's Parkside Neighborhood*, 26.

¹⁵ Information related to historical development citywide is excerpted from the Department's draft Preservation Element (2009).

neighborhoods, most of which were constructed of wood that served to kindle the great inferno. For three days the fires blazed, and some 28,000 buildings were destroyed, including almost every structure east of Van Ness Avenue and Dolores Street, and north of 20th and Townsend Streets, an area that includes today's Financial District, North Beach, Russian Hill, South of Market, and the northern Mission District. Some pockets within the fire line escaped destruction, including portions of Telegraph Hill. An estimated 3,000 or more people perished in the conflagration, and approximately 250,000 people—more than half of the entire 1906 population of San Francisco—were left homeless by the disaster.

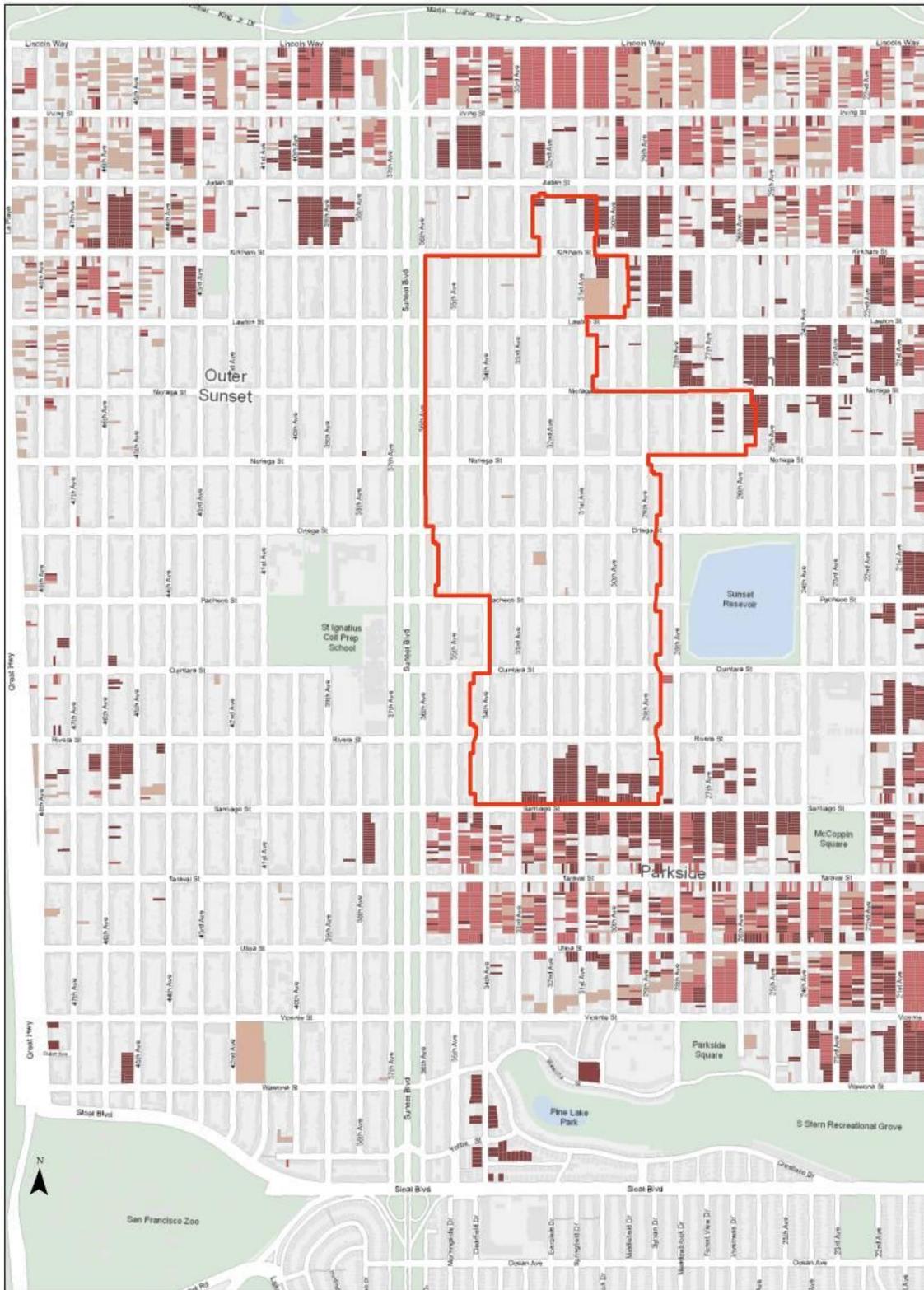
The rebuilding and recovery of San Francisco from the 1906 disaster earned it the moniker of "The City That Knows How." The City's reconstruction, despite occurring without central planning or leadership, resulted in modernization of the financial and industrial bases, densification and expansion of residential neighborhoods, wholesale social and economic reorganization of the City, and ultimately a new San Francisco. The sheer scope and magnitude of the physical rebuilding effort, which involved more than 500 city blocks and four-fifths of the City that had been destroyed, was astounding. Just as extraordinary was the pace of the rebuilding, as entire burnt districts were rebuilt just a few years after the disaster and the destroyed areas were nearly completely built out within a decade. The City, along with the world, symbolically celebrated the recovery of San Francisco when it hosted the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915, which also the year that the rebuilt City Hall was completed.

Rebuilding of the City began within months of the 1906 disaster. The early focus of reconstruction was the downtown commercial district, which was entirely rebuilt and modernized within three years. The immense South of Market district, which was previously a mix of working-class residences and industry prior to the disaster, was rebuilt as primarily industrial and large-scale commercial. Higher density housing was constructed in rebuilt and surviving residential neighborhoods, which experienced a dramatic increase in population. Higher-income housing moved westward, while lower-income housing was pushed farther south. In order to accommodate the urgent citywide housing needs, multi-unit flats were increasingly constructed in rebuilt residential neighborhoods. Although many of the outlying residential neighborhoods were permitted to rebuild with wood, post-disaster fire codes enacted in the downtown and South of Market districts resulted in widespread fire-resistant construction in brick and concrete.

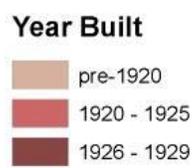
The citywide building boom that began after the 1906 disaster continued nearly unabated until World War I. A nationwide economic boom during the 1920s correlated with another building boom in San Francisco and the enactment of the City's first Planning Code in 1921, which mandated the geographic separation of incompatible land uses. The opening of streetcar tunnels in 1918 and 1928, as well as the adoption of mass automobile use beginning in the 1920s, spurred residential development in outlying areas of the City. Consequently, vast areas of the Sunset and Richmond Districts in western San Francisco, and the Excelsior District in southern San Francisco, were built out from the 1920s through the 1940s with tract housing, primarily single-family dwellings with integral garages. This period correlated with the mass adoption of automobiles, enabling development in farther-out areas not yet served by public transportation.

Sunset District

The early 20th century witnessed increased residential development in the Sunset District, though development was largely limited to in-fill within the existing Oceanside and Parkside neighborhoods. The Inner Sunset, located to the east, adjacent to Golden Gate Park, also experienced continued residential and commercial development. A new neighborhood, Parkway Terrace, was laid out by prolific Victorian-era builder Fernando Nelson & Sons in 1916. Located adjacent to Golden Gate Park, between 27th and 32nd Avenues and from Lincoln Way to Irving Street, the five-block Parkway Terrace residential tract is notable for the rounded, built-in corner benches at intersections and the many large, detached houses designed in fully expressed Period Revival styles set on oversize lots with deep front yard setbacks.



Sunset District Development
1920s



Chapter 4

Sunset District Development Influences (1925–1950)

A variety of factors influenced the type, location, and building form of residential tract development in the Sunset District from 1925 to 1950. This chapter documents these key factors including geography, terrain, construction of the Sunset and Twin Peaks streetcar tunnels, the mass adoption of automobiles, the near collapse of the construction industry during the Great Depression, changes in the mortgage industry and the resultant rise in home ownership, World War II, and the massive postwar population boom.

Terrain

The Sunset District's shifting sand dunes and distance from downtown helped stave off large-scale development until the mid-1920s. The area was largely covered with sand dunes, grasses, herbaceous species, and scrub brush. Several creeks blocked by the dunes formed ponds and tidal lagoons, the largest of which were located to the southwest (Lake Merced) and southeast (Pine Lake in Stern Grove).¹⁶ The sand dunes persisted into the 20th century, even as scattered residential clusters developed near the ocean, in the Parkside, and near the eastern end of Golden Gate Park. Maps labeled the Sunset District as the "Great Sand Waste" and many areas were described as "unfit for cultivation."¹⁷ Even as late as 1937, the year of a citywide aerial photography survey, vast portions of the Sunset District, particularly the areas adjacent to Sunset Boulevard, remained undeveloped sand dunes.

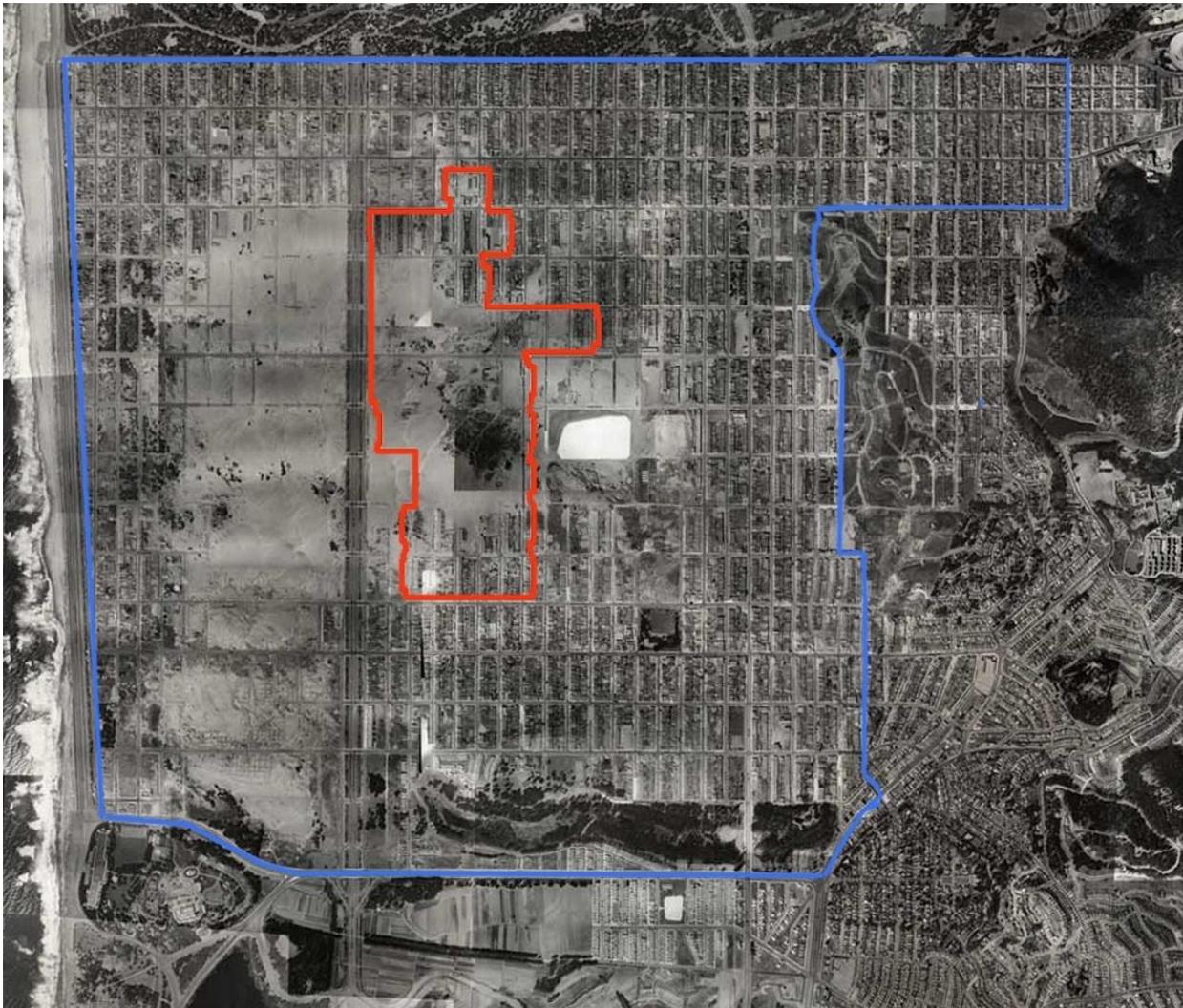


Left: A large western portion of the Sunset District was still undeveloped into the 1940s. View from 33rd Avenue at Pacheco Street, looking southwest, November 1943.

Source: SF Dept. of Public Works, via www.outsidelands.org

¹⁶ Brandi and LaBounty, *San Francisco's Parkside Neighborhood*, 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.



Composite image of aerial views taken 1937-1938. The Sunset District neighborhood is outlined in blue and the smaller Sunset survey area in red. Source: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

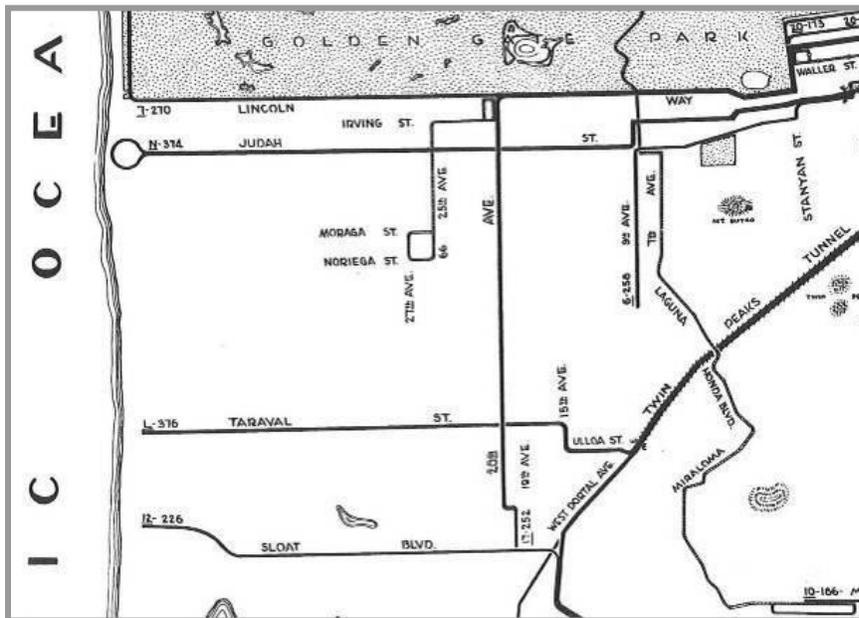
Streetcars & Tunnels

New streetcar lines and two streetcar tunnels connecting the Sunset District to downtown increased the area's accessibility and helped facilitate the 1920s to 1940s building booms. The Twin Peaks Tunnel, completed in 1918, linked the largely vacant sand dunes of the southern Sunset District with the City center. Designed solely for streetcars, the tunnel portals were located at the intersection of Market and Castro Streets (east portal) and the intersection of West Portal Avenue and 14th Avenue (west portal). It was the first tunnel leading to what was formerly known as the Outside Lands and stimulated growth, albeit slowly, in the area immediately surrounding the tunnel's west portal. In particular, the restricted neighborhood of St. Francis Wood, developed by Mason-McDuffie as a City Beautiful-inspired residential park, benefited from the tunnel opening. This discrete neighborhood on the edge of the Sunset District featured curvilinear streets, large architect-designed houses set on gracious lots, alleyways, and detached garages. Houses were commonly designed in extravagant interpretations of period revival styles including Spanish Colonial, Mediterranean, and Tudor. It is likely that builders in the Sunset District were influenced by the design elements found in St. Francis Wood and incorporated ornamental details into their far more modest dwellings intended for the middle-class.

A second tunnel, the Sunset Tunnel, had a more direct and immediate impact on development of the Sunset District. Completed in 1928, this tunnel featured a portal at Duboce Park (to the east) and a western portal in Cole Valley. This 1.25-mile streetcar tunnel provided quick and direct access from the northern end of the Sunset District to downtown and the City center.

Beginning in 1908, a growing number of streetcar lines served the Sunset District, including:

- **20th Avenue line**, which provided north-south access to the Sunset District, running from 20th Avenue at Golden Gate Park south to 19th Avenue at Wawona Street. This streetcar line operated from 1908 to 1945. Beginning in 1916, the route continued west along Sloat Blvd. to the beach on Sundays.¹⁸
- **Sloat Boulevard line**, which provided service from downtown to the beach. This streetcar line operated from 1909 to 1945, running on Sloat Boulevard on the southern edge of the Sunset District.
- **Taraval Street line**, which provided east-west service through the Sunset District, including the neighborhood's southernmost commercial corridor on Taraval Street, beginning in 1918. The L-Taraval connected downtown with the Sunset District via the Twin Peaks Tunnel. Service was extended from the original terminus of 20th Avenue to the beach in 1923.
- **Judah Street line**, which in 1928 provided a direct connection from downtown to the beach via the Sunset Tunnel. This still-operating streetcar line traveled east-west through the Sunset District along the neighborhood's northernmost commercial corridor.
- **25th Avenue line**, an early motorbus line which provided north-south access from Golden Gate Park to Noriega Street.



Detail from 1937 map of street car and motor bus lines.

Source: Miller McClintock, San Francisco City-Wide Traffic Survey, 1937.

¹⁸ Ibid., 35.

Automobility, Garages, and Streets

The initial wave of 1920s tract houses in the Sunset District corresponded with the mass adoption of automobiles citywide. In 1920, there were 47,969 passenger automobiles registered in San Francisco; a decade later that number had more than tripled to 146,182.¹⁹ Part of this increase was due to the significant reduction in the price of automobiles, opening up the market to the working- and middle-class. In 1910, for example, the price of a Model-T was \$950, equivalent to 22 months of average labor, but by 1924, the price had dropped to just \$290, equivalent to less than three months of average labor.²⁰

Many of these early automobiles were open-top and the majority were not watertight, necessitating indoor storage. In order to provide garage space while maximizing the number of houses per block, Sunset District builders opted to incorporate automobile storage into the house design. With few exceptions, Sunset District tract houses from the 1920s to 1950s featured automobile garages integrated into the house, which typically resulted in living spaces located above the ground-story garage. This early merging of automobile and living spaces was unusual for the time and resulted in a uniquely San Franciscan landscape of semi-attached single-family houses with prominent ground-story garages. Although several other communities in the Bay Area—notably Berkeley and Oakland—contain tracts of 1920s to 1930s houses, most feature larger lots with detached garages. There are no known examples outside of San Francisco (and later, Daly City) of the one-story-over garage format that characterizes the Sunset District.²¹



Left: Recently constructed Sunset District tract houses, 1926.

Source: San Francisco Public Library, Historical Photograph Collection

Much of the Sunset District was inaccessible by automobile into the 1920s. A 1926 United States Coast Survey map shows just a single north–south road (34th Avenue) traveling through the sand dunes of the central Sunset District.²² The nearest parallel through roads were 21st Avenue (to the east) and 45th Avenue (to the west). The map shows no east–west through roads in the eight-block area between Kirkham and Santiago Streets. By 1931, Sunset Boulevard, a block-wide boulevard with landscaped strips flanking an oversize roadway, was completed, thereby opening up a nearly mile-long north–south automobile thoroughfare through the central Sunset District. The wide, multi-lane thoroughfare presaged the importance of future automobile travel in the neighborhood, though the immediately adjacent blocks weren't typically developed until the late 1930s and into the 1940s.

Great Depression

The stock market crash of October 1929 and onset of the Great Depression resulted in mass unemployment and the near-collapse of the home-building industry in San Francisco and nationwide. Between 1928 and 1933 new residential construction and expenses related to home repairs fell by 95% nationwide.²³ In 1934, it was estimated that one third of

¹⁹ McClintock, 1937.

²⁰ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985), 187.

²¹ It is possible that such examples do exist, but it is highly unlikely that they were constructed prior to the adoption of this house form and massing in the Sunset District.

²² United States Coast Survey map, 1926.

²³ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

the unemployed nationwide were identified “directly or indirectly” with the building trades.²⁴ The crash led to an immediate halt to the 1920s building boom in the Sunset District and signaled an end to the neighborhood’s signature Mediterranean Revival barrel front house, the style and form of which was rarely replicated after construction activity resumed in the mid-1930s. Although most residential construction ceased immediately after the crash, several clusters of residential tracts with wildly expressive “old world” architectural styles were constructed in the Sunset District in 1931 to 1933. Federal programs and policies to spur employment and stimulate building activity—which facilitated mass housing construction and increased home ownership in the Sunset District—are outlined below.

HOLC, FHA Loans, GI Bill, and Rise in Home Ownership

Beginning in the 1930s, the federal government played a direct role in dramatically increasing the construction and consumption of single-family housing for the middle-class. This involvement resulted in the adoption of mass production techniques in the construction industry and a dramatic increase in homeownership—from 44% of American families in 1934 to 63% in 1972.²⁵ The federal government’s role began during the Great Depression when the country faced an alarming drop in home construction and a rise in foreclosures.²⁶ To revive the moribund housing industry, the federal government created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1933 and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in 1934. These agencies revolutionized home financing by making it less expensive and less risky for banks and homeowners to finance mortgages. With its low-interest loans to homeowners, the HOLC pioneered the concept of a long-term, fully amortized mortgage. Prior to this, mortgages had to be renewed every five to ten years, and foreclosures often occurred because the owner could not secure financing to renew.²⁷ With full amortization, homebuyers had lower monthly payments with uniform payments spread over the life of the debt, and foreclosures became less likely.²⁸

The FHA insured long-term mortgage loans made by private lenders with the United States Treasury as guarantor. This reduced the risk to bankers, which led to lower interest rates and more manageable down payments.²⁹ Prior to HOLC and FHA, a typical down payment in the 1920s was at least 30% of the house value. HOLC and FHA policies resulted in a substantial reduction in down payment requirements, typically to less than 10% of the house value. With low down payments and mortgage payments extended for the 25- to 30-year life of the loan, home ownership became a feasible alternative for millions of Americans. While the HOLC’s lending programs were disbanded in 1936, the mortgage innovations and the FHA survived.³⁰ The Federal National Mortgage Association (aka Fannie Mae), introduced in 1938, further incentivized mortgage lending by purchasing FHA mortgages from private lenders.³¹

In addition to substantially increasing the feasibility of home ownership, the FHA stimulated building to an impressive and immediate degree. On a national scale, the construction of new houses nearly quadrupled in just a few years, from just 93,000 in 1933 to 332,000 in 1937. Exponential growth in the home building industry continued into the 1940s, with 399,000 houses constructed in 1938; 458,000 in 1939; 530,000 in 1940; and 619,000 in 1941.³²

²⁴ Ibid., 204.

²⁵ Ibid., 215-16.

²⁶ Ibid., 193.

²⁷ Ibid., 196-97.

²⁸ Ibid., 196.

²⁹ Ibid., 203-205.

³⁰ Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

³¹ Ibid., 185.

³² Ibid., 205.

In San Francisco in the mid-1930s and 1940s, these new mortgage programs and the concept of home ownership were heavily promoted by builders and by the FHA. Builders frequently highlighted the availability of FHA terms and FHA-approved financing in newspaper advertisements, the FHA placed frequent ads promoting the program, and the FHA's District Director D.C. McGinniss wrote a regular column in the Sunday "Home" section of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

According to Carl Gellert, president of Standard Building Company, a prolific Sunset District building firm, it took several years for the public to fully realize the impact of amortized mortgages and to change their perceptions of home ownership. Anticipating increased home sales in 1939, Gellert stated, "I think we are in for a big home building year here. The advantages of buying on the FHA have had time to sink into the public's mind and there is an increasing 'own your own home' consciousness throughout San Francisco."³³ Construction data confirms Gellert's prediction: housing production and sales in the Sunset District reached record highs in 1939 and 1940.

The federal government also initiated programs to make buying a home easier for returning World War II veterans. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill, created a Veterans Administration (VA) to assist returning veterans purchase a home. The VA largely followed FHA policies and some argue functioned as a continuation and expansion of the FHA program.³⁴ In 1955, approximately 4 million veterans had purchased homes with VA-backed loans.³⁵

Segregation and Racial Restrictions

The homeownership incentives did not just promote homeownership but influenced where homes were purchased and by whom. The HOLC needed to predict the life of the housing it financed, but the appraisal methods it introduced and helped to standardize privileged white homebuyers in newly developing areas at a city's margins and beyond. Neighborhoods were valued using four grades. The highest grade went to new neighborhoods homogeneously populated with "American business and professional men."³⁶ Conversely, an older housing stock and the presence of foreigners or ethnic/racial minorities resulted in lower grades. African American neighborhoods were invariably rated with the lowest grade, colored red on the agency's maps. This practice of "red lining" steered FHA mortgage insurance and bank loans to less urban, less diverse areas.³⁷ Red lining continued into the mid-1960s, when the FHA modified its policies to reduce barriers to lending in these areas.³⁸

A 1937 HOLC residential security map of San Francisco reveals that the Sunset District—with the exception of previously built up areas near the Inner Sunset and near the Pacific Ocean—is uniformly drawn as green or blue, first and second grade respectively. No portion of the Sunset District was redlined. This favorable HOLC / FHA ranking had a direct impact on the neighborhood's rapid development and the success of the area's merchant builders.

³³ Francis Newton, "Merchandise Programs for an Operative Builder," *National Real Estate Journal*, June 1940, 36.

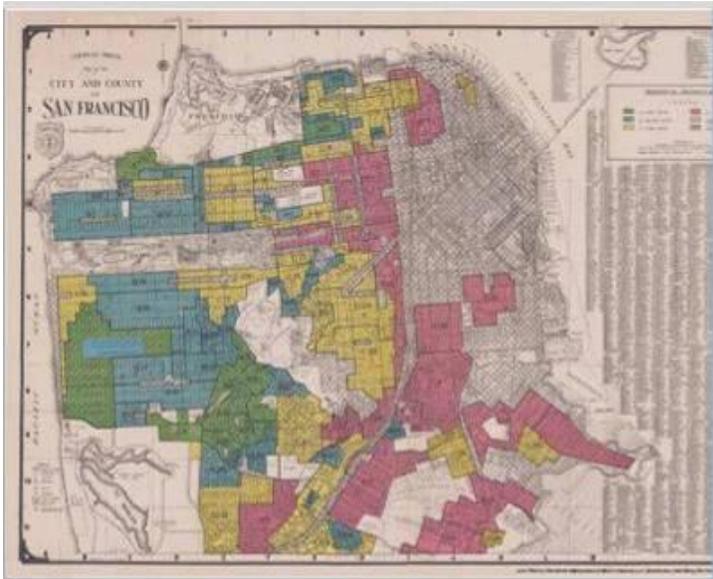
³⁴ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 207-14.

³⁸ Allen R. Hays, *The Federal Government & Urban Housing: Ideology and Change in Public Policy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 86-87.



Left: 1937 HOLC Residential Security Map for San Francisco.

Green indicates first grade, blue is second grade, yellow is third grade, and red is fourth grade. Overlaid hatch marks indicate sparsely populated areas while hatch marks alone indicate largely industrial or commercial areas.

Source: <http://salt.unc.edu/T-RACES/mosaic.html>

In addition to government-backed red lining, deed restrictions and racial covenants—enacted by private developers—resulted in a segregated geography of race and ethnicity in San Francisco. Although deed restrictions that applied to a single parcel had been in use for more than a century, the new covenants “applied to the entire established neighborhood and extended into perpetuity.”³⁹ The parcel-based deed restrictions and neighborhood-based covenants were a reaction, in part, to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in 1917 that struck down municipal residential segregation ordinances. As a result, some real estate boards and property owners associations “turned to contractual agreements between individuals which were not outlawed by the Supreme Court until 1948.”⁴⁰

In the 1920s, the use of restrictive covenants and deed restrictions, which legally prevented the sale of property to African-Americans, Asians, Jews, and other specified non-Caucasian groups, became widespread throughout the country.⁴¹ In San Francisco, many of the largest private builders of the 1920s to 1950s—such as Baldwin & Howell, Henry Doelger, Standard Building Company, and Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (Parkmerced)—included racial covenants or discriminatory practices prohibiting non-Caucasians from purchasing and/or renting properties, particularly in the western and southwestern area of San Francisco. It is interesting to note, however, that Sunset District builders typically did not adopt racially restrictive deeds until the late 1930s.⁴² For example, early tracts of picturesque houses designed in fully expressed Period Revival styles by Henry Doelger (1932) on 31st Avenue between Lawton and Moraga streets and by Oliver Rousseau (1932) on 36th Avenue between Kirkham and Lawton streets did not contain deed restrictions. By the late-1930s, however, racially restrictive deeds on new properties constructed in Doelger’s large-scale “Doelgerville” development appear to be standard practice. Restrictions on Doelger-built houses constructed in 1939 on the 1800 block of 30th Avenue, for example, state that the property “shall not be sold, conveyed, leased, rented or occupied by any person other than one of the White or Caucasian race.” It is possible, that in placing deed restrictions, Doelger was attempting to create an air of exclusivity to his later tracts, which cost less and featured far more restrained ornamentation and design.⁴³ Likewise, FHA appraisal policies discouraged FHA-backed loans in areas that contained a presence of foreigners or ethnic/racial minorities, resulting in a strong financial incentive for builders to restrict neighborhoods to whites/Caucasians. Nonetheless, this

³⁹ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 212.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² One notable exception is Fernando Nelson’s Parkway Terrace tract developed in the 1910s. Other exceptions are likely.

⁴³ In *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia 1870-1930*, author Robert Fogelson posits that deed restrictions and covenants in working class and middle income neighborhoods were sometimes used to provide the appearance of exclusivity.

exclusionary practice casts a pall on the work of builders of that era. Not all builders placed racially restrictive deeds in the late 1930s. A review of select deeds indicate that Chris McKeon's 1936 "Rivera Heights" tract centered on 29th Avenue at Rivera Street contained no such restrictions, nor did a small tract developed by the Golden Gate Investment Co. in 1938 on 32nd Avenue at Quintara Street.

The incentives to keep non-Caucasians out of areas with high FHA ratings resulted in decreased opportunities for home ownership among San Francisco's racial and ethnic minorities. Although racial covenants and deed restrictions were ruled unconstitutional in a series of court cases beginning in 1948, the practice of exclusion continued, albeit unofficially. Even after 1948, the Standard Building Company, one of the Sunset District's largest builder firms, for example, was accused of refusing to show or sell houses to African Americans. In 1961, after picketing and a sit-in led by young African American lawyer Willie Brown,⁴⁴ a company spokesperson admitted that "we have not sold in the past to Negroes and the question of selling to Negroes in the future is still under advisement."⁴⁵ Picketing, unwelcome national attention, and pressure from San Francisco's political and civic leadership ultimately compelled the company to cease its unofficial discriminatory practices.

The Veterans' Welfare Board of California

A little-known precursor to the FHA and GI Bill—the California Veterans' Welfare Act—provided direct home ownership assistance to veterans of the first World War. In 1921, the State established the California Veterans' Welfare Act, appointing a commission to oversee assistance to World War I veterans in education and purchasing land for farming or private residences. The legislation was "designed to materially assist in rehabilitating the returned men and women who had vacated their residence in the State to serve their country in the World War..." Initially funded with \$10,000,000, the Veterans' Welfare Board (VWB) was created to administer the program. By 1936 a total of \$80,000,000 had been issued in bonds, \$65,000,000 of which was invested in properties for qualified veterans. The Farm and Home Purchase Act, which was overseen by the VWB, issued state funded loans to facilitate the purchase of properties upfront for qualified veterans. This was an early and successful model of amortized mortgages. Home buyers paid five percent of the property's selling value plus an administrative fee to the VWB. The advantages of this system were the buying power of cash, no payment of state taxes while the property remained in the state's ownership, and a two percent average savings on purchases compared to private loan options. District offices were located in Sacramento, San Francisco, Oakland, Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

In San Francisco, 180 homes were purchased in 1926, the second year of the program's Farm and Home Purchase Act, whereas by 1936 the number had increased dramatically to 2,141 homes purchased.

The VWB owned dozens of houses in the Sunset District. For example, the VWB purchased 1507 and 1511 33rd Avenue from the Rousseau brothers (Sunset District builders) shortly after construction in 1931. The buildings were then sold by the VWB, at favorable rates, to WWI veterans Walter J. Hilbrook and John D. Lumis, respectively. A comparison of sales ledgers, the 1937 San Francisco Assessor's block map, and original building permits reveals intensive VWB activity in the Sunset District. Henry Doelger sold many buildings to the VWB, and in 1937 alone the VWB owned 52 houses in the Sunset District.

In 1946, following World War II, the Department of Veterans Affairs and California Veterans Board were established to replace the VWB, among other agencies.

(Source: Biennial Report of Veterans' Welfare Board, June 1926 - June 1936, California State Printing Office, Sacramento, CA.)

⁴⁴ In 1995, Willie Brown was elected San Francisco's first African American mayor.

⁴⁵ S.F. Homes Picketing to Spread," *San Francisco Examiner*, June 3, 1961, as quoted in Woody LaBounty's "The Gellert Brothers and Lakeshore Park," accessed on the Western Neighborhoods Project website: www.outsidelands.org.

World War II

Five months after the U.S. entered World War II, a federal War Production Board construction order halted all non-essential private development in order to concentrate resources toward the war effort.⁴⁶ Many of the larger-scale builders including Henry Doelger, the Stoneson Development Company, Standard Building Company, and Galli Construction Company, shifted their activities from private construction and sales to war-related housing. During World War II, Doelger, for example, entered the defense housing market and constructed 3,000 military units in South San Francisco, Benicia, Vallejo, and Oakland. Despite the general prohibition on non-essential construction, several builders were able to continue residential development in the Sunset District and other areas of the City, arguing that private housing construction helped alleviate the severe housing shortage that resulted from migration of thousands of defense workers to San Francisco during the war. R. F. Galli, for example, built smaller “Holiday Homes” for war defense workers on a few block of 45th Avenue. Nonetheless, housing construction in the Sunset District largely evaporated from 1942 to 1944, only picking up in late 1945.

Post-World War II: Citywide

The years following the end of World War II witnessed an explosion in residential building activity. Thousands of new residential units were needed to house returning veterans, the now permanent “temporary” defense workers, and new families drawn to the area. More than a million servicemen and women and defense workers passed through the San Francisco Bay Area during the war. Many chose to return and settle in San Francisco at war’s end. San Francisco and Los Angeles experienced massive population increases immediately following the end of the war. New single-family tracts were developed into the 1960s.

San Francisco led the nation in residential construction immediately following the end of World War II. More house building permits—17,000 by May 1946—were authorized in San Francisco than in any other city in the U.S.⁴⁷ The vast majority (82%) of new houses was planned for owner-occupancy.⁴⁸ House prices in the immediate postwar era hovered around \$4,500, with the upper tier topping out at around \$10,000. Proposed rents averaged \$40/month with some rentals fetching up to \$80/month.⁴⁹

Although single-family buildings still predominated, the years following the end of World War II showed a marked increase in the number of multi-family units. In particular, there was a sharp increase in the number of two- to four-unit buildings and five- to ten-unit buildings. Though initially explosive, the postwar building boom quickly leveled off. Beginning in the period 1951 to 1955, residential construction dropped sharply. Just over 6,100 residential buildings were constructed, a 44% decrease from the previous five years. A new building form, however, gained popularity in the decade following the end of the war: high-density apartment towers and large-scale planned private developments. Just south of the Sunset District, builders Henry and Ellis Stoneson developed Stonestown, consisting of residential towers, townhouses, and a commercial development. Likewise, Henry Doelger shifted his operations from the Sunset District to an undeveloped area south of San Francisco, in what was to become the planned community of Westlake.

⁴⁶ Mason C. Doan, *American Housing Production, 1880-2000: A Concise History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 49.

⁴⁷ “San Francisco Leads in Housing Permits,” *Architect & Engineer*, (May 1946): 29.

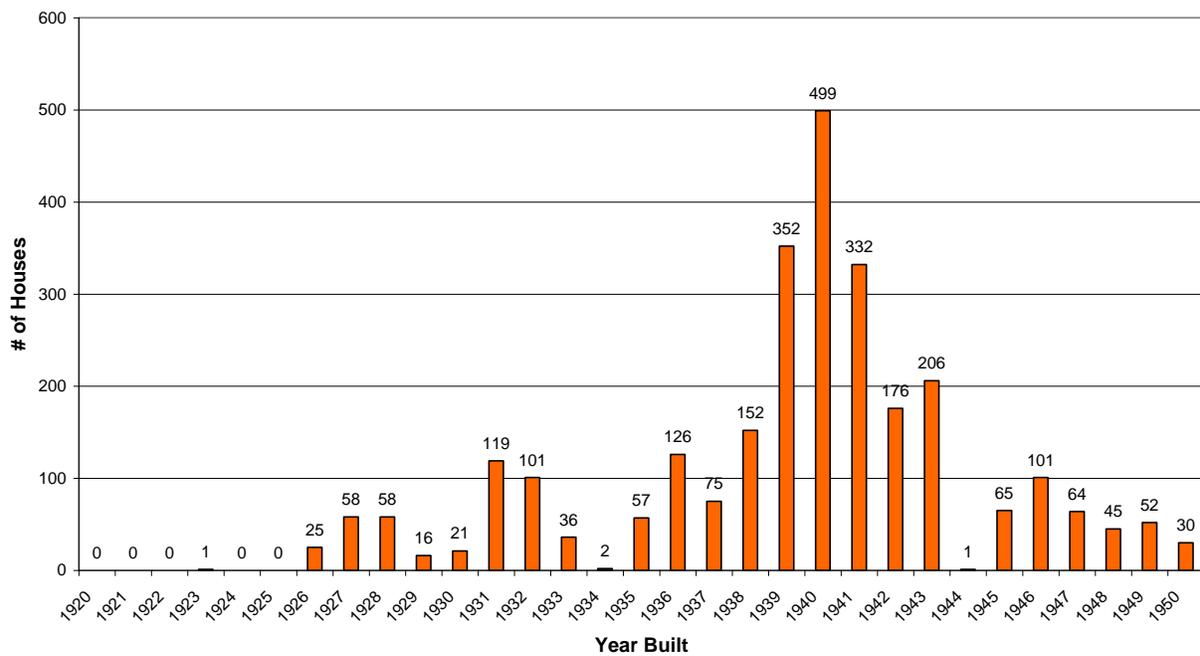
⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Construction Activity

Due to economies of scale, efficient Fordist production, and new government-backed mortgages, the late-1930s, in particular, witnessed an explosion of residential tract construction in the Sunset District. Beginning in the mid-1930s and continuing into the 1960s, home ownership was suddenly within reach of a wider range of household incomes. This intense period of building activity continued in the years immediately after World War II. Waves of construction activity in the Sunset District are revealed in an analysis of construction dates for single-family houses constructed in the Sunset survey area from 1920 to 1950.⁵⁰ Construction peaked in 1940, with 499 houses constructed in that year alone. Due to prohibitions on non-essential construction enacted during World War II, the number of residential buildings constructed after 1943 dropped precipitously, with just a single building constructed in 1944. Construction renewed at the end of World War II, although much of the land within the survey area was already built out. Postwar residential construction in the larger Sunset District was focused in then largely vacant westerly portions of the neighborhood. In particular, the blocks bounded by Noriega Street, 37th Avenue, Sloat Boulevard, and 46th Avenue feature a heavy concentration of postwar residential tracts.

Houses Built Per Year- Survey Area



Within the Sunset survey area boundaries, house production peaked in the years 1939 to 1941⁵¹.

⁵⁰ The following analysis is based upon extant building stock. Data was pulled from the San Francisco Planning Department's Parcel Information Database.

⁵¹ Year built data was pulled from the San Francisco Planning Department's Parcel Information Database.

Chapter 5

Buildings

Introduction

The Sunset District was developed in 1925–1950 by a handful of large-scale merchant builders who constructed thousands of houses on vacant sand dunes, as well as dozens of smaller builders who constructed a few blocks or scattered in-fill. Merchant builders are defined as large-scale firms that facilitated all process of land development. They purchased raw land, designed the subdivision plat, and designed, constructed and sold houses.⁵³ The term is often used interchangeably with “operative builder.” The largest builders—Henry Doelger, the Gellerts, and Ray F. Galli—constructed the majority of the neighborhood’s single-family houses. Mid-size firms were also influential; the Rousseau brothers of Marian Realty designed blocks of fantastically picturesque houses in the early 1930s, creating an “old world” aesthetic emulated by small and large-scale builders alike. By the late 1930s, the larger merchant builders had mastered the “Fordist” production of assembly-line house building. Rather than build houses individually, workers were organized into specialized crews, each focusing on a specific step in the process: foundation work, framing, sheetrock, siding, and roofing. Large-scale merchant builders also benefitted from economies of scale, the purchasing power of vast quantities of construction materials.



1500 block of 22nd Avenue, 1929.

This chapter documents the building plans, typologies, interior features, and landscape elements associated with residential tract buildings constructed in the Sunset District.

Exteriors

The exterior façades of Sunset District houses reflect myriad designs and architectural styles. To avoid monotonous blocks of identical buildings, builders offered a range of façade styles, with French Provincial, Spanish Colonial, Mediterranean, and Tudor Revival styles predominating. The wide spectrum of façade styles provided the appearance of variety and resulted in block faces with remarkably differentiated parapets, entrances and stairways, and fenestration patterns. Despite the uniform massing, set-back, and roof form, this range of styles and design features resulted in a streetscape that provided depth, visual interest, and heterogeneity in an otherwise homogenous landscape. The range of façade styles also provided consumers with more choices. Buyers had the option of choosing a traditional, period revival, or, in the late 1930s, a modernistic style house.

House plan catalogs provided information and advice to builders on acceptable styles, materials, ornament, and detailing. Guides and catalogs offered dozens of floor plans and layouts in designs favoring traditional and Colonial Revival styles and occasionally cautioned against too radical of a style. Only a handful of catalogs offered what was called “Spanish,” “or “Modernistic” styles, though one guide included such styles in its list of “eight architecturally accepted types of homes,” which also included American Colonial, Dutch Colonial, Cape Code Colonial, Georgian,

⁵³ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin: Historic Residential Suburbs*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior).

Norman Farmhouse, and Tudor.⁵⁴ The popularity of the Colonial-inspired houses was linked to its long-time acceptance by the public and its enduring ability to maintain value. As one architect noted in 1939, “In the selection of style, obsolescence, the enemy of value, should be borne in mind. Jigsaw exteriors, overdone bungalows, and false gabled English were among many passing fads, while good colonial, early American, and Georgian have stood the test of time. If done well, they will always be good.”⁵⁵

Despite cautious advice contained in catalogs, several Sunset District builders in the late 1930s increasingly offered façades that reflected their interpretation of the Streamline Moderne style. Builders added this sleek new style in order to appeal to consumers interested in the Modern and Modernistic style emerging at that time. A very small minority—fewer than 10%—of the façades offered by builders during the late 1930s to 1940s were designed in the Streamline Moderne style.⁵⁶ The earliest known Modern tract houses in the Sunset District survey area were designed in 1936 by C. O. Clausen for the Golden Gate Investment Company. Located on the 2100 block of 33rd Avenue, these two tract houses mimic the Art Deco-inspired stepped-back design of Doelger’s sales office on Judah Street, which was designed by Clausen in 1932. Other early Streamline Moderne examples in the Sunset District, built in 1937, are credited to Henry Doelger and Jason Arnott. These houses, including the Doelger and Galli model homes marketed as the “Styleocrat” and “Casa Moderna,” provided some of the first Modern alternatives to traditional tract house design.

Sunset District tract houses were tightly packed, with no visual separation between buildings, in contrast to the fully detached models displayed in catalogs.⁵⁷ Likewise, catalog houses typically featured fully detached garages, with just a handful featuring semi-attached garages and none in the Sunset District model of living spaces set atop an integrated garage. The following section provides an overview of the unusual Sunset District building form, as expressed in nine distinctive building typologies constructed from the mid-1920s to the early 1950s.

⁵⁴ *The Home Idea Book*, (Johns Manville, 1939), 7.

⁵⁵ As quoted in David Gebhard, “The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3 Summer-Autumn, 1987), 109.

⁵⁶ Based on a random sample of three blocks located within the larger Sunset District neighborhood.

⁵⁷ Based on a review of 20 house plan catalogs dating from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Building Typologies

The nine Sunset District building typologies are primarily differentiated by distinct entry configurations, which are often associated with particular eras of construction. Regardless of these differences, nearly all single-family houses share the following features: small-scale massing; one-story over integrated garage; a prominent, often deeply recessed garage opening; flat roof; ornamented parapet; and front yard setback. A secondary tradesman door is often located within the recessed garage opening. Each typology can display a variety of architectural styles, though some typologies are closely associated with certain styles. Likewise, most typologies are closely associated with a specific time period, though overlap is common.

Stair / Entry Configuration Typology

Ground Floor Entry

The earliest iteration of the Sunset District tract house featured a recessed entry door located at the ground story. Built in the early 1920s, there are relatively few examples of this entry typology in the Sunset District and scattered examples exist citywide. This early version is unusual in that the entry door is at ground level adjacent to a garage, rather than at the second story, which is a near universal feature of tract houses built from the mid-1920s to 1950. A tradesmen door was typically located within the garage opening.⁵⁸ This typology typically displayed restrained traditional ornamentation, with an occasional reference to the Mediterranean Revival style.

Only a handful of the ground story entry typology is found within the Sunset survey area.



1386 15th Avenue, 1922.



1330 29th Avenue, 1925.

⁵⁸ Tradesmen doors were historically intended to receive home deliveries of ice, milk, and other items. A former resident recalled that tradesmen doors also allowed residents to enter and exit the house via the garage and back stairs, thereby “saving” the more formal hardwood floors interior stairs (Ungaretti, 2013).

Straight Side Stair

By the mid-1920s, builders had moved entry access from the ground level to the second story, which was accessed from a straight flight of side stairs. The stairway created a partial separation between adjacent buildings and modulated space between rows of semi-attached houses. The front door is clearly visible in this configuration. At the top of the steps is a small landing and semi-enclosed portico. The shape of the recessed entry portico often mimicked the shape of the deeply recessed garage opening. The straight side stair is most closely associated with mid-1920s barrel front Mediterranean Revival houses, though it can also be found on tract buildings—designed in a variety of styles—constructed into the 1940s.



1434 and 1438 28th Avenue, 1930.



1454 32nd Avenue, Christian Anderson, 1939.

Straight Side Stair, Open with Entry Arch

A variant of the Straight Side Stair, this typology also features an entrance arch or design element above the base of the stairs. This typology was primarily constructed from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s. Earlier versions often consisted of a discrete arch or hood, while later iterations displayed an arch created by a continuation of the front building wall. In both cases, the stairway is open air and the entry arch often partially obscures the view to the front door. Occasionally, a decorative metal arch was set atop stucco pillars; this metal arch typically matched the material and pattern of its adjacent balcony. This building typology is most closely associated with the Mediterranean Revival, Tudor Revival, and French Provincial styles.



1490 31st Avenue, 1933.



1667 32nd, 1935.

Transitional Side Stair

Commonly constructed in the early- to mid-1930s, this typology features a partially hidden staircase tucked into the side of the building. The primary entry doors of these buildings are not visible from the street. This variant can be considered a precursor to the popular Tunnel Entry typology (see below) that dominated in the 1940s. The minimally visible stairs are typically open air and are most often built with a slight curved configuration. A result of this configuration is a primary façade that extends the full width of the lot, creating the appearance of a larger building. Occasionally, a projecting alcove shelters the entrance to the stairs. The transitional side stair typology is most closely associated with Spanish Colonial Revival, Mediterranean Revival and Storybook design.



1575 35th Avenue, Rousseau, 1932.



2282 29th Avenue, Standard Building Co., 1936.

Angled Stair

The Angled Stair typology is uncommon in the Sunset District, though it was built over a period of several decades. It was primarily constructed in the early-1930s (though examples can be found as early as 1926) with scattered examples into the mid-1940s. This stair configuration typically featured solid cheek walls that extended into the front yard setback, toward the street. Clad in the same textured stucco, the cheek walls and stairs blended seamlessly with the building exterior and were often elaborately designed with stepped or curved flourishes. Stairs often began at the building's side property line to access a centrally located entry door. The primary entry doors typically did not face the street. Switchback stair turns were also common in buildings from the early 1930s. Occasionally, a secondary tradesman door was discretely placed beneath the stairway, within or adjacent to the garage opening. Most Angled Stair typology buildings from the early 1930s were constructed in the Mediterranean Revival style, though a range of styles was applied to the form in the early 1940s.



2238 35th Avenue, C.T. Lindsay, 1937.



2200 block of 30th Avenue, Nels E. Johnson, 1931.

Tunnel Entry

The vast majority of Sunset District tract houses feature the Tunnel Entry layout. Scattered examples were constructed in the Sunset District neighborhood as early as the mid-1930s⁵⁹ and the design rapidly caught on. By 1940, the tunnel entrance was standard form for most Sunset tract houses. The design is frequently credited to Ray Galli, though it was quickly adopted by most merchant builders. Within the Sunset survey area, the earliest documented Tunnel Entry was constructed in 1938.⁶⁰ Tunnel Entry houses display a wide range of styles, including Mediterranean Revival, Colonial Revival, Minimal Traditional, French Provincial, and Streamline Moderne.

The Tunnel Entry features an interior passageway leading from the front of the building to a deeply recessed ground story interior courtyard and stairway leading to the second story entrance. This interior passageway and courtyard is well lit and often contains interior planters and plantings.⁶¹ The arched, rectangular or peg-shaped opening at the ground story was originally open, though today most entry openings are secured with metal gates. Occasionally, a ground story bedroom opened out onto the passageway, though it was far more common for living spaces to be located upstairs or at the rear of the basement level.

Due to the absence of an exposed side stair, Tunnel Entry houses were typically built to the full width of the lot line, with no modulating space between buildings. Occasionally buildings were set back a foot from adjacent buildings; nonetheless, the overall visual impact is of a solid wall of attached row houses.



1479 32nd Avenue, Harrison, 1938.



1767 33rd Avenue, 1940.



2050 36th Avenue, 1954.



2238 Santiago Street, 1949.

⁵⁹ Zinns, *The Tradition Continued*.

⁶⁰ 1479 32nd Avenue was constructed by the unknown builder Harrison for the property owner Klint.

⁶¹ Zinns, *The Tradition Continued*, 15.

Massing / Interior Plan Typology

The following three house typologies—Split-Level, Hollywood Houses, and Patio Plan—are distinct for their massing or interior plan rather than a particular stair or entry configuration.

Split-Level

A rare typology in the Sunset District, the Split-Level house is unusual for its ground-story living spaces. Examples in the Sunset District are typically asymmetrical with the central entrance accessed via a short flight of steps. Henry Doelger constructed several dispersed blocks of Split-Level houses on 31st and 33rd Avenues⁶² in 1942. Eight years later he began construction of Westlake, a planned community south of San Francisco in which Split-Level is a common house typology. Split-Level houses in the Sunset District represent an early adoption of what would become a widely constructed property type—at a nationwide scale—in the 1950s to 1960s. The earliest known examples in the Sunset District were designed in the Mediterranean Revival style, while later examples built by Doelger favored Colonial Revival, French Provincial, Minimal Traditional, and Streamline Moderne styles.



2331 Rivera Street, Castle Building Co., 1931.



1900 block of 31st Avenue, Henry Doelger, 1942.

Holiday and Hollywood Houses

Unlike the vast majority of Sunset District houses, the Holiday and Hollywood Houses, designed by Ray Galli in the 1940s, are one-story with living spaces adjacent to, rather than above the integrated garage. Inspired by a visit to Southern California, Ray Galli constructed several blocks of these horizontally (rather than vertically) oriented houses, which he described as “Hollywood Houses”—in reference to the form, not any particular style—in the Outer Sunset near the Pacific Ocean.⁶³ There are no known examples of Hollywood Houses within the Sunset survey area. Like most tracts constructed in the 1940s, the Holiday and Hollywood Houses were designed in a range of styles, including Colonial Revival, Regency, French Provincial, and Streamline Moderne.



2100 block of 45th Avenue, Galli, 1941.



Holiday houses on 2100 block of 45th Avenue, Galli, 1941.

⁶² Other, smaller Doelger-built split-level tracts are found on 31st, 32nd, and 33rd Avenues.

⁶³ Lorri Ungaretti. *Stories in the Sand. San Francisco's Sunset District, 1847-1964.* (San Francisco: Balangero Books, 2012).

Patio Plan

Initially designed in 1932 by Oliver Rousseau, the Patio Plan typology introduced light and air to the central portion of nearly attached tract houses. It features an interior courtyard at the top story, which separated living and sleeping areas, and was typically accessible from several rooms. The Patio Plan configuration is not visible from the street. The typology is most closely associated with the Period Revival styles constructed in the 1930s and was less commonly built after introduction of the Tunnel Entry typology. Aerial photographs taken in 1937-1938 reveal the prevalence of this typology in the Sunset District.



Aerial view of Patio Plan oval-shaped interior courtyard atriums on the west side of 34th Avenue. Designed by Oliver Rousseau.

Source: Bing.com



Patio Plan courtyard of a Rousseau-designed house in the Sunset District. Address unknown.

*Source:
<http://www.sfgate.com/homeandgarden/article/Brightening-the-Sunset-Oliver-Rousseau-a-2703046.php#page-1>*



Three sets of French doors open onto the interior courtyard at 1557 35th Avenue. Designed by Rousseau, this open-air patio was later enclosed with a skylight.

*Source:
<http://www.sfgate.com/realestate/article/The-Walk-Through-1557-35th-Ave-San-Francisco-3164236.php>*

Interiors

To minimize costs and maximize efficiencies, the interiors of Sunset District houses were typically limited to a few standardized layouts. The typical Sunset District house consisted of five rooms and slightly less than 1,000 square feet of livable area. It contained a single bathroom, a fireplace in the living room, two bedrooms, and a two-car (parked in tandem) garage. The separate living and dining rooms were typically located at the front, kitchen and bathroom near the center, and two bedrooms overlooking the rear yard. Variations on the basic five-room floor plan included built-in breakfast nooks, sunrooms, a third bedroom, or ground story living spaces. The enormously popular “Patio Plan,” introduced in 1932 by the Rousseau brothers, included a second-story interior atrium space that provided additional light and air to adjoining rooms.

The ground story (basement/garage) configurations varied greatly. The ground story of a Rousseau tract on 26th Avenue, for example, featured “a finished social room, with buffet and corner fireplace,” in the space adjacent to the laundry and three-car garage.⁶⁵ The Standard Building Company offered greater flexibility in its unfinished ground story space, describing it as a “huge basement capable of garaging four cars or allowing an ample social hall, servants’ quarters, or large laundry.”⁶⁶

Residential tract buildings feature many interior flourishes. Interior arched doorways and room dividers were common, particularly in the early 1930s. Bathrooms and kitchens often featured colorful polychromatic ceramic tiles. Floors were often wood or parquet. Several builders commissioned murals for the interior living rooms. Muralist Harry Tyrell painted murals over the fireplaces of Doelger’s early-1930s Sunset District tracts⁶⁷ and Oliver Rousseau’s houses on 36th Avenue likewise featured murals, several of which are known to exist.⁶⁸ Decorative interior stenciling can also be found in mid-1930s houses.

Descriptions of the most common layouts for 1930s to 1940s Sunset District tracts—the Junior 5, Tunnel Entrance, and Patio Plan—are described below. Interior plans and descriptions were accessed from www.saxerealestate.com and are summarized below.

⁶⁵ “Startling New Homes at Unbelievably Low Prices,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 26, 1931.

⁶⁶ “New Sunstream Homes Nearing Completion,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 9, 1939.

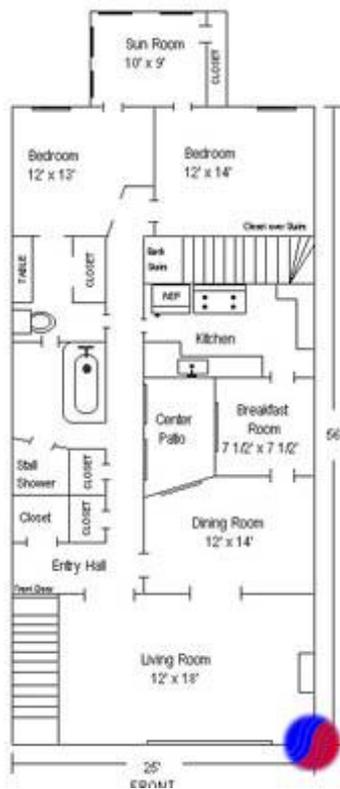
⁶⁷ Thatcher Covely, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*, (Booklet produced for Henry Doelger Builder Inc., 1935), 32.

⁶⁸ Several property owners contacted the Department regarding the presence of interior murals in buildings with the Sunset survey area.



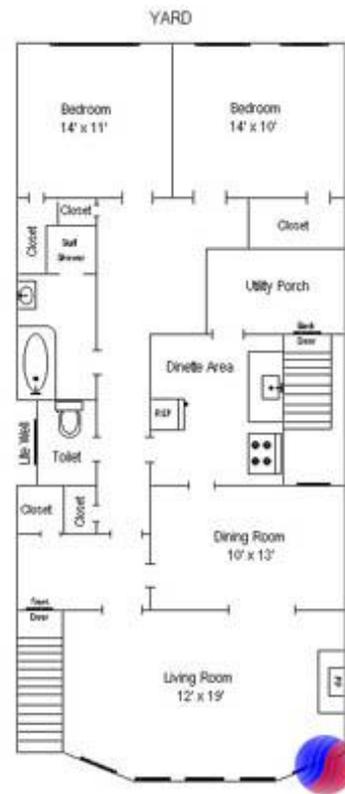
Junior-5

The Junior-5 is a basic and common floor plan built in the Sunset District. The name refers to the five-room interior configuration. Most Junior-5's were constructed during WWII and into the late 1940s. The average plan is slightly less than 900 square feet. The plan features a combined kitchen and dining area. "Jumbo" versions of the Junior-5 were constructed primarily in the postwar era and feature larger rooms and/or a third bedroom off the first floor tunnel passageway. The second floor living space of most Junior-5 buildings is through a tunnel entry.



Patio Plan

A still popular house plan layout, the Patio Plan configuration is referred to by some as the "Cadillac of the Avenue homes." It was built primarily in the early 1930s with occasional examples dating to the early 1940s. The name refers to the interior second floor center courtyard atrium, which is accessed from the hall, dining room, and breakfast nook. The patio serves to provide additional natural light to the center of the house.



Barrel Front

The barrel front layout featured a large living room, dining room, and separate Pullman built-in dinette. The barrel front layout could be expanded to include three upstairs bedrooms or a sunroom at the rear. A second set of interior stairs occasionally led to a downstairs den or social room.

Landscape Features

The Sunset District is subdivided on a standard grid pattern. Uniform front yard setbacks of approximately 10' characterize most blocks and tracts from the 1920s to 1950 and feature remarkably uniform landscape features. Paved entry walkways and driveways were typically flanked by narrow strips of lawn. Occasionally, the concrete walkways or driveways were scored with a curvilinear or geometric pattern. An additional thin swath of lawn was often found between the sidewalk and the curb. Some tracts historically featured small-scale shrubbery. Street trees are notably absent. The Sunset District's foggy climate and sandy soil make it difficult to maintain landscaping. With the exception of Parkway Terrace, an eight-block 1910's development that featured built-in concrete corner benches, the Sunset District does not feature planned landscape design elements that are found in surrounding neighborhoods. For example, the Sunset District does not contain curvilinear streets, uniform fences or tree species, alleys,⁶⁹ purposeful landscape design, or street furniture such as gates, pillars, or other entry markers.⁷⁰

The appearance of the neighborhood's existing landscape of uniform front yard setbacks might have changed drastically in the 1940s had prominent merchant builders succeeded in their effort to implement an alternative setback configuration. In 1943, builder Chris McKeon spearheaded a "crescent" setback frontage proposal for the Sunset District that would have required staggered front yard setbacks. McKeon—the then-Secretary of the Associated Home Builders—proposed a requirement to build corner houses directly to the property line, staggering back gradually to a setback of nine feet at the center of the block.⁷¹ Supported by builders, the proposal was touted as significant for the future development of the Parkside and Sunset District neighborhoods. Neighborhood residents, however, strongly resisted the contentious plan, which was narrowly rejected by the Board of Supervisors.

⁶⁹ A handful of one- or two-block long alleys are scattered within the Sunset District. Alleys, however, are not part of the neighborhood's standard street pattern.

⁷⁰ Several neighborhoods adjacent to the Sunset District display curvilinear streets (St. Francis Wood), uniform picket fences or specific tree species (Lakeside), alleys with fronting attached garages (Merced Manor and Balboa Terrace), purposeful landscape design (Parkmerced and Balboa Terrace), or street furniture such as gates, pillars, or other entry markers (Ingleside Terraces).

⁷¹ "Building Line in Parkside Upheld," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 15, 1943.

Chapter 6

Builders

Merchant builders were responsible for constructing tracts of single-family houses on vast swaths of land in the west, southwest, south, and southeast areas of San Francisco. The larger builder firms purchased full blocks of vacant land for residential development rather than engage in a piecemeal, parcel-by-parcel approach. By building dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of houses, these builders were able to economize construction costs, increase speed and efficiency of construction, and offer affordable houses for the newly burgeoning class of middle-income San Franciscans. The Excelsior, Portola, and neighborhoods to the south and southeast were more often developed by smaller builders, who focused on just a few blocks. To the west, however, where large swaths of land were still untouched, builders such as Ray Galli, Henry Doelger, and the Standard Building Company developed thousands of houses atop the former sand dunes of the Sunset District.

Sunset District builders shared several notable characteristics. Many merchant building firms were family-run, often by brothers, for example, Oliver and Arthur Rousseau, Henry and John Doelger, Ray and Frank Galli, Carl and Fred Gellert (Standard Building Company), and Henry and Ellis Stoneson. These men were often young (many began building careers while in their early 20s), always white, and often emerged from working-class backgrounds. Many Sunset District builders were of draft age during World War I and several are confirmed veterans. They were typically high school graduates, with no formal architectural training (with the notable exception of Oliver and Arthur Rousseau), and several had no more than a grammar school education. They tended to design buildings in-house or use standardized plans, rather than commission consulting architects. Some were carpenters who transitioned to larger-scale building operations, while many others transitioned to residential development from wholly unrelated fields. Chris McKeon and Claude Lindsay, for example, were butchers, Henry Doelger sold tamales—and was a reported bootlegger—and Ray Galli a bookkeeper. Most were native San Franciscans, and, importantly, most builders resided in the Sunset District, often within the tracts they designed and built. They were fully invested in the successful emergence of this new neighborhood. During the course of their careers, many went on to serve on influential boards and commissions, including the powerful Associated Home Builders of San Francisco (Boyd C. Lindsay, McKeon, Doelger, and Ray Galli), Golden Gate Bridge Board of Directors (McKeon), and a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) commission (Doelger).

This chapter documents the work of large merchant building firms who led the development of the Sunset District, as well as the smaller-scale builders, who played a largely unacknowledged role in the neighborhood's development. The descriptions of individuals and firms include a short personal biography, a career summary (focused on Sunset District developments), and representative examples of their work in the Sunset District. While the information provided in this section is not comprehensive, it has been compiled as a guide to provide greater context for the works and careers of influential builders during this era of intensive residential building activity. The chapter is divided into major builders (typically merchant builders) and small-scale builders (who typically constructed buildings on scattered lots, rather than large tracts).

Large-Scale Builders

Henry Doelger

Henry Doelger dominated the home-building industry in San Francisco in the 1930s and early 1940s. During his 30-year career, Doelger's firm constructed approximately 11,000 buildings in San Francisco, primarily in the Sunset District.⁷⁴ From 1934 to 1941 he was the largest home builder in the U.S., constructing an average of two houses a day and employing 500 people, earning him the moniker "the Henry Ford of housing."⁷⁵ His specialty was a one-story over garage, single-family house, though he also built a limited number of duplexes and apartments in the Sunset District. Doelger was undoubtedly, the most influential Sunset District developer and in many respects, Doelger's career is illustrative of the other large merchant builders of that era. Therefore, a more detailed documentation of his career and building practices was warranted for this historic context statement.

Biography

Henry Doelger was born in San Francisco on June 24, 1896 in a back room above his parent's bakery at 1321 Mason Street.⁷⁶ In 1904, his parents opened a grocery store at 7th Avenue and Hugo Street in the Inner Sunset and moved the family to the residential unit above the store⁷⁷ His father died when he was ten years old, prompting Henry to quit eighth grade (a few years later) to work in order to contribute financially to his family. He never returned to school and later stated that he would "flunk a fifth-grade arithmetic test."⁷⁸

In 1922, while still in his 20s, Doelger bought (and sold) his first lot in the Sunset District, an area that 15 years later would be known as "Doelger City." With his brother Frank, an established Sunset District realtor, Henry entered the realm of real estate speculation, purchasing raw land as speculative investments. His first investment, an empty lot at 14th and Irving Streets, purchased for \$1,500 in 1922, was flipped a few months later for a handsome profit. ⁷⁹ Several years later Doelger's investments increased in scale when, using borrowed money, he purchased 14 blocks for \$140,000 (\$10,000 a block). Henry's son Michael Doelger describes his father's shift from speculation to construction:

My father's older brother, Frank, taught him how to buy and sell lots, how to speculate. My father bought lots, but during the hard economic times there were no buyers for 'raw lots.' My father had overextended himself by buying these lots and had to recoup his costs. He hooked up with Carl Vedell. They hired a few carpenters and built a few houses. When these sold, they built more. His success in building and selling grew out of necessity: he couldn't sell empty lots, but with houses on them he could.⁸⁰

In 1927, Doelger built his first house in the Sunset District, a barrel front, single-family house at 1427 39th Avenue.⁸¹ Later that year, on that same block, he began construction of the first tract of Doelger-built homes.⁸² This solid block face of barrel front Mediterranean Revival houses, located on the 1400 block of 39th Avenue between Judah and Kirkham Streets, features alternating parapet forms and remains largely intact. Like other early tract builders of that

⁷⁴ Rob Keil, *Little Boxes: The Architecture of a Classic Midcentury Suburb* (Daly City, California: Advection Media, 2006). Note, because Doelger destroyed his business records, the exact number of Doelger-built houses in San Francisco is unknown. The 11,000 figure quoted in various publications may overstate his building activity, though it is within the realm of possibility. Doelger assigned a serial number to each of his houses (and possibly, dwelling units). The serial numbers for his Westlake development begin in the 13,000-range, lending some weight to the argument for 11,000 San Francisco houses.

⁷⁵ Rob Keil, *Little Boxes*, 31.

⁷⁶ Crocker-Langlely San Francisco Directory, 1896; and Keil, *Little Boxes*, 31.

⁷⁷ Andrew Curtin, "Henry Doelger, The City's premier homebuilder dies," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 24, 1978, 24. Note: Doelger is the only known Sunset District builder to have grown up in the Sunset District.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ "Henry Doelger, The City's premier homebuilder dies," *San Francisco Examiner*, July 25, 1978.

⁸⁰ As quoted in Lorri Ungaretti's *Stories in the Sand: San Francisco's Sunset District, 1847-1964* (San Francisco: Balangero Books, 2012), 61.

⁸¹ The Western Neighborhoods Project documented and confirmed the correct address of Doelger's first house. <http://www.outsidelands.org/first-doelger.php> The San Francisco Assessor's office provides a construction date of 1927.

⁸² Thatcher Covely, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*. (Promotional booklet published by Henry Doelger Builder Inc., 1935), 47.

era, Doelger's first tract houses were designed in a single style, with identical massing and footprint, with differentiation limited to window muntin pattern, cornice ornamentation, and alternating parapet forms.



Fisheye view of Doelger's first tract development on the 1400 block of 39th Avenue.

Photo: Google Maps.

San Francisco City Directory listings trace his evolution from real estate speculation to construction: in 1925 and 1926 Doelger's listed occupation was "real estate," in 1927 it expanded to "real estate and builder," and by 1928 he is listed solely as a "builder."

During this early phase of his career, Doelger worked out of a one-room office in the basement of the apartment building he lived in at the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Judah Street (1391 Eighth Avenue/300 Judah Street). This basement office, which Doelger described as a "hole in the wall,"⁸³ was located next door to what would become the Doelger Building at 320 Judah Street.

320 Judah Street + Expanding Firm

In order to accommodate a growing number of employees and to provide a base for marketing and sales, Doelger in 1931 commissioned architect Charles O. Clausen to design a headquarters for his growing business. The new building functioned as a sales office, warehouse, and prominent visual advertisement for Doelger's emerging home building firm. Its bold Modern design was highly unusual for that time and Doelger highlighted the sales office in promotional materials, including the cover photograph of a 1936 promotional booklet. According to Doelger's son, Michael Doelger, the expanded building "held the sales office, the executive offices, and [Doelger's] workrooms, where some of his house designs were created."⁸⁴ Lumber, construction materials, a fleet of Doelger trucks, and hardware were also stored onsite.

By the mid-1930s, Henry Doelger Builder Inc. employed an increasing number of in-house employees who worked at 320 Judah Street, including architectural designers John Hunter and O. E. Peterson;⁸⁵ a painting and decorating department led by H. G. Douglas; a team of salesmen; and Doelger's secretary Ms. Alpha Porter, whom Doelger later described as his "right hand man."⁸⁶ Henry's younger brother John was also actively involved in the business. As a carpenter in 1927, he constructed many of the company's early homes. His roles at the company included carpenter, foreman, and superintendent of construction, and, by 1934 he served as the company's vice president.^{87 88}

⁸³ "Doelger Opens New Firm Offices," *San Francisco Examiner*, Saturday, April 20, 1940, 10.

⁸⁴ San Francisco Architectural Sunset Parkside Education and Action Committee (SPEAK), Architectural and Historical Resources of the Sunset District, "Sixteen Notable buildings," 2004-2005.

⁸⁵ Thatcher Covely, *Homes of the Moment*, 40.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* and "Doelger Opens New Firm Offices," *San Francisco Examiner*, Saturday, April 20, 1940, 10.

⁸⁷ "Firm Official Began Service in Overalls," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 5, 1940, front page of "Home" section.

⁸⁸ San Francisco City Directories, 1928-1940.



Henry Doelger in front of one of his first housing tracts, c. late-1920s.

Source: Leslie LaManna, www.outsidelands.org

“Henry Ford of Housing”

Doelger’s business continued to grow at an unprecedented pace. By 1940, Doelger had constructed more than 2,500 homes, mostly single-family houses in the Sunset District and Golden Gate Heights area, with 425 bought and sold in 1939 alone.⁸⁹ The largest concentration of Doelger houses spanned a cross-section of the Sunset District, from 15th Avenue, between Lawton and Quintara Streets, to the Pacific Ocean.⁹⁰ At that time, Doelger’s operation at 320 Judah Street employed 26 workers (including designers, draftsmen, sales staff, and administrative staff) and seven crews of carpenters totaling 300 men.⁹¹ Doelger’s lead in-house architectural designer for more than 20 years Chester Dolphin along with staff designer Ed Hageman developed versions of standardized plan layouts for five- and six-room houses.⁹²



Chester Dolphin (left) and Ed Hageman (right) in the drafting room at 320 Judah Street, circa 1937.

Source: Daly City Public Library Photo Collection.

By 1940 Doelger was recognized as the nation’s largest home builder and promoted himself as the builder of the nation’s fastest selling homes.⁹³ He was able to offer lower prices than small-scale builders because of the economies of scale of his building operation. By purchasing vast quantities of nails, lumber, and gypsum, for example, Doelger was able to command a lower price, which he passed on to consumers. He called this “buying power” and emphasized its importance in various marketing materials.⁹⁴ A promotional brochure from 1940 notes, “By the tremendous savings effected in the purchase of building materials in carload lots, Henry Doelger is able to build and sell a far better home at a lower cost than ordinarily could be done by smaller builders.”⁹⁵ Doelger was inspired by Henry Ford’s model for mass

⁸⁹ Brochure: *America’s Fastest Selling Homes are Built by Doelger*, 1940.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.* Note that neither Dolphin nor Hageman was a trained or licensed architect (Keil, *Little Boxes*, 74-77).

⁹³ Brochure: *America’s Fastest Selling Homes Are Built by Doelger*, 1940.

⁹⁴ Thatcher Covely, *Doelger’s Homes of the Moment*, 1936.

⁹⁵ Brochure: *America’s Fastest Selling Homes Are Built by Doelger*, 1940.

production of automobiles and applied this “Fordist” production model to assembly-line house building. Rather than build houses individually, workers were organized into specialized crews, each focusing on a specific step in the process: foundation work, framing, sheetrock, siding, and roofing. At one point Doelger even experimented with a conveyor belt to move pre-fabricated parts. To cut costs in his later developments, Doelger had his own planing mill at the job site.⁹⁶

By the early 1930s, builders had shifted from constructing tracts of nearly identical buildings designed in the same style to tracts that displayed a wide range of architectural styles. Although the interior layouts were limited to just a few options, the façades of Doelger’s early 1930s houses are extraordinarily picturesque, featuring miniature chateaus and castles designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, French Provincial, Mediterranean Revival, and Storybook styles. This range of styles resulted in block faces with remarkably varied roof forms and cladding, entrances and stairways, fenestration patterns, and ornamental detailing.

The exuberant designs of the early 1930s, however, had evolved by the late 1930s into more restrained versions of this wide spectrum of architectural styles. The FHA stimulus and resultant mass production of housing resulted in exterior façades that were more standardized, displayed less articulation, and were quicker and cheaper to construct.



Doelger's early- to mid-1930s Sunset District tract houses featured fully expressed Period Revival styles, such as this muscular Spanish Colonial Revival house at 1530 33rd Avenue, built in 1935.

Design features touted by Doelger include an internal patio, a “Pullman” breakfast nook, a center atrium, a reverse floor plan, and a “daylight” kitchen.⁹⁷ In February 1941, Doelger told the *San Francisco Examiner*, “the very nature of this work ... requires constant ingenuity, for example kitchens which avoid a laboratory like uniformity and bring for a spontaneous ‘that’s the kitchen I want’ from women visitors. Through the conscientious effort to make each house not merely a job number, but the potential ‘perfect home’ for someone, builders are fulfilling a real obligation to the community.”⁹⁸

Due to economies of scale, efficient Fordist production, and new government-backed FHA mortgages, Doelger was able to offer the affordable homes and the possibility of home ownership to a wider range of household incomes. In 1941, buyers could purchase the \$5,560 “Rainbow House” with a 10% down payment and \$37.50 monthly mortgage. The slightly smaller “Freedom House” was available in 1942 for \$4,780, with \$480 down and a monthly mortgage of \$32.50.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Keil, *Little Boxes*.

⁹⁷ Brochure: America’s Fastest Selling Homes Are Built by Doelger, 1940.

⁹⁸ *San Francisco Examiner*, “Builders Owe Debt to Community,” February 8, 1941.

⁹⁹ Housing costs listed in 1941 and 1942 advertisements in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, accessed (July 2012) at www.outsidelands.org.



Doelger posted numbered job cards in the basement of each house. His 3,230th house located on 33rd Avenue, was built in 1942.

By the late 1930s, consumers had the option of choosing a traditional revival style or a modernistic Streamline Moderne house. Doelger's early versions of the Streamline Moderne style, marketed as the "Styleocrat" and the "Rainbow House," provided some of the first Modern design options to his largely traditional or revival façade designs. Features such as glass block walls, curved balconies, flat parapets, and porthole windows are hallmarks of Doelger's early Modern designs. "We used to call that dog-and-cat hospital architecture," staff designer Edward Hageman of the glass block walls that are ubiquitous feature of Doelger's Streamline Moderne designs.¹⁰⁰ Around 1940, Doelger explained his decision to offer a variety of styles, including new Modern styles: "We've kept foremost in our minds the realization that houses, like people, have a definite character which should be expressed and which is completely lost if long rows of identical houses are constructed, as once was a builder's policy."¹⁰¹

The geographic focus of Doelger's building operation was San Francisco's emerging Sunset District neighborhood. From the late 1920s into the early 1940s, Doelger constructed many of the houses bounded by 27th Avenue, 39th Avenue, Kirkham Street, and Quintara Street.¹⁰² He also constructed larger, often detached houses on many blocks of Golden Gate Heights and Sunset Terraces. During World War II, Doelger worked for the United States Army Corps of Engineers and built an estimated 3,000 military dwelling units in South San Francisco, Benicia, Vallejo, and Oakland.¹⁰³ By 1948, Doelger had expanded his building ventures to the Richmond and Parkside areas, as well as San Mateo County. Plans for a new developments called for "200 sets of two-family flats, together with 25 four family and six-family dwellings in San Francisco proper."¹⁰⁴ Additionally, he had begun plans for more houses in the Golden Gate Heights neighborhood.



In 1939, Doelger built a handful of large detached single-family houses on 15th Avenue. The period revival houses were set on oversize lots and featured a rear alley, expansive front lawns, matching white picket fences, and mailboxes that were designed as miniature replicas of each house. Several of the mailboxes are extant.

¹⁰⁰ As quoted in a January 29, 2003 *New York Times* article by Patricia Leigh Brown: "Praising San Francisco's Champion of Conformity."

¹⁰¹ As quoted in Rob Keil's *Little Boxes*, 86.

¹⁰² Ken Zinns, *The Tradition Continued: The Sunset District Rowhouse of San Francisco, 1920–1945*, (Master's Thesis, December 9, 1983). Also, one of Doelger's promotional brochures from 1940 explicitly describes "Doelger City" as 26th to 36th Avenues between Noriega and Quintara Streets.

¹⁰³ Bunny Gillespie, *Images of America: Westlake* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

¹⁰⁴ *San Francisco News*, "Doelger Pushes Dunes," April 6, 1948.

Rousseau Brothers / Marian Realty Company

Founded in 1922, the Marian Realty Company was led by Arthur Rousseau and his younger brother, Oliver Rousseau. Unlike many Sunset District builders, the brothers were trained architects with deep ties to the architectural community in San Francisco. Their father and former partner, Charles Rousseau, was a renowned and prolific Victorian-era master architect. During the 1920s, the Rousseaus designed and constructed large apartment buildings, hotels, and office buildings, and the company was known as “one of the largest realty development and building organizations in the West.”¹⁰⁵ The economic crisis precipitated by the 1929 stock market collapse, however, forced the Rousseaus to radically shift their business focus. As the demand for large-scale projects dried up, the brothers transitioned to the construction of single-family houses in order to meet the demand for affordable housing. Arthur, the firm’s president, focused on the development financing, while Oliver was tasked with designing architecturally stimulating houses that were affordable to households of moderate means.¹⁰⁶ In the early 1930s, the Marian Realty Company partnered with the Whitney Investment Company (headed by Oliver Rousseau) to develop single-family residential tracts, one block at a time, in the Sunset District.¹⁰⁷

The highly picturesque Storybook single-family houses designed and developed by the Rousseau brothers in the early 1930s had a tremendous impact on the form, massing, and stylistic detailing of subsequent Sunset District residential tracts. Innovative design elements, such as the interior courtyard, a plan layout developed by Oliver Rousseau in 1932 that featured a top-story open-air patio, was widely adopted by Sunset District builders in the 1930s. In addition to the patio floor plan, which was described as “revolutionary in character,” Rousseau’s buildings featured integrated design and functionality elements that were considered new to San Francisco at that time, such as the two- and three-car garage, sunken living rooms, water heaters, and laundry machines.¹⁰⁸

Although the Rousseau brothers developed properties in the Sunset District during a span of only a few years (1931 to 1933) the stylistic impact of these houses on the emergent neighborhood was and is pronounced. Rousseau-designed houses are notable for their high level of architectural expression, Storybook-inspired design, inventive fenestration, and often-whimsical entry configuration. Although it is estimated that the Rousseaus built fewer than 200 houses in the Sunset District, later builders and designers—including developer Henry Doelger and architect Charles Clausen—often directly incorporated signature design elements from Rousseau buildings. The Rousseau tracts embodied a dramatic shift from near-identical houses designed in a single style (Mediterranean Revival) to houses designed in a profuse array of architectural styles—Storybook, Tudor Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, French Provincial, and Mediterranean Revival—united by common setback, form, and massing.

¹⁰⁵ “Building Firm Plan to Erect 200 Residences,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 9, 1932.

¹⁰⁶ “Oliver Marian Rousseau,” *City-County Record* 20 (1953): 10-11, 21.

¹⁰⁷ “Home Demand Called Omen,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 7, 1933.

¹⁰⁸ “6,000 See New Patio Plan,” *San Francisco Examiner*, February 4, 1933.



Built in 1933, this 34th Avenue Spanish Colonial Revival style house displays many of Rousseau's exuberant design elements.

The Rousseau brothers' first Sunset District development, consisting of 24 houses on 33rd Avenue, between Kirkham and Lawton Streets, was completed in May 1931. Other smaller clusters of Rousseau houses are located on 26th, 35th, 38th, and 43rd Avenues, Irving Street, and Noriega Street. The firm's Sunset District work culminated in 1933 with the construction of three blocks adjacent to the newly paved Sunset Boulevard. At 93 houses, this final development was by far the firm's most ambitious in the Sunset District and contains the largest and most expensive of the firm's houses. Oliver and Arthur Rousseau settled with their families in this development immediately after its completion, and their presence no doubt lent cachet to the emerging neighborhood. Oliver Rousseau resided in the large Spanish Colonial Revival corner building at 1598 36th Avenue from 1933 to 1937.¹⁰⁹ At the other end of the block, Arthur Rousseau resided at 1500 36th Avenue, in a Storybook-inspired Tudor Revival corner building, from 1933 to 1937.¹¹⁰ A third Rousseau (Annie), of unknown relationship to the brothers, resided at 1573 34th Avenue.

The Rousseau brothers were among a handful of developers active in the Sunset District during the Depression and prior to the advent of the Federal Housing Act's low-interest mortgage loan guarantees and the resultant mass construction of houses and rise of home ownership in the Sunset District. They were active in an area of the Sunset District that consisted, in large part, of vast sand dunes and scrubland. In order to attract potential home buyers to this fairly desolate area, the Rousseau brothers relied heavily on marketing strategies and partnerships with interior designers—including tours of fully furnished Model Homes—to successfully advertise and promote sales in this outlying San Francisco neighborhood. Named Model Homes, such as the "Sunset House" and "Surprise House," proved enormously popular with the public and were enthusiastically reviewed in local papers. The *San Francisco Chronicle* described the firm's early Model Houses thusly: "So great was the interest manifested by home lovers in the display that upon the sale of the Sunset House, it was decided to open a new exhibit in an adjoining home to accommodate the thousands who were unable to see Sunset House and to demonstrate different ideas for the decoration of a bungalow home."¹¹¹ District buildings were also advertised as an investment opportunity as the land value in the developing Sunset District was expected to increase.¹¹²

Although the Sunset District houses proved popular with the public and sold rapidly, the Marian Realty Company incurred mounting debts and the firm declared bankruptcy at the close of 1933.¹¹³ At that time, the firm's liabilities were listed at more than six million dollars, with debt scattered among many banks, insurance companies, and mortgage firms. A month later, Arthur Rousseau declared personal bankruptcy. In April 1934, Oliver Rousseau formed a solo real estate and brokerage firm called "Rousseau & Company" headquartered at 5408 Geary Boulevard

¹⁰⁹ Polk's Crocker Langley *City Directory*, 1931-1937.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "Exhibit Shows Artistry of Decorations," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 1932.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ "Marian Realty Firm Declares Bankruptcy," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 29, 1933.

in the Richmond District.¹¹⁴ This new firm focused on scattered in-fill development of single-family houses, duplexes, and some larger projects throughout the City, with no known new buildings developed in the Sunset District.

Gellert Brothers / Standard Building Company

The Standard Building Company, led by the brothers Carl and Fred Gellert, was an extraordinarily prolific building firm, with strong ties to the Sunset District.¹¹⁵ The brothers' father, Charles Gellert, was a German immigrant who worked as a house painter in San Francisco, and their mother, Willis, was an immigrant of Russian descent.¹¹⁶ Carl was born in 1899 and Fred in 1902. As young men, the Gellert brothers were employed as ironworkers until 1921, when they joined their father Charles as house painters.¹¹⁷ Their early work as house painters likely familiarized the brothers with the construction industry, and by 1922 they are credited with building their first house in the Sunset District.¹¹⁸ With little more than an eighth-grade education, the Gellert brothers were largely self-schooled in the building industry, acting as apprentices and taking night classes to learn architectural drawing.¹¹⁹ By 1926, the San Francisco City Directory lists the Gellert brothers and their father Charles as builders, working from their home at 164 Otsego Avenue in San Francisco's Mission Terrace neighborhood.¹²⁰

Carl and Fred continued to work as small-scale contractors through the 1920s, primarily constructing individual single-family houses. Their business activities increased during the real estate boom of the 1920s, and in 1932, they founded the Standard Building Company.¹²¹ That same year, the Gellerts built their first full-block subdivision at Ardenwood Way off Sloat Boulevard, near the Sunset District's southernmost boundary, which consisted of 24, fully detached, expressive Period Revival houses.¹²²

Similar to other merchant builders, the early versions of Standard Building Company houses were often fully expressed version of various Period Revival styles. By the late 1930s, however, the extravagant ornament and detailing that characterized the early 1930s houses were abandoned in favor of restrained house designs that were quicker and less expensive to construct. During this time the Gellert brothers began to construct single-family row houses on a large scale in the Sunset District. Along with other Sunset merchant builders, the Gellert brothers benefited from FHA loan policies, allowing them to quickly construct entire blocks of residential tracts.¹²³

In 1939, the Standard Building Company developed the Sunstream brand of single-family houses in the Sunset District (refer to "Chapter 7: Selling and Buyers" of this context statement for more information). This enduring branding and associated marketing effort proved remarkably profitable, and by 1940 the Standard Building Company's sales doubled those of the year before.¹²⁴ The Sunstream brand was later applied to houses constructed outside of the Sunset District, and they continued to be constructed by the Standard Building Company into the 1970s.¹²⁵

¹¹⁴ "Rousseau Starts New Real Estate Brokerage Firm," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 7, 1934.

¹¹⁵ California Death Index, 1940-1997.

¹¹⁶ United States Federal Census, 1900, 1910 & 1920.

¹¹⁷ Polk's Crocker Langley City Directory, 1920-1930.

¹¹⁸ Ken Zinns, *The Tradition Continued: San Francisco's Sunset District Rowhouse* (Master's Thesis, 1983), 9.

¹¹⁹ Woody LaBounty "The Gellert Brothers and Lakeshore Park," www.outsidelands.org.

¹²⁰ Zinns, *The Tradition Continued*, 9.

¹²¹ 1932 was the first year that the Standard Building Company was listed in San Francisco City Directories.

¹²² LaBounty.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Francis Newton, "Merchandise Programs for an Operative Builder," *National Real Estate Journal*, June 1940, 38.

¹²⁵ LaBounty.

After the United States entered World War II in 1941, the Standard Building Company was forced to suspend the construction of private residences in order to redirect resources to the war effort.¹²⁶ During the war, the Gellerts shifted their focus to military housing and defense facilities throughout California, including defense projects in Oakland, Pittsburg, Stockton, Richmond, and Treasure Island.¹²⁷ In the postwar era, the firm resumed work on its Lakeshore Park subdivision, which was begun in 1941.¹²⁸ The Lakeshore development (located just south of the Sunset District), was marketed to higher-income buyers than the firm's earlier Sunset District tracts. Lakeshore Park houses were fully-detached, typically featuring split-level or ranch-style floor configurations, and included double garages.¹²⁹



1443 32nd Avenue, Standard Building Co., 1937.

The Gellert brothers were among the largest and most successful merchant builders in San Francisco's history. At peak periods of activity, the company employed crews of carpenters, with 10-20 carpenters per crew. Each crew focused on a specific house plan layout in order to maximize efficiency. As the firm expanded, they began to develop duplexes, apartment buildings, and large-scale residential tracts.¹³⁰ Over time, Standard Building Company formed dozens of smaller firms focused on different development activities including construction, sales, advertising, realty, and land investment.¹³¹ Longtime employee, Peter Brusati, recounted the role of these smaller firms:

Each one had a different name, including Bay Area Contractors, Trelleg (Gellert spelled backward) Construction Co., and Salta (Atlas backward). At one time, Standard Building Company was challenged by the IRS, and the case took three to four years. Eventually, 75 percent of the companies were allowed. Those disallowed were merged into other companies.¹³²

Standard Building Company constructed approximately 25,000 housing units in the Bay Area, including the large-scale Midtown Terrace development near Twin Peaks; Lakeshore Plaza Shopping Center; tracts in Forest Knolls, Country Club Acres, Forest Hill, Lake Merced and Mount Sutro; and dozens of blocks of single-family houses in the Sunset District.¹³³ The company was active throughout the Bay Area as well, constructing the large-scale Serramonte-Center in 1966.¹³⁴ The largest of the company's developments, Serramonte consisted of a planned-community and shopping center, with 10,000 units, a shopping mall, a 5,000-car parking lot, public high schools, churches, and recreational areas.¹³⁵

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Also, Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 57.

¹²⁸ LaBounty.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ LaBounty.

¹³¹ As quoted in Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 56.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Daniel Gregory. *From Be It so Humble: the impact of the merchant builder / land developer on the evolution of housing in the bay area 1850-1979*. UC Berkeley, Department of Architecture, February 19, 1979. Also, Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 57.

¹³⁴ "Sunstream's Serramonte," *San Francisco Examiner*. September 18, 1966

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Despite their geographic reach, the Gellert's remained rooted in the Sunset District. The Standard Building Company's headquarters were located at 1500 Judah Avenue, in the Sunset District, from 1935 to 1946. In 1946, the firm moved to a prominent Sunset District location, 2222 19th Avenue¹³⁶. The brothers likewise, lived in or near the developing Sunset District neighborhood. In 1930 Carl moved from Mission Terrace to 218 Castenada Avenue, in Forest Hill, where he lived until 1939. He then moved to 44 Sloat Boulevard, adjacent to the brothers' first development on Ardenwood Way, where he lived from 1939 to 1968. He later moved to a large house, adjacent to a grand public staircase, at 300 Magellan Avenue, in Forest Hill, where he resided from 1968 to 1974. Carl's brother, Fred, meanwhile remained in the Mission Terrace neighborhood until 1932 before moving briefly to a tract house on Monterey Blvd, then more permanently to 1030 Vicente Avenue, in the Sunset District, where he lived from until 1950. He later resided at 300 Gellert Drive, a sprawling corner lot across in the Lakeshore development, until 1978.

Raymond F. Galli / Galli Construction Co.

Raymond "Ray" Galli was born in San Francisco in 1896 to Italian and German immigrants, Frank and Frieda Galli. After working as a bookkeeper for an Oakland Dairy through the 1920s, he established a building company in 1925 with his savings.¹³⁷ The 1930 United States Federal Census reports Galli and his wife, Bernadine W. Galli, living at 1574 28th Avenue in the Sunset District with their son, Raymond, Jr. At that time, Galli's occupation was listed as "contractor/builder." Their house was part of a tract constructed by Galli in 1928–1929.

In 1931, Galli's brother, Frank, joined the firm. Frank was primarily responsible for management and administrative duties while Ray had a more prominent role on the political, public and financial fronts.¹³⁸ R. F. Galli, Inc., also known as Galli Construction Co., managed to survive the Depression, while maintaining wages of \$8 per day, which established a loyalty with his company among union leaders.¹³⁹ In 2005, Galli's son Ron explained the firm's labor-friendly philosophy, "Galli houses were built by union labor. Dad said that he didn't believe in working the guys by lantern light. Dad wanted the guys to be home with their families by 4:30 or 5 o'clock. And if they were earning a living wage, they could go buy the same house for themselves."¹⁴⁰

In 1935, Galli opened an office at 377 West Portal Avenue, at the southern edge of the Sunset District, which remained his base of operations through the 1960s. He was involved in all aspects of the business, from accounting, to construction to sales.¹⁴¹ During WWII, Galli focused on defense-related housing, building a line of "Defense Homes" for war-related workers in the Sunset District and in Richmond, California.¹⁴² The firm retained a strong presence in residential development, building in San Francisco's Sunset District, Golden Gate Heights, Lakeside, McLaren Park Terrace, Francisco Heights, Forest Hill, Merced Manor, and the Excelsior. Throughout his 35-year career, Galli oversaw the construction of more than 3,000 residences in the Sunset and Parkside Districts alone, with numerous additional developments on the San Francisco Peninsula and wider Bay Area.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Polk's Crocker Langley City Directory.

¹³⁷ Ray Galli Jr., "The Heritage of Galli Builders," August 15, 2003, www.gallieritage.com.

¹³⁸ "Brothers Form Team to Build Homes in San Francisco," January 28, 1951, unnamed newspaper clipping, San Francisco Public Library, History Room, clippings file.

¹³⁹ Galli, "The Heritage of Galli Builders."

¹⁴⁰ Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 52.

¹⁴¹ Galli, "The Heritage of Galli Builders."

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, and Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 53.

¹⁴³ Galli, "The Heritage of Galli Builders."



The Challenger, a new Galli model home, at 2278 44th Avenue, one of 33 newly constructed Galli homes, as promoted in the San Francisco Examiner, February 28, 1942.

Source: www.gallheritage.com

Galli is credited with inventing the popular “tunnel entrance” plan in the late 1930s, which allowed more light and livable space through the use of a central entryway.¹⁴⁴ The tunnel entrance features a ground-story interior passageway leading from the front of the building to a deeply recessed interior courtyard and stairway to the second story entrance.¹⁴⁵ The vast majority of tract houses built after 1939 featured the tunnel entrance.

After the war, the City of San Francisco acquired many of Galli’s undeveloped parcels in the Sunset and Parkside neighborhoods through eminent domain in order to construct schools, a library, and a community center. The unwilling loss of these properties resulted in a shift in the firm’s construction activities to areas outside of the City. In the mid-1950s, Galli retired and his son Ray Jr. assumed control of the company; he was later joined by his brother Ron.¹⁴⁶ The firm resumed development in San Francisco in the 1960s, working on the first phase of the Diamond Heights redevelopment project.¹⁴⁷ Also in the 1960s, the firm moved its offices from San Francisco to San Mateo County. The firm is still active in the home building industry, primarily in the South Bay.¹⁴⁸

Although Ray Galli is an important Sunset District builder, there are no known Galli-built houses located within the Sunset survey area.



Ray Galli’s first office. Sunset District, unknown location, circa 1930.

Source: www.gallheritage.com

¹⁴⁴ Galli, “The Heritage of Galli Builders.”

¹⁴⁵ Ken Zinns, *The Tradition Continued: San Francisco’s Sunset District Rowhouse* (Master’s Thesis, 1983), 15.

¹⁴⁶ Galli, “The Heritage of Galli Builders.”

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Ray Galli Jr. retired in 1994.

Chris McKeon / Happy Homes

Christopher Dennis McKeon was born in 1893 and raised in San Francisco's Mission District.¹⁵⁰ His parents, Irish immigrants Thomas and Lenore McKeon, owned a retail meat and butcher shop at 2160 Mission Street where McKeon and his older brother, Thomas, worked throughout the 1920s. While the 1920 census lists his profession as a silk wholesaler,¹⁵¹ highlighting his entrepreneurial spirit, McKeon registered as a butcher in both the 1930 census and his 1918 draft card.¹⁵² He graduated from Sacred Heart High School.

In 1927, McKeon began his career as a carpenter, constructing working-class housing in the McLaren Park neighborhood.¹⁵³ In the 1930s and 1940s, McKeon developed extensive tracts in the Sunset District and Berkeley, including 154 houses in University Gardens, along Rose and Sacramento Streets in Berkeley, and dozens of houses in "Rivera Heights" in the Sunset District.¹⁵⁴ By September of 1936, McKeon acquired the Happy Homes Building Company (a firm he previously worked for) and focused his residential construction activity on the then-booming Sunset District during and following World War II.¹⁵⁵ Like many Sunset builders, McKeon lived and worked in the neighborhood he helped develop, residing for a short time at 2163 29th Avenue in his Rivera Heights tract. Based on city directory research, it appears that McKeon only resided at that address the year he oversaw construction and sales of the tract. His primary Sunset District address was 346 Santiago Street, where he resided from 1932 to 1948.¹⁵⁶ McKeon's offices were located in the Sunset District at 2194 30th Avenue from 1936 to 1939. He relocated within the neighborhood several times, to 948 Taraval Street from 1939 to 1942 and to 550 Taraval Street from 1944 through 1955.¹⁵⁷

McKeon was active in the political realm of the housing industry in San Francisco, occupying numerous roles on the State Contactor License Board (SCLB) over a span of 24 years, the influential Associated Home Builders of San Francisco, the San Francisco Property Owners Association, and the Golden Gate Bridge board of directors.¹⁵⁸ As the population of the Sunset grew, so too did a need for improved transportation infrastructure, such as the extension of Highway One through St. Francis Wood, where he had settled in 1948 with his family at 405 St. Francis Boulevard. The well-connected builder organized the West of Twin Peaks Freeway Fighters and headed the Mayor's Citizens Committee on Freeways to challenge proposed freeway development in San Francisco and San Mateo Counties.¹⁵⁹ McKeon died in his St. Francis Wood home on August 29, 1968, at the age of 75. By then he had built approximately 15,000 houses and apartment units in the Bay Area.¹⁶⁰



2163 29th Avenue, built in 1937, the house McKeon resided in during construction and sales of his Rivera Heights tract.

¹⁵⁰ California Death Index, 1940-1997.

¹⁵¹ United States Federal Census, 1920.

¹⁵² World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Zinns, Ken. *The Tradition Continued: The Sunset District Rowhouse, 1920-1945*, (Master's Thesis, 1983).

¹⁵⁶ San Francisco City Directories, 1930-1955.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ "Final Rites for McKeon," August 31, 1967. Untitled newspaper clipping, on file at San Francisco Public Library History Room clippings file for Christopher McKeon.

¹⁵⁹ "Angry Charges Fly in New Freeway War," November 18, 1959. Untitled newspaper clipping, on file at San Francisco Public Library History Room clippings file for Christopher McKeon.

¹⁶⁰ "McKeon Quits Board," Untitled newspaper clipping, on file at San Francisco History Room clippings file.

Golden Gate Investment Company

The Golden Gate Investment Company was a real estate and construction firm active in San Francisco from 1918 until the late 1930s. Unlike other Sunset District firms, the Golden Gate Investment Company's sales office, at the Mechanics Building, was located in downtown rather than the Sunset District. Although little is known about the firm's early years, building permits and deed records indicate that the firm was very active in the Sunset District during the 1930s. Although the firm was only listed in San Francisco city directories from 1918 until 1929, it was documented in sales ledgers as the builder and seller of houses in the Sunset District from 1933 until 1938.

The Golden Gate Investment Company is known to have constructed dozens of single-family houses in the blocks surrounding 32nd and Rivera streets in the 1930s. Many of the houses are fully expressed Period Revival styles reminiscent of Rousseau's and Doelger's early work.¹⁶³ The firm occasionally commissioned architects to design houses—renowned architect Charles Clausen designed several clusters of buildings, including two unusual Art Deco buildings on 33rd Avenue. A cluster of five Streamline Moderne buildings constructed in 1938 on 32nd Avenue, one of only a handful of known groupings of Streamline Moderne houses in the Sunset District, is also credited to the firm.



2137 32nd Avenue, Golden Gate Investment Co., 1938.



2191 32nd Avenue, Golden Gate Investment Co., 1933. This house features unusual Period Revival roof forms and detailing not commonly found in the Sunset District.

Boyd C. and Claude T. Lindsay

The Lindsay brothers, Claude T. and Boyd C., constructed distinctive Sunset District houses during the 1930s. Born and raised in Utah—Boyd in 1893 in Eden¹⁶⁴ Claude in 1902 in Ogden¹⁶⁵—the brothers worked with their father, Walter, as ranch hands on the family livestock farm.¹⁶⁶ In 1925, the extended Lindsay family moved to San Francisco where they resided at 2381 Bryant Street in the Mission District.¹⁶⁷ Boyd and Claude, along with their brothers Clyde and Ray, worked as carpenters for the family's real-estate/construction firm, headed by Walter Lindsay. In 1927, Boyd left the

¹⁶³ Although 13 houses on this block are confirmed as built by the Golden Gate Investment Co., it is likely that the firm built an additional nine houses on this block, which were constructed in the same year and share similar building features.

¹⁶⁴ California Death Index, 1940-1997.

¹⁶⁵ Family data collection, individual records. Accessed from Ancestry.org, March 2012.

¹⁶⁶ U.S Census of Population and Housing, 1910: *Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: California*.

¹⁶⁷ Polk's Crocker Langley *City Directory*. 1925-1950.

family firm to become an independent contractor and moved to 183 Oxford Street in San Francisco's Excelsior neighborhood with his wife Mary and daughter Maude.¹⁶⁸

In 1931 Claude and Ray partnered to form a construction firm, located at 140 Duboce Street near the east portal of the Sunset Tunnel.¹⁶⁹ By 1937, Claude had opened a sales office at 820 Taraval Street in the Sunset District and in 1939, Boyd's firm operated out of 1176 Alemany Boulevard in the Excelsior District.¹⁷⁰ Although Claude and Boyd headed separate firms, they followed similar business models, constructing single houses or small clusters rather than larger development of a full block.

Claude designed houses in a range of Period Revival styles, though it is his Streamline Moderne designs that are particularly distinctive. The fully expressed Streamline Moderne houses often featured a two-story curved glass block window, circular metal balconettes, and porthole windows. Likewise, Boyd designed similarly expressive versions in Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival styles, often favoring a prominent chimney or tower element. Scattered examples of Boyd's Sunset District houses, constructed between 1936 and 1940, are located in the area bounded by 31st Avenue to 35th Avenue, from Kirkham Street to Quintara Street. It is also possible that Boyd constructed houses in the Excelsior District during this time.



Although Boyd and Claude Lindsay maintained separate firms, they clearly shared plans and design elements. 1729 27th Avenue (top left) was built by Claude in 1939 and 1722 30th Avenue (top right) by Boyd that same year.

Left: 1547 37th Avenue, Claude Lindsay, 1938.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Polk's Crocker Langley City Directory. 1932-1937.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

In the postwar era, the Lindsay brothers expanded their geographic reach to include the larger San Francisco Bay Area and expanded operations into the supply side of the construction industry. Claude and Ray acquired the “New Colma Mill and Lumber Company,” with yards and mills located in Daly City, Decoto, Montrose, Forest Hills, Auburn, Nevada City, Georgetown, and Reno (Nevada).¹⁷¹ In 1946 they allegedly sold vast quantities of lumber at illegally high rates, supplying “black market operations as far east as Massachusetts.”¹⁷²

In the 1950s, Claude was an active developer in Menlo Park, responsible for developing single-family residential tracts, apartment housing, and commercial buildings.¹⁷³ In 1955, he began construction of his signature “Lifetime Homes”—billed as affordable three bedrooms, two bath single-family houses—in Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, and San Jose.¹⁷⁴

Meanwhile, in the 1950s, Boyd served as president of the Associated Home Builders of San Francisco, alongside vice president Oliver Rousseau and director Frank Oman.¹⁷⁵ On January 19, 1985 Boyd passed away in Sunnyvale, California.¹⁷⁶

Stoneson Brothers / Stoneson Development Corporation

Brothers Henry and Ellis Stoneson headed the Stoneson Development Corporation, a merchant builder firm that constructed hundreds of single-family residential houses as well as a large-scale multi-unit planned neighborhood development in San Francisco. The Stoneson brothers, along with Henry Doelger, were known for being among the largest of the nation’s housing developers.

The Stoneson brothers were born in Victoria, British Columbia, Ellis in 1893 and Henry in 1895.¹⁷⁷ Their parents were Icelandic immigrants who immigrated to British Columbia before moving to Washington State in the late 1880s.¹⁷⁸ The brothers’ father was a shopkeeper who struggled to provide for the family; to help make ends meet, the teenage brothers worked as carpenters. According to Henry, the brothers were “driving nails around British Columbia—and we’ve been driving nails ever since.”¹⁷⁹ With no more than a grammar school education, the brothers moved to Alaska and British Columbia in their early 20s to pursue careers in the construction industry.¹⁸⁰ They both worked as foremen for contractors in Alaska, British Columbia, and later in Washington.

In 1922, the Stoneson brothers moved to San Francisco¹⁸¹ and worked in the building trades on simple odd jobs for contractors, typically involving home repairs and alterations.¹⁸² By 1928, they had partnered with Fred Thorinson,¹⁸³ a friend from Washington, took out a loan for materials, and built and sold their first house.¹⁸⁴ The firm’s sales office

¹⁷¹ “OPA Charges Black Market in Lumber; Sues for \$1,000,000” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 29, 1946.

¹⁷² “2 SF Builders Held as Price Violators,” *San Francisco Examiner*, February 20, 1947.

¹⁷³ “Plans for 475 Homes Drawn,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 29, 1946 and “Zoning Feud in Menlo Park,” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 21, 1955.

¹⁷⁴ “Real Estate Review: Farm,” *San Francisco Examiner*, January 18, 1955.

¹⁷⁵ “Builders Going to D.C Parley,” *San Francisco Examiner*, February 28, 1951.

¹⁷⁶ *California Death Index, 1940-1997*.

¹⁷⁷ *California Death Index, 1940-1997*.

¹⁷⁸ United States Federal Census, 1910.

¹⁷⁹ “S.F Builder Dies After Brief Illness,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 31, 1958.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ “Stoneson Brothers Win National Fame for San Francisco Building Projects,” *San Francisco Examiner*, July 13, 1952.

¹⁸² “The Stoneson Brothers and the City They Built,” *The Icelandic Canadian*, Spring, 1960, 33, as cited in Caroline Cartwright, “Icelandic Heritage Based on The Life Stories of Henry and Ellis Stoneson and Andy Oddstadd Jr.” *College of San Mateo Historic Library*, 1980.

¹⁸³ Polk’s Crocker Langley *City Directory*, 1927-1929.

¹⁸⁴ Cartwright.

was located at 379 Yerba Buena Street, close to the West Portal neighborhood, until 1932.¹⁸⁵ In the mid-1920s, Stoneson Brothers & Thorinson purchased a large plot of vacant land in what is now the St. Mary's Park neighborhood just south of the Mission District (between Alemany Blvd. and Crescent Ave.) and constructed a tract of single-family houses designed in various iterations of the Mediterranean Revival style.¹⁸⁶ Henry and Ellis Stoneson both lived within their St. Mary's Park tract—Henry at 225 Murray Street from 1927 to 1936 and Ellis at 235 Murray Street from 1927 to 1932.¹⁸⁷

In the 1930s to 1940s, the firm constructed smaller-scale single-family tracts throughout western San Francisco, primarily in the area around Lake Merced and in the Sunset District.¹⁸⁸ The brothers typically designed houses in traditional and Period-Revival styles, although their prominent sales office at 1 Sloat Boulevard embodied a fully expressed Streamline Moderne style.¹⁸⁹ By 1937 the firm had purchased a large swath of agricultural land in the southwestern area of San Francisco, subdivided the land, and constructed a large-scale residential tract in what is now the Lakeside District at a reported rate of one house a day.¹⁹⁰ The brothers later resided on the same Lakeside District block: 100 Stonecrest (Henry) and 30 Stonecrest (Ellis).¹⁹¹

The Stoneson brothers won government contracts to develop housing during World War II; however, their business was slowed as the war put a temporary hold on non-essential building activities.¹⁹² In the postwar years, their construction activities dramatically increased with the soaring demand for veteran housing.¹⁹³ During this time, the Stoneson brothers constructed residential tracts in cities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, notably in San Bruno, San Mateo, Millbrae, Hayward, and Daly City.¹⁹⁴

In the late 1940s, the Stoneson brothers began work on their most ambitious project to date: the "Stonestown" planned neighborhood development and shopping center just outside the Sunset District. Stonestown was built on a 110-acre site, of which 42 acres were devoted for commercial uses, and the remaining 68 acres were used for a mix of two-story townhouses and high-density apartment towers, all set in a park-like setting.¹⁹⁵ Designed by local architect Angus McSweeney, Stonestown was built to house an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 renters.¹⁹⁶ Stonestown opened to the public in 1952 at a total cost of \$35 million.¹⁹⁷ With 783 apartment units and a major shopping center, Stonestown was promoted by the builders as a "City Within A City."¹⁹⁸ When completed, Stonestown was the nation's fourth largest apartment / shopping center development.¹⁹⁹

The Stoneson brothers are credited with building close to 15,000 houses and apartment units in San Francisco, primarily in St. Mary's Park, Lake Merced, Lakeside and Sunset District neighborhoods, and an additional 10,000

¹⁸⁵ Polk's Crocker Langley City Directory, 1926-1940. The firm is not listed in City Directories from 1933 to 1935, though it is listed in 1936 with a sales office at 1630 Ocean Avenue.

¹⁸⁶ "S.F. Builder Dies After Brief Illness," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 31, 1958.

¹⁸⁷ Polk's Crocker Langley City Directory, 1927 and U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1930.

¹⁸⁸ Thorinson left the firm at some point after 1936.

¹⁸⁹ San Francisco Planning Department. *San Francisco Modern Architecture and Landscape Design 1935-1970 Historic Context Statement*. December 2010.

¹⁹⁰ "Henry Stoneson Community Builder," *City-County Record*, March 23, 1953.

¹⁹¹ San Francisco City Directory, 1951.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ "S.F. Builder Dies After Brief Illness," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 31, 1958.

¹⁹⁴ "Two Stoneson Home Areas," *San Francisco Examiner*, September 8, 1956.

¹⁹⁵ "Henry Stoneson Community Builder," *City-County Record*, March 23, 1953.

¹⁹⁶ *San Francisco Call*, July 2, 1949, image caption.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ "Stonestown: A City Within a City," *Architect & Engineer* (July 1950): 12-15.

¹⁹⁹ Woody LaBounty, "Parkmerced," June, 2006, www.outsidelands.org/parkmerced.php.

more in the larger Bay Area.²⁰⁰ The brothers served as presidents and directors of various local and national homebuilder and contractor associations. Ellis Stoneson served two terms as the president of the Associated Home Builders of San Francisco between 1942 and 1944, and was one of the founding members and the director of the National Association of Home Builders.²⁰¹ Ellis was frequently called to Washington, D.C. to assist the Homebuilders Emergency Committee in planning emergency wartime housing.²⁰²

Ellis Stoneson passed away on August 23, 1952, just a few weeks before Stonestown opened to the public.²⁰³ Henry continued in the construction industry for an additional six years, until he passed away on December 20, 1958.²⁰⁴ During the course of Henry's 25-year building career in San Francisco, he achieved considerable financial success: his estate was appraised at nearly \$1.5 million—equivalent to more than \$11 million in 2012 dollars.²⁰⁵ Unlike the unabashed self-promoter Henry Doelger, the Stoneson brothers were reportedly humble despite their success. Henry Stoneson described himself as “a guy who was handy with tools, who went on to build a lot of buildings.”²⁰⁶



1490 32nd Avenue, Stoneson, 1937.

Lang Realty Company

The Lang Realty Company was a prolific San Francisco development firm active in San Francisco from 1917 to the 1950s. Although there are no known examples of the firm's work in the Sunset survey area, a brief history of the firm is warranted because of its influential and extensive building activities in and around the Sunset District. In the mid-1920s, during a peak period of construction, Lang Realty was led by August Lang, his son August Jr., and William and Rudolph Lang. Marketed as “Real Estate, Insurance, and Home Builders,” the firm employed in-house architects, including W. E. Hughson and Harold G. Stoner.²⁰⁷ Several of the Langs had previous experience in the building industry working as managers and salesmen at major building firms including F. Nelson and Sons and Oscar Heyman and Brothers.²⁰⁸ Lang Realty expanded rapidly in the 1920s. By 1925, while in the midst of several large-scale projects in western San Francisco, the firm maintained sales offices in Downtown, Outer Richmond (5300 Geary Street), and the Sunset District (900 Irving Street).

Lang Realty, along with property owners/builders Ernest and Oscar Hueter, architect Harold Stoner, and construction supervisor Walter Zweig, were part of a development team that designed, built, and marketed the new Balboa Terrace residential development in the 1920s.²⁰⁹ Located just to the southeast of the Sunset District, the new, discrete neighborhood featured detached cottages and larger houses designed in a range of Period Revival and

²⁰⁰ “Home builder Ellis Stoneson Dies at 59,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 25, 1952.

²⁰¹ “Stoneson Brothers.” last modified 8/7/02. www.outsidelands.org/stonesons.php

²⁰² *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 25, 1952.

²⁰³ California Death Index, 1940-1997.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ “Stoneson Estate \$1,442,225,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 13, 1961; Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Adjustment Calculator

²⁰⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 25, 1952.

²⁰⁷ San Francisco City Directory, 1925.

²⁰⁸ San Francisco City Directory, 1916.

²⁰⁹ Western Neighborhoods Project, “Balboa Terrace.” Accessed February 2013, www.outsidelands.org.

Storybook styles. Detached garages were located at the rear of the lot, fronting alleyways. With early 1920s house prices hovering above \$10,000, these houses were far beyond the reach of lower- to middle-income house buyers.

Other mid-1920s Lang Realty Company developments included approximately 200 California Bungalow houses in the Parkside neighborhood, just south of the Sunset District, in 1926–1927,²¹⁰ and Laguna Honda Park, a residential development adjacent to Laguna Honda Blvd., in the mid-1920s.²¹¹

By the late 1920s into the 1930s, Lang Realty had shifted its building and marketing efforts to upper-income residential tracts in the emerging Forest Hill neighborhood, located directly to the east of the Sunset District. In that development, the firm again favored a Storybook design aesthetic, which presented a “quaint, medieval atmosphere.”²¹² It was here, too, that Lang Realty experimented with the concept of fully furnished model houses, opening a “San Francisco Model House” for the “educational purposes in better homecraft,” to showcase the houses’ many design features, from tiles, to door locks, to an automatic refrigerator.²¹³

By the 1930s, the growing firm had expanded its reach far beyond western San Francisco. In 1939, Lang Realty boasted a downtown headquarters, two local branch offices near Sherwood Forest (200 Casitas Avenue) and West Portal (850 Ulloa Street), and branch offices in Marin County (San Anselmo) and San Mateo County (Burlingame).²¹⁴ At that time, the firm’s president, August Lang Jr., and secretary-treasurer, William Lang, resided in Burlingame, while vice president Rudolph Lang resided in a prominent house near the entrance to the firm’s Balboa Terrace development.²¹⁵ By 1951, the firm had consolidated its San Francisco sales offices to the Sherwood Forest branch and a branch office at the corner of 19th Avenue at Ocean Avenue.²¹⁶

²¹⁰ Brandi, Richard and Woody LaBounty, *San Francisco’s Parkside District 1905-1957*, (March 2008), 28.

²¹¹ Brandi, Richard. *San Francisco’s West Portal Neighborhoods*, (Chicago: Arcadia Books, 2005), 59.

²¹² “Lang Realty Home Draws Thousands to Free Exhibit,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 4, 1927, 11, as quoted in “Imagination Country,” by Woody LaBounty, April 2003, on www.outsidelands.org.

²¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 23, 1926, 11, as quoted in “Imagination Country,” by Woody LaBounty, April 2003, on www.outsidelands.org.

²¹⁴ San Francisco City Directory, 1939.

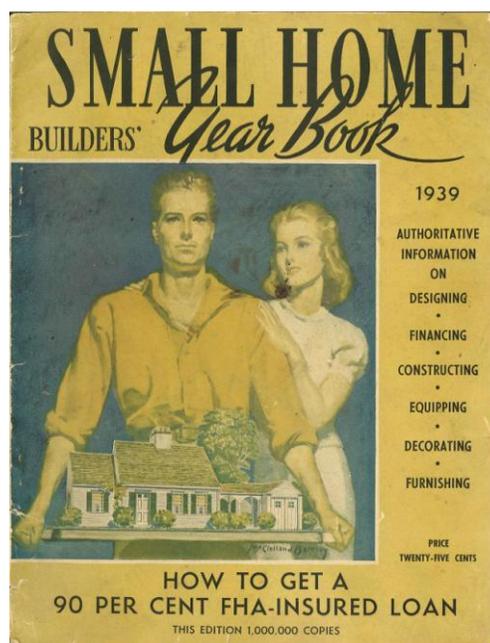
²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ The firm is listed in San Francisco City Directories as late as 1961, however, the Langs no longer appear to be associated with the firm at that point and the branch offices are no longer listed.

Small-Scale Builders

Although most residential buildings in the Sunset District were constructed by a handful of large merchant building firms, there are numerous examples of one-off speculative houses, personal residences, and small clusters of houses built by aspiring builders. A review of building permits within the survey area reveal a minimum of 60 builders and firms.²¹⁷ Even within Doelger City, the area bounded by 26th Avenue, 36th Avenue, Noriega Street and Quintara Street, and credited to Henry Doelger, numerous non-Doelger buildings are found. Occasionally these smaller-scale builders engaged the services of architects, though it appears that many were designed in-house or were purchased standardized house plans. A notably popular house plan favored by smaller builders was a standard French Provincial design, near-identical examples of which are scattered throughout the Sunset District. Unlike Mediterranean Revival or Spanish Colonial styles, which featured myriad design elements, entryways, and window forms, the French Provincial house often appears in identical forms with minimal variation.

Builders were not interested in advancing architectural styles; their concerns were focused on constructing buildings that met FHA specifications and sold quickly. This was particularly true for smaller-scale builders who held less capital than larger firms and needed more immediate returns on their investment. House-plan catalogs and a range of publications were produced to assist the small-scale builder, who often had little or no experience in the building trades and/or real estate development. Various guides counseled prospective builders on modern features and trends, cautioned against too radical a style, and provided inspiration for materials, ornament, detailing, and styles. One 1930s guide argued, “The popular future style trends in this country seem toward the continued adaptation and modification of the historical styles. Thus a tested style, modified and adapted to developments of research and science will result.” Another guide cautioned against too modern a style, arguing that a “radical and ultra style soon becomes déclassé and a burden,” adding that “for expensive houses an openness of plan, large plate glass windows, great expanse of walls and roofs, expensive gadgets and visionary experiments may be possible, but the great majority of families neither want nor can afford too radical a style.”²¹⁸



This catalog from 1939 offered guidance ranging from financing, to construction, to interior design.

Many smaller-scale builders offered additional related services. For example, George H. McCarthy, a Sunset District builder and resident, advertised “Real Estate, Builders, Renting and Leasing, General Insurance, Homes Built to Order,” in the 1931 San Francisco City Directory.²¹⁹

The following section provides information about some of the Sunset District’s smaller-scale builders. In many cases, relatively little is known about the careers of these builders. The information provided below was pieced together through building permit histories, census records, and listings in San Francisco city directories.

²¹⁷ Based on a review of more than 200 building permits. Building permits were not pulled for every property within the survey area.

²¹⁸ House Plan catalog.

²¹⁹ McCarthy’s office was listed as 2049 Irving Street.

Henry Horn / Castle Building Company

Henry Horn was born on April 3, 1900 in San Francisco.²²⁰ He was raised in San Francisco and worked as a “railroad clerk” during his late teenage years and early 20s.²²¹ By the time he was 27, he had formed his own construction firm called the “Castle Building Company,” with a downtown office at 830 Market Street.²²² The Castle Building Company was active from 1928 until 1932.²²³ The firm is known to have built single-family houses in the Sunset District between 1928 and 1931, including a small tract of four split-level houses on Rivera Street and 33rd Avenue (right). Split-level houses are exceptionally rare in the Sunset District and this tract, designed by architect Donnell Jaekle, is the earliest known grouping in the Sunset District.²²⁴



Although the Castle Building Company was active only for a limited number of years, Henry Horn remained in the real estate industry for 40 years,²²⁵ developing both industrial and commercial buildings.²²⁶ During World War II Horn led the Office of Price Administration in San Francisco, and he later served as a member of the San Francisco Board of Realtors.²²⁷ He died on November 13, 1970 at age 70.²²⁸

Herman Christensen²²⁹

Herman Christensen was born on December 4, 1892 in Sweden and immigrated to the United States in 1913.²³⁰ Christensen first lived in Queens, New York, where he worked as a carpenter with his older brother Edward. By 1929, Christensen had moved to San Francisco, where he initially resided in the Mission District and was employed as a builder.²³¹ From 1929 until 1955 Christensen was an active builder in both San Francisco and San Mateo County.²³² He worked from his home at 1422 27th Avenue in the Sunset District from 1930 to 1939 and, later, from his apartment at 1399 21st Avenue. Christensen is known to have engaged the services of architects. For example, 2214 29th Avenue (right) was designed in the Mediterranean Revival style in 1936 by architect Charles O. Clausen.²³³ In June 1977, at the age of 85, Christensen passed away in Menlo Park California.²³⁴



²²⁰ California Death Index, 1940-1997.

²²¹ United States Federal Census, 1920 and World War I Registration Draft Card, September 12, 1918.

²²² Polk's Crocker Langley *City Directory*, 1928.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 1928-1932.

²²⁴ Building Permits, City and County of San Francisco Public Works, Central Permit Bureau.

²²⁵ “Henry Horn Dies at 70, S.F. Real Estate Man,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 14, 1970.

²²⁶ “Henry Horn, S.F. Realtor,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 14, 1970.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ “Henry Horn Dies at 70, S.F. Real Estate Man,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 14, 1970.

²²⁹ Note, not to be confused with H. Christian Christiansen, a Danish building contractor who died in 1941.

²³⁰ *California Death Index, 1940-1997* and New York State Census, 1915.

²³¹ Polk's Crocker Langley *City Directory*, 1929.

²³² *Ibid.*, 1929-1955 and “City Property Held Up; Bid Probed,” *San Francisco Examiner*, October 15, 1954.

²³³ Building Permits, City and County of San Francisco Department of Public Works, Central Permit Bureau.

²³⁴ *California Death Index, 1940-1997*.

Ragner Monson

Ragner Monson was born on August 18, 1899 in Sweden.²³⁵ In 1917, at age 18, he immigrated to San Francisco.²³⁶ Monson was an active builder and carpenter in San Francisco from 1924 to 1939.²³⁷ He was listed in San Francisco city directories as a carpenter or contractor, though he never listed a fixed office location. Little is known about Monson's career as a builder in San Francisco, though he is credited with a pair of single-family houses on 29th Avenue in the Sunset District. Built in 1931, 2270 and 2274 29th Avenue (right) display an unusual stair configuration with forward-facing tradesman doors. The houses are designed in the Mediterranean Revival style. In 1940, Monson moved with his wife and children to San Mateo and later to Contra Costa County. He died May 25, 1982 in Vacaville, California at age 93.²³⁸



Christian Anderson

Christian Anderson was born in Norway in 1880 and immigrated to San Francisco with his wife Marie Anderson in 1907.²⁴⁰ In 1910, the Andersons shared a house with Christian's older brother, Charles, at 27 Fountain Street in Noe Valley.²⁴¹ Both Christian and Charles got their start in the building industry as carpenters, eventually working as independent contractors.²⁴² By 1930, the Anderson brothers had moved, with their families to adjacent houses on the 100 block of Granville Way, close to Mount Davidson and the West Portal neighborhood.²⁴³ At that time, Christian and Charles were both listed as contractors in the building industry.²⁴⁴

Christian was active in the Sunset District during the 1920s to 1930s, where he specialized in the construction of single-family stucco-clad houses, many designed in similar Mediterranean Revival and French Provincial styles.²⁴⁵ Known examples of his work from 1927 to 1939 are located in the area bounded by 30th and 32nd Avenues between Moraga and Judah Streets.²⁴⁶ Anderson's tracts were typically quite small, consisting of a handful of adjacent houses.



1451 31st Avenue, 1937.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Swedish Emigration Records, 1783-1951. (www.ancestry.com).

²³⁷ Polk's Crocker Langley City Directory. 1924-1940.

²³⁸ California Death Index, 1940-1997.

²⁴⁰ United States Federal Census, 1910 and 1930.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Aside from four small groupings of houses in the Sunset District, little is known about exactly how many building Christian Anderson constructed in San Francisco.

²⁴⁶ San Francisco Assessor's Office, Sales ledgers, Block no. 1822, 1914-1938.

Small-scale builders and buyers

A sample of buildings constructed by small-scale speculative builders and builder-owners are described below.²⁴⁷



In 1938, Sunset resident A. Hallgren built this French Provincial house at 2278 29th Avenue for \$3,500 as a speculative property. Hallgren lived several blocks away at 1594 29th Avenue. The following year, he either sold or rented the property to David and Alice Richardson.



Contractor Thomas J. Sullivan constructed a cluster of houses on the 2200 block of 32nd Avenue in 1931. Permits indicate that he was the owner and builder and did not engage an architect. The stair configuration—shaped cheek walls with a tradesman door located directly beneath the stair landing—is unusual for the Sunset District.



This Tudor-inspired house, at 2218 35th Avenue, features a rare cat-slide roof. The house was designed by its original owner, 28-year-old carpenter Harry Oscar Skold, and built by the California Construction Company in 1938. Skold, a Swedish immigrant, who was formerly employed as a seaman, resided here with his wife Dorothy.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Examples are not necessarily of architecturally significant buildings.

²⁴⁸ 1938 Original Building Permit; United States Federal Census, 1930; and San Francisco City Directories, 1935-1945.



J.F. Johnson of Ville Noret, Inc. owned, designed, and constructed this cluster of Mediterranean Revival houses on the 2100 block of 35th Avenue, in 1937.



In 1933, property owner C. Rege, hired architect Irvine Ebbets to design a Spanish Colonial Revival house at 2230 27th Avenue. The Churrigueresque window surrounds are unusual for a tract house. This investment property was constructed for an estimated \$6,000.²⁴⁹ The 2200 block of 27th Avenue was slowly built up over a 20-year period. Beginning in 1929, numerous builders constructed from one to four buildings along the block face, with the last small cluster built out in 1950.



In 1940, property owners Eugene and Joanna Howard hired builder George Larsen to build this Mediterranean Revival house at 2270 33rd Avenue. The five-room building was estimated to cost \$4,600. At that time, Eugene was a driver at the San Francisco Emergency Hospital. The couple moved from a Mission District flat to their new house, where they resided until at least the 1960s.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Department of Public Works Building Permit Application (1933).

²⁵⁰ Department of Public Works Building Permit Application (February 21, 1940) and San Francisco City Directories: 1941, 1951, 1961.

The following table documents the active years of Sunset District builders identified during the research phase of this context statement. It includes known Sunset District builders active from 1925 to 1950, with a particular focus on builders active in the Sunset District survey area. Builder information was primarily gathered from original building permits, sales records, and listings in San Francisco City Directories. It should be considered a starting point, not a comprehensive list of Sunset District builders.

Builder Firm	Owner	Active Years ²⁵²	Associated Architect
A & D Realty Co.	-	1937–1938	None listed
Allred, Clifford S.	-	1915–1934	None listed
Anderson, Christian	-	1920–1938	None Listed
Anderson, N. W.	-	1936–	None Listed
Anthony, T.	-	1939–	None listed
Arnott, Jason & Son	-	1927–1949	-
Baldinson, J.	-	1940–	None Listed
Ballit, Frederick	-	1931–	None Listed
Bay Cities Building Co.	-	1936–	C. O. Clausen
Bendon, G. O.	-	1927–	None Listed
Biltwell Construction Co.	“Louie” Epp	1941–2013	G. W. Claudius (1940s)
Blinco, C. O.	-	1934–1944	None listed
Boe, A. M.	-	1932–	None listed
Castle Building Co.	Henry Horn	1928–1932	Donnell Jaekle
Charlson, Charles	-	1948–	None listed
Christiansen, Herman		1929–1955	C. O. Clausen
Costello, Lawrence	-	1915-1957	None listed
Costello, Michael & Son	-	1947–	G. W. Claudius
Doelger, Henry Builder Inc.	Henry Doelger	1925–1940s	Staff designers
Epp, Louis (see Biltwell)	“Louie” Epp	1925-1941	G. W. Claudius (1940s)
Galli Construction	Ray F. Galli	1938–1968	Edmund Denke (designer)

²⁵² “Active Years” is defined as years listed in the San Francisco City Directories and/or the year listed on original building permits.

Getz, Sol & Sons	Sol Getz	1891-1955	
Golden Gate Investment Co.	-	1933-1938	C. O. Clausen
Hallgren, A.	-	1937-	None listed
Happy Homes Building Co.	S. K. Burdsell / Chris McKeon	1936-1941	Suffoegnon, A.
Harrison, Klint	-	1938-	None listed
Heyman, Oscar	-	1920s	
Johnson, Nels E. ²⁵⁴	-	1925-1942	None listed
Laney, Albert & Mary	-	1928-	None listed
Lang Realty Co.	August, Rudolph & William Lang	1917-1950s	Harold Stoner and W. Hughson
Larsen, George	-	1940-	None listed
Lindsay, Boyd		1925-1953	None listed
Lindsay, Claude T.		1925-1955	None listed
Marian Realty Co.	Oliver and Arthur Rousseau	1922-1933	Oliver and Arthur Rousseau
McCarthy, Charles	-	1936-1942	None listed
McCarthy, George H	-	1923-1946	None listed
McKeon Happy Homes (aka McKeon Construction Co.)	Chris McKeon	1940-1966	None listed
Miller, J. T. & Francis	-	1932-	None listed
Mirsky & Sons	-	1931-	None listed
Mittelstaedt, Oscar E.		1923-1953	None listed
Monson Brothers	Ragner Monson	1907-1950s	None listed
Nelson, Frank F.	-	1937-	None listed
Northern Co. Title Investment Co.	-	1937-1939	None listed
Rockledge & Frieze	-	1927-	None listed
Standard Building Company / (Sunstream Homes)	Carl & Fred Gellert	1932-1972	None listed
Stoneson Development Company	Henry & Ellis Stoneson	1920s-1950s	None listed

²⁵⁴ Note: A Nels E. Johnson and Nels J. Johnson were listed simultaneously in city directories as carpenter/contractor. Nels J. was listed from 1927-1938. Occasionally Nels was spelled "Nils."

Sullivan, Thomas J.	-	1924–1933	None listed
United Investment Corp.	-	1943–	None listed
Vukicevich, Peter E.	-	1936–	Irvine, R. R.
Warden, Allan	-	1932–	None listed
Weitz, Albert	-	1939–	None listed
Woods, Fred	-	1931–	None listed
Young, Samuel	-	1935–	C. O. Clausen

Architects

Few Sunset District builders were trained architects. Many of the larger builders employed staff designers and a few commissioned consulting architects. A handful of architects are known to have designed Sunset District tract houses including Charles O. Clausen, Charles W. Claudius,²⁵⁵ R.R. Irvine, A. Suffoignon, Edmund Denke, and Donnell Jaekle.

Of particular note is Charles O. Clausen who designed remarkably expressive Period Revival houses in the Sunset District in the mid-1930s. Clausen was raised in San Francisco, apprenticed with the architecture firm Meyer and O'Brien at 18, earned his architect's certificate by age 23,²⁵⁶ and opened his own office by age 24, working in the Phelan and Hearst Buildings.²⁵⁷ His commissions include the Larkspur Mission Revival style City Hall (1913, extant)²⁵⁸ and numerous grand apartment buildings in neighborhoods throughout San Francisco in the 1910s-1920s. In the early 1930s, possibly correlating to the downturn in building activities as a result of the Great Depression, Clausen shifted his focus to the design of smaller-scale, single-family houses. From his home office in the Richmond District, Clausen Studios, Clausen accepted commissions from small-scale builder developers to design houses for modest-income home buyers. A review of building permits indicate that Clausen was one of only a handful of outside architects commissioned by Sunset District builders. Clausen is known to have worked for the following Sunset District builders: Bay Cities Building Company, Samuel Young, Golden Gate Investment Company, Herman Christensen, and E.W. Perkins.

Clausen's best-known Sunset District commission—and one that likely led to commissions from other Sunset District home builders—is the Doelger Building at 320 Judah Street in the Inner Sunset. Designed in 1932 in a striking Art Deco style, the building served as the headquarters, sales office, and warehouse for Henry Doelger's then-emergent construction firm. The Doelger Building is one of a handful of buildings Clausen is known to have designed in a Modern style. His Art Deco design of modest single-family two houses on 33rd Avenue, in the Sunset District, appears directly inspired by the boxy, stepped design of 320 Judah Street.

²⁵⁵ During a peak period of housing production in 1939-1940, architect Charles W. Claudius also worked for the FHA as an "Examiner." (Source: San Francisco City Directories).

²⁵⁶ Dennis McCarthy, "Charles O. Clausen, Architect," July 1926 column, unnamed newspaper.

²⁵⁷ United States Census, 1910 and San Francisco City Directories.

²⁵⁸ www.MarinHistory.org (Accessed August 2012)

Chapter 7

Marketing, Sales, and Buyers

Nationwide, the 1930s–1940s witnessed an onslaught of advertising, contests, and inventive sales techniques to lure the expanding base of prospective house buyers. One popular marketing strategy involved staging fully furnished and decorated “model homes.” Across the country, builders of new subdivisions promoted and displayed full-scale houses, staged with the latest in furnishings, appliances, and equipment. Influential publications, such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*, glamorized the new technological advances and household gadgets.²⁵⁹ Many of these design innovations and related marketing efforts specifically targeted middle-class women, who had less access to domestic help than women of previous generations.²⁶⁰ Houses were designed and marketed for efficiency—with women’s labor and comfort at the fore—and utilized the latest in modern technologies and interior arrangements. The gendered domestic spheres of the house—particularly the kitchen—were marketed as scientifically planned and featured modernized equipment.²⁶¹ In 1935, for example, the General Electric Company (GE) sponsored an architectural competition to incorporate GE appliances into residential design. The winning entrant managed to incorporate 70 GE features into a single house.²⁶²

In addition to appliances and equipment, furniture stores and interior designers engaged in cross-marketing strategies by decorating model houses in the latest designs. These nationwide design trends and marketing strategies were readily embraced by Sunset District merchant builders, who attempted to promote and differentiate their products through a variety of marketing techniques including staged model homes, house naming contests, extensive newspaper advertising, branding, product placement in radio programs, and personal services such as free repair and house calls. The following sections document the marketing strategies employed by Sunset District builders and the key demographics of home buyers.

Model Homes

Brothers Oliver and Arthur Rousseau, of the Marian Realty Company, and Henry Doelger were early promoters of the fully furnished model homes in the Sunset District. Doelger embraced model homes as a marketing strategy early in his building career. In 1932, prior to the mass construction that characterized the Sunset District later in the decade, Doelger displayed several fully furnished model homes on 31st Avenue and 18th Avenue. With evocative names such as The Windsor, The Abbey, The Chatel, and Casa Alhambra, Doelger sought to evoke an upscale atmosphere in the midst of a crippling economic depression. The Rousseau brothers’ first known model homes—described in advertisements as the “Sunset House”—were located at 1564 and 1568 36th Avenue.²⁶³ Both featured identical interior plans, including the new “Patio Plan” interior courtyard, though each featured markedly different façade styles. An article in the Real Estate section of the April 29, 1932 *San Francisco Chronicle* gushingly described the houses:

So great was the interest manifested by home lovers in the display that upon the sale of the Sunset House, it was decided to open a new exhibit in an adjoining home to accommodate the thousands who were unable to see Sunset House and to demonstrate different ideas for the decoration of a bungalow home.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁶⁰ As noted in Gwendolyn Wright’s *Building the Dream* (1981), the number of domestic servants in the United States decreased 50% from 1900 to 1920. Most of these were day workers, rather than live-in servants, 72.

²⁶¹ *The Home Idea Book*. (Johns Manville, 1939), 2.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ “Sunset House Welcomes Public,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 9, 1932.

²⁶⁴ “Exhibit Shows Artistry of Decorations,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 29, 1932.

In 1933, the Rousseau brothers' Storybook-inspired developments, centered around 35th Avenue and Kirkham Street, featured 18 model homes decorated and furnished by O'Connor Moffat & Co., which were enthusiastically described and reviewed in both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner*.²⁶⁵ The "Surprise House," at 1548 35th Avenue, reportedly attracted more than 6,000 visitors during its opening, the largest crowd ever experienced by the Marian Realty Company.²⁶⁶ In addition to its three-car garage (an unusually large capacity for that time) and the Rousseau-originated interior patio ("surprise") courtyard, the Surprise House showcased new interior features such as a triangular kitchen sink and a large dressing room closet which provided a desirable direct connection from the master bedroom to the bathroom.

Known Marian Realty (Rousseau brothers) model homes include: 1535 35th Avenue, July 1932;²⁶⁷ La Belle Brittany, 1500 block of 35th Avenue, 1933; 1578 35th Avenue, April 1933; 1545 34th Avenue, March 1934;²⁶⁸ 1573 34th Avenue, March 1934;²⁶⁹ and 3031 Kirkham Street, 1934.



The "Surprise House," 1548 35th Avenue.

Sunstream Homes / Standard Building Company

In contrast to the luxury marketed by the Rousseau brothers, the Standard Building Company began to market "Sunstream Homes," a brand of low-cost (priced under \$6,000) single-family houses in the Sunset District in 1939.²⁷⁰ The name resulted from the merging of the word sun (from the Sunset District) and streamline, reflecting the company's promise of a "streamlined lifestyle" in the Sunset District.²⁷¹ As part of its initial campaign, more than 100 5' x 10' billboards with Sunstream slogans were stationed at corners throughout the neighborhood. The first block of Sunstream Homes was constructed on 31st Avenue between Quintara and Rivera Streets.²⁷² The brand proved tremendously popular in the Sunset District, and in the following decades the Standard Building Company applied the Sunstream name to more expensive houses constructed throughout the City.²⁷³

Furnished model homes were an important component of the Sunstream Homes marketing strategy. The Standard Building Company contracted with a major furniture dealer to furnish a new model home every six weeks, often in a

²⁶⁵ "Low Cost Era Nears End in Sunset Tract," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 14, 1933. It should be noted that the exact locations of these 18 model homes is unknown. Research was only able to determine locations of those mentioned in the text.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ "Classy Group Model Homes Being Erected," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 16, 1932.

²⁶⁸ "Two Emporium Homes Beckon," *San Francisco Examiner*, March 17, 1934.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Woody LaBounty. "The Gellert Brothers and Lakeshore Park," Western Neighborhoods Project website: www.outsidelands.org.

²⁷¹ Francis Newton, "Merchandise Programs for an Operative Builder," *National Real Estate Journal*, June 1940, 38.

²⁷² *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 9, 1939; and Newton, 38.

²⁷³ LaBounty, *The Gellert Brothers and Lakeshore Park*.

“modern classical” or “Swedish modern” design.²⁷⁴ The names of model homes initially incorporated “Sunstream” with the nearest street, e.g., the Sunstream Rivera, on Rivera Street,²⁷⁵ while later model homes were assigned catchier names such as the Sunstream June Bride and the Sunstream Security.

Other marketing schemes employed by the Standard Building Company—as highlighted in a 1940 article in the *National Real Estate Journal*—included the creation and promotion of the Standard Free Service Department, an on-call free repair service available to home buyers for the first few years after purchase.²⁷⁶ Heavily promoted in radio and print advertisements, the Department consisted of trained repairmen and a slogan-heavy repair truck, stocked with hinges, tiles, and paint, to fix “any of the little things that can go wrong when a home is being broken in.”²⁷⁷

The Standard Building Company also marketed its homes through a regular radio program, “I Want a Home.” The half hour Sunday noontime program featured musical recordings and occasional special guests, such as the local Girls’ High Songsters, who performed in May 1940. The Standard Building Company was plugged during the program as was a regular five-minute discussion of FHA loans, the benefits of home ownerships, and even the suggestion that a down payment for a Sunstream house was an excellent wedding present.²⁷⁸ Mention of the radio program was touted in the company’s newspaper sales advertisements.²⁷⁹



The Standard Building Company’s Free : truck and repairmen in 1939.

Source: National Real Estate Journal, June 1940.

²⁷⁴ Newton, *National Real Estate Journal*. Note: Advertisements in the *San Francisco Chronicle* occasionally refer to “Swedish Modern.”

²⁷⁵ Newton, *National Real Estate Journal*, 38.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷⁸ Newton, *National Real Estate Journal*, 40.

²⁷⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, advertisement, May 5, 1940, 14.



Display of Sunstream Homes newspaper advertisements produced by Standard Building Company, 1939-1940. Note that house exteriors are rarely or minimally visible.

Source: National Real Estate Journal, June 1940.

Doelger's Model Homes & Contests

By the late 1930s, prolific builder Henry Doelger relied heavily on the showcase model home as a sales and marketing strategy and, like other merchant builders of that era, frequently partnered with furniture stores to provide the interior design and furnishings. Each year, Doelger featured a constantly rotating display of model homes for public view. In 1940, for example, his policy was to keep two stylistically distinct and differently priced model homes continuously on display. Doelger's model homes were heavily advertised in local newspapers, often with accompanying articles extolling the building's style, latest technological gadgetry, value, and availability of FHA mortgage financing.

Patriotic names for model homes were common leading up to and during World War II. Model homes included The American, at 1958 30th Avenue (Doelger, 1941), the Freedom House, at 1738 43rd Avenue (Doelger, 1942), the Challenger, 2278 44th Avenue (Galli, 1942), and Sunstream Security, at 76 Middlefield Drive (Standard Building Company, 1942).²⁸⁰ Other model house names attempted to evoke affluence or an aura of exclusivity. A sample of Doelger's model homes, as advertised in promotional brochures and the real estate section of the weekend *San Francisco Chronicle*, include:

1930s

The Windsor, 31st at Lawton, 1932²⁸¹
The Abbey, 1651 31st Avenue, 1932
The Chester, Ortega at 18th Avenue, 1932
Casa Alhambra, 1687 31st Avenue, 1932
The Chatel, 1651 31st Avenue, 1932
El Cadre, 1647 31st Avenue, 1932
The Wiltshire, 1925 17th Avenue, 1933 (Sunset Terrace)
The Normandie, 18th Avenue at Ortega, 1933
The Riviera, 1917 17th Avenue, 1933
The Padre, 33rd Avenue at Kirkham, 1935
The Deauville, 33rd Avenue at Kirkham, 1935
The Yorkshire, 33rd Avenue at Kirkham, 1935
The Charm House, c.1936
Maison Distingue, 1855 26th Ave, September 1939
The Trenton, 1843 27th Avenue, September 1939

1940s

The Lexington, 1766 16th Avenue, January 1940
The Doe-Val (as in Doelger-Value) at 1858 30th Avenue, February 1940
The Forty Finer, 1538 40th Avenue, March 1940
The Westchester, 1619 33rd Avenue, May 1940
The Headliner, 1687 33rd Avenue, May 1940
The El Dorado, 1614 41st Avenue, June 1940
The Georgian, 1739 33rd Avenue, August 1940
The Lynbrook, 1646 34th Avenue, August 1940
The Doelworth, 1754 19th Avenue, August 1940
The House of Wonders 1710 35th, February 1941
The Lafayette, 1750 34th Avenue, 1941²⁸²
The American, 1958 30th Avenue, 1941
The Styleocrat, 3430 Moraga Street, 1941
The Courtland, 1746, 35th Avenue, 1941

The onslaught of new model homes on display is noted in a May 12, 1940 *San Francisco Chronicle* article, "every week in San Francisco is New Home week these days."²⁸³

During the peak of building construction and intensive sales competition, Doelger sponsored several house naming contests. This marketing strategy was designed to generate excitement, advertisement copy, and news stories, and to physically lure contestants to the Sunset District to view his completed houses. The first known contest, publicized in January 1940, focused on Doelger's latest model home, located at 1935 29th Avenue. Applicants were required to visit the house in order to enter the contest. The first-prize winner would receive \$100 and a new kitchen stove.²⁸⁴ Later

²⁸⁰ Western Neighborhoods Project, www.outsidelands.org.

²⁸¹ Model houses from 1932-1935 are mentioned on page 41 of the promotional booklet, "Doelger Built Homes of the Moment," *Henry Doelger, Builder, Inc.* 1936.

²⁸² The Lafayette, American, Styleocrat, and Courtland are listed in Lorri Ungaretti's book *Stories in the Sand, San Francisco's Sunset District, 1847-1964*.

²⁸³ "Always New Home Week," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 12, 1940, 12.

²⁸⁴ "Oh, For a Name!" *San Francisco Examiner*, January 13, 1940. Note: According to the Consumer Price Index calculator, \$100 in 1940 equates to the buying power of more than \$1,600 in 2012.

that year, Doelger held a second contest in August for a model home located at 1754 19th Avenue.²⁸⁵ The winning name: “The Doelworth.”²⁸⁶

Name This **DOELGER STERLING**
HOME OVER **\$300** IN PRIZES

FIRST and SECOND PRIZES \$100 Cash & \$136.50
 New 1940 Wedgewood Store
 (Choose your first prize winner)
THIRD PRIZE \$50.00 CASH
FOURTH PRIZE \$25.00 CASH
 Rules and facts in promotional folder.

NAME PLEASE

Enter the NAME PLEASE contest today. Cut your official entry blank of the MODEL HOME, 1935-29th Avenue. Just give us a living name for this outstanding model and get yourself in the running for one of these prizes.

See this Beautiful MODEL HOME
1935-29th AVE.

Come with us and visit our first model home of 1940. Pass through the distinctive patio entrance with its beautiful red garden. Relax in the sea-view living room overlooking a magnificent sweep of the Pacific. See the tiled sunlight kitchen attractively finished in white with red trim—near the club car breakfast nook, the streamlined bath, and a host of other distinctive features. Here is your ideal home—awaiting your inspection.

Furnished by Sterling Furniture Co.

One of the most interesting examples of modern interior decoration, using streamlined motifs in its massive lines. Selected from the very latest models of the Springs. The model is one of the finest specimens ever created by Sterling decorators.

HENRY DOELGER

Left: Contest advertisement, *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 7, 1940.

Below: Doelger’s “The Lafayette” model home (1941) at 1750 34th Avenue.



The adoption of fully furnished “model homes” as a marketing strategy was likely limited to the Sunset District’s large-scale merchant builders, including Chris McKeon, Ray Galli, and the Stoneson Brothers, though none appear to have embraced the strategy as thoroughly as Henry Doelger and the Standard Building Company. Reflecting on the building activities of that time, the Galli brothers stated, “People would look at a model house, then pick one under construction that they wanted to buy. I think that was new at the time, at least for San Francisco. Before that, many builders just built one home at a time.”²⁸⁷ Known Galli model homes include: The Carmel, 1554 39th Avenue, January 1940; The Queen Anne, 1550 39th Avenue, January 1940; The May Time, 2223 43rd Avenue, 1942; The Spring Haven, 1574 39th Avenue, February 1940; Casa Moderna, 1590 39th Avenue, March 1940; The Thrift House, 3324 Moraga Street, May 1940; The Holiday House, 2163 44th Avenue, 1942; The Parkway, 2627 37th Avenue (1940); Priority House, 2191 44th Avenue, 1941; The Rivera, 2191 45th Avenue, 1941; Chatelet Merced, 3007 20th Avenue, 1938; and the Vicente, 2161 Vicente Street, 1941.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ “Thousands Enter Name Contest,” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 31, 1940.

²⁸⁶ Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 65.

²⁸⁷ From an oral history interview with the Galli sons Ron and Ray Jr., conducted in 2005 by Lorri Ungaretti and printed in *Stories in the Sand*, 47.

²⁸⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* advertisements and Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 51.

Cross Marketing

In the 1930s to 1940s, cross marketing between builders and related stores and suppliers was common practice. Sales brochures and other builder-produced marketing materials in San Francisco frequently contained advertisements from businesses supplying services, furnishing, or equipment such as venetian blinds, painting supplies, plaster ornamentation, custom upholstery, and wallpapering. Newspaper advertisements for furnished model homes were funded, in part, by furniture stores such as Sterling, Redlick-Newman, and Lachman Bros. Advertising costs were shared. The Standard Building Company, for example, paid 60% of the cost of model homes advertising, while its associated furnishings store paid 40%.²⁸⁹ As evidenced by the copious number of ads and special weekend sections devoted to real estate, local newspapers benefited from prolific builder advertisements and reciprocated with glowing “articles” highlighting the rapidly expanding building industry. A review of the *San Francisco Chronicle* weekend real estate section from the 1930s to 1940s revealed rampant boosterism, highly complimentary copy of local builders, and articles that reinforced paid advertisements.

Cross-marketing materials also included promotional literature, such as a 50-page booklet, “Doelger Built Homes of the Moment,” commissioned by Doelger in 1935. In addition to glowing text, photographs, and poetry devoted to Doelger homes, this free booklet contained advertisements for 47 local products and services related in some way to the production or purchase of a Doelger house, including banks and insurance companies; furniture and drapery stores; suppliers of plumbing, gas, and lighting fixtures; lumber and paint companies; hardware and nails suppliers; various contractors (foundations, decorative stonework, electrical work, iron work, plastering, stucco work, excavation, landscaping, roofing, cabinetry, wallpapering, and wood flooring); cleaning suppliers; moving and storage companies; automobile dealers and service stations; and even a muralist.²⁹⁰ This extensive cross-marketing effort hints at the widespread impact and “trickle down” effect of FHA loans designed to stimulate the construction industry and promote home ownership.

The following is one of several poems by Thatcher Covely included in the 1935 promotional booklet “Doelger Built Homes of the Moment.”²⁹¹

*Contentment*²⁹²

A Doelger Built Home is our castle ...
Our dream house that came true.
He built it ... we dreamed it
While courting ... we two.

It isn't a mansion with acres of ground,
But a cozier built home is hard to be found—
So quiet ... so peaceful ... so modern and neat,
It's nice to reside on a Doelger Built street
Where contentment and beauty blend into one,
And then sweet repose when worktime is done.
Is it no wonder we're happy living out there
In a Doelger Built Home so roomy and fair—
Out in the “Sunset” where sunsets are gold,
In our Doelger Built Home we're going to grow old.

²⁸⁹ Newton, *National Real Estate Journal*, 38.

²⁹⁰ Thatcher Covely, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*. (Promotional booklet published by Henry Doelger Builder Inc., 1935. Note: Muralist Harry Tyrrell described his interior murals in Doelger's homes as “completing a symphony of color and enhancing the value of the home.”)

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁹² Covely, *Doelger Built Homes of the Moment*, 21.

Sunset District Builder Sales Offices

Most of the large-scale merchant builders constructed visually prominent sales offices in the Sunset District or in nearby neighborhoods. The sales offices were often boldly modern in design, unlike the majority of their house designs. The buildings were frequently pictured on promotional materials, serving as company advertisements, and housed the sales, office, and warehouse/storage function of the larger firms. Examples of known Sunset District builder sales offices are pictured below.



Henry Doelger's Sunset District sales office at 320 Judah Street. Built in 1932, with a horizontal addition in 1940. The building is extant.



McKeon's Happy Homes sales office at 550 Taraval Street. McKeon moved offices frequently and occupied three other Sunset District sales offices during his career, including a temporary sales office onsite during initial sales at Rivera Heights. 550 Taraval Street is extant.



Standard Building Company sales office at 2222 19th Avenue in the Sunset District. The building is extant, though heavily altered.²⁹³

Source: San Francisco Public Library History Center, September 1943.

²⁹³ Other Standard Building Company offices and support buildings included 1500 Judah Street (office), a lumber mill on Sloat Blvd. and warehouses on Vicente Street. Source: Ungaretti, *Stories in the Sand*, 55.



Gallie sales office at 377 West Portal Avenue, southeast of the Sunset District. The building is extant.

Source: www.gallieheritage.com

Buyers

Due to economies of scale, efficient Fordist production, and new government-backed FHA mortgages, Sunset District builders were able to offer affordable homes and the possibility of home ownership to a wider range of household incomes. The clear targets of many builders' marketing efforts were San Francisco's working-class and middle-class families. An analysis of the 1940 United States Federal Census reveals that early residents of Sunset District tract houses shared many common characteristics, including:²⁹⁴

Housing Ownership. Nearly all of the single-family houses were owner-occupied with just 3% occupied by renters. The average value for most homes was approximately \$6,000, with house values ranging from \$4,900 to \$8,000. The handful of renters paid an average of \$45 per month rent.

Family Units. Most households were composed of a married couple, with many of these households containing one or two children. However, there were scattered exceptions to the nuclear family unit, including childless married couples, multi-generational family units, and households with lodgers. Households headed by a single, divorced, or widowed adult were more likely to contain lodgers. Two female lodgers, for example, resided with property owner William Schutte at 2142 31st Avenue. A few doors down, 29-year-old divorcée Glee Taylor lived with a 21-year-old female lodger; both worked as nurses. Likewise, it was not unusual for a household to include various in-laws or elderly parents. A few households, particularly those with elderly relatives, employed live-in servants. Some households contained multiple generations, for example, renters Don (an unemployed tailor) and Veronica MacDonald (homemaker) shared their two-bedroom house at 1539 33rd Avenue with their daughter, son-in-law, and two school-aged grandchildren. Down the block, a well-paid banker lived at 1591 33rd Avenue with his wife, daughter, son-in-law, two grandchildren, and live-in servant.

Race / Ethnicity. 100% of residents were listed in the census as "White." The vast majority (89%) of residents were American citizens, with most born in California. Immigrants were primarily from western European countries, with many from Ireland and Italy.

Education: A large number of adults (31%) completed no more than a grammar school education. Very few (14%) attended any college and only a handful of residents completed a four-year college education.

²⁹⁴ Based on documentation and analysis of 1940 United States Federal Census records for six discrete builder tracts ranging in size from 12 to 44 houses located within the Sunset survey area. This research was conducted in summer 2012 by San Francisco Planning Department intern Jessica Childress.

Occupations: Adult men reported high levels of employment, primarily in working-class, service-oriented, or government jobs. Common occupations included salesmen, clerks, policemen, and firemen, and the average annual salary for men hovered around \$2,000. In December 1940, Chris McKeon, director of the Associated Home Builders of San Francisco, cited a study that 85% of the families purchasing new homes in San Francisco had incomes of less than \$2,000 per year.²⁹⁵ A surprisingly large number of women (nearly 40%) worked in jobs outside of the home. Typical occupations included retail sales, clerical work, nursing, teaching, and phone operators. A few women worked in family-owned businesses. Women with small children tended not to work outside the home.

²⁹⁵ Newspaper clipping dated December 14, 1940, from the San Francisco Public Library History Room, hanging file collection. The newspaper name and article title are missing.

Chapter 8

Architectural Styles: Evolution, Design Elements, Character-Defining Features

The primary architectural styles found in Sunset District builder tracts—Spanish Colonial Revival, Mediterranean Revival, French Provincial Revival, Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, Storybook, and Streamline Moderne derive from diverse historical, cultural, and architectural sources, theories, and practice. This chapter provides information on the associated design elements, stylistic evolution, and character-defining features as expressed in residential tract buildings from 1925 to 1950. It is important to note that while pure expressions of the styles documented in this chapter are found in the Sunset District, it was also common for buildings to display a fusion of design elements associated with several styles.

EVOLUTION

The Panama Pacific Exposition held in San Diego in 1915 heralded a major stylistic shift away from the late Victorian and Classical styles that had dominated early 20th century architectural design. San Diego's Exposition featured a complex of Spanish Baroque buildings, designed by southern California architect Bertram Goodhue, which had a profound impact on residential design throughout California. Exposition buildings provided a different architectural focus, one that was attuned to the American West. This California-based vocabulary drew primarily from Spanish-Colonial influences, which, in addition to referencing the Spanish-Mexican heritage of the area, were easily adapted to California's climate and natural environment. In the latter 1910s and 1920s, the resulting styles such as Mission Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Churrigueresque, were adapted for the construction of prominent new religious and civic buildings. In San Francisco, a fusion of these styles also dominated the single-family residential architecture of the Sunset District during the 1920s and 1930s.

Spanish Colonial Revival / Mediterranean Revival

The terms "Spanish Colonial Revival" and "Mediterranean Revival" are often used interchangeably to describe a style that incorporates red Spanish clay tile roofs, stucco walls, and arched window and door openings. This style of building is also referred to occasionally as Mission Revival, Spanish Eclectic, Pueblo Revival, Mediterranean Colonial, and Monterey Revival.²⁹⁶

Although architectural style classifications are renowned for their lack of consistency, the categorization of Spanish Colonial Revival and Mediterranean Revival styles are notably malleable. This context statement recognizes the limitations of classification and does not attempt to resolve this ongoing dialogue; rather, a set of working definitions was developed in order to aid the understanding of the Spanish-influenced style as expressed in tract houses designed for the 1920s to 1940s middle-income home buyer. For the sake of simplified classifications—recognizing the interchangeability and overlap of stylistic elements—this historic context statement adopts the following definitions:

Mediterranean Revival is a catch-all umbrella term that includes buildings with Spanish, Mexican, Italian, and Moorish influences. It takes an inclusive approach and applies to buildings that clearly reference vernacular design elements—red Spanish clay tile parapets or coping, stucco exterior cladding, and arched window or door

²⁹⁶ Spanish Colonial Multiple Property Submission (Mobile, Alabama):F-1; Gregory, *Be It So Humble*, 108; McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*; Morgan, *The Abrams Guide to American House Styles*; Cunliffe and Loussier, *Architecture Styles Spotter's Guide: Classical Temples to Soaring Skyscrapers*; Gebhard, "The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California (1895-1930), *Society of Architectural Historians*, (May 1967): 131-147.

openings. The style reflects an eclectic synthesis of design elements from the Mediterranean region. It is the most common style of single-family builder tracts constructed in the mid-1920s to mid-1930s.

Spanish Colonial Revival references California's Spanish Colonial and Missions legacy. It is rooted in Spanish Colonial architecture as built in California, rather than Spain. In addition to red Spanish clay tiles, stucco cladding, and an emphasis on arches, this style references the thick adobe walls, shaped parapets, exposed timber, bell towers, and ironwork of the original Spanish Mission buildings. The style does not reflect attempts to recreate the past faithfully, rather it draws from the romantic associations of the Spanish Colonial rule. Examples of Spanish Colonial Revival tract houses are less common than those classified as Mediterranean Revival and in the Sunset District were constructed primarily in the early 1930s.

The above definitions are intended to guide identification of the easily recognizable examples as well as subtler evolutions. Character-defining features of each style are described in more detail in the following chapter.

By the late 1930s, the Spanish Colonial Revival and Mediterranean Revival style had run its course in San Francisco. After 1940, few Sunset District builders adopted design elements from these styles, opting instead for Tudor Revival, French Provincial, Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional styles.

Period Revival Styles

San Francisco's 1920s to 1950s merchant builders favored Period Revival styles including Spanish Colonial Revival, Mediterranean Revival, Tudor Revival, and French Provincial. Drawing from this range of Period Revival styles, builders created stylized and individualized façades that are unified by materials, setback, massing, and form. The introduction of Period Revival styles, and its close relative, the Storybook style, in the 1920s is credited in part to the overseas experiences of American soldiers during World War I. At that time, soldiers were exposed to structures of rural European countryside and postcards transmitted these images to a wider audience back home. Articles and advertisements frequently invoked "Old World charm." One advertisement claimed "Quaintness is secured through the use of a tower."²⁹⁷ Builders constructed tracts of miniature castles and chateaus, incorporating medieval designs and elements from vernacular European structures. Sunset District builder Chris McKeon advertised his houses as "miniature chalets of France of the days of the monarchy."²⁹⁸

Storybook

Storybook, a subset of Period Revival style, is an exuberant style inspired by medieval European vernacular forms. Emblematic features such as turrets, dovecotes and the meandering transition from masonry to stucco attempted to evoke picturesque, aging European buildings.²⁹⁹ The primary hallmarks of the Storybook style are exaggerated, often cartoonish interpretation of medieval forms, the use of artificial means to suggest age and weathering, and whimsical designs.³⁰⁰

Storybook style, also referred to as Fairy Tale, Disneyesque and Hansel & Gretel, originated in Los Angeles in the early 1920s. Its introduction in Los Angeles is linked to the silent film industry, in particular the experience of Hollywood set designers in evoking the exaggerated appearance of age and ruins; the fact that many silent films were set in Europe; and the "demand for homes that reflected the fantasy of film."³⁰¹ In Los Angeles, the style was

²⁹⁷ Arrol Gellner, *Storybook Style: America's Whimsical Homes of the Twenties*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

²⁹⁸ "52 New Homes Being Erected," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 1936.

²⁹⁹ Gellner, *Storybook Style*, 18.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

incorporated into the design of a few small residential tracts and large architect-designed custom houses with finely crafted wrought iron, carved wood, and rubble stone.³⁰²

In the late 1920s, Storybook style migrated to the San Francisco Bay Area, with significant architect-designed residential compounds built in Berkeley and Oakland. Bay Area architects associated with the style include Walter Dixon, Carr Jones, and William Raymond Yelland. It is not known if these architects designed houses in San Francisco or in the Sunset District. In San Francisco, the style dates to a short time frame, approximately 1930 to 1935 and known examples are largely limited to several residential tracts in the Sunset District as well as individual houses scattered citywide. Builder Henry Doelger and architect/builder Oliver Rousseau are known to have developed Storybook-inspired tracts in the Sunset District. San Francisco architect Harold Stoner designed many exuberantly picturesque Storybook houses in the nearby Balboa Terrace development in the late 1920s and his designs graced the pages of Dixon's *Home Designer and Garden Beautiful* magazine.³⁰³ There is significant overlap between Storybook and Period Revival styles constructed at that time.

Colonial Revival

To a lesser extent, Sunset District builders incorporated design elements associated with the Colonial Revival style. Colonial Revival houses in a variety of iterations (Dutch Colonial, Georgian Colonial, American Colonial, and Cape Cod Colonial) were a dominant house style nationwide, particularly on the East Coast, in the 1920s to 1940s. A late-1920s article in *Popular Mechanics* noted the Colonial Revival's enduring popularity, "Styles in houses come and go like styles in cars ... It pays to build in a style as liquid in public approval as a Liberty bond at a bank. Colonial is such a style."³⁰⁴ The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia during the 1930s exposed the style to a wider audience. By the early 1940s, the number of source books on colonial architecture had more than doubled, reflecting the widespread acceptance and popularity of the style.³⁰⁵

However, the Colonial Revival style was rarely fully expressed in Sunset District tract houses. Design elements associated with the style were not common in the Sunset District until the early 1940s, and were typically simple gestures toward the style rather than a full embrace. Modest design gestures such as the presence of shutters and wood cladding at the gable end of Sunset District tracts signified Colonial influence.

³⁰² Gellner, *Storybook Styles*, 18.

³⁰³ Proctor, Jacquie. "Bay Area Beauty: The Artistry of Harold G. Stoner, Architect. www.jacquieproctor.com/haroldstoner

³⁰⁴ As quoted in David Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 22, No. 2/3, 1987, 109.

³⁰⁵ Gebhard, "The American Colonial Revival in the 1930s," 111.

DESIGN ELEMENTS

Sunset builders incorporated a range of historicist details at the primary façade to create an overall sense of variety of residential tracts. Decorative design elements created individualized primary façades, while standardization in terms of height, setback, massing, and plan modulation united the individual buildings into a coherent, uniform streetscape.

Common design elements, applied to a range of styles, include arches, balconettes, multi-light casement windows, textured stucco cladding, balconies, recessed entries, parapets, double-hinged garage doors, mansard roof forms, and Spanish clay tile. Less common design elements include weathervanes, cusped Moorish arches, decorative sound holes, decorative curls, urns, niches, turrets, decorative stairway tiling, and medieval elements such as machicolated hoods.

It is interesting to note that Sunset tract houses constructed during the height of the Depression, roughly 1930 to 1935, typically display more expressive design features, more ornamentation, and façade articulation than buildings constructed after 1938. Despite a climate of economic austerity, builders in the early 1930s emphasized picturesque features that are largely missing in tract houses constructed just a few years later. By the late 1930s, the economics of mass production largely prohibited the façade articulation and ornamentation that characterized earlier tract house production. The definitions and photographic examples below provide a sample of common, prominent, and/or unusual design elements found on Sunset District tract houses and should not be considered a comprehensive list.

Machicolations

Machicolations are a projected feature of an English castle. In medieval times, stones were dropped through openings in the machicolated projection to injure attackers massed at the base of a defensive wall.³⁰⁶ Sunset District builders incorporated this design element above doorways, garage openings, and arched openings of residential buildings. Machicolated features are associated with Mediterranean Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Storybook-influenced styles.



Machicolations above the garage door of 2270 33rd Avenue, constructed by George Larsen in 1940 (left) and 1523 33rd Avenue, designed by Oliver Rousseau in 1931 (right).

³⁰⁶ Gellner, *Storybook Style*.

Turrets and Towers

Turrets and dovecote-inspired towers are prominent features of early 1930s Sunset District residential tract buildings. Dovecote structures for raising pigeons were common in the French countryside. Often circular in form, dovecotes were built as freestanding structures or incorporated into the ends of rural European buildings. In the Sunset District, these muscular design elements were primarily incorporated into Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, and Storybook influenced styles in the 1930s and are rarely found after 1938. Occasionally, the primary entrance was inserted into the base of a tower.



The entry of this Doelger (1932) at 1601 31st Avenue (left) is located completely within a double-height tower. At right, the Rousseau (1933) at 1577 34th Avenue features a two-story crenellated tower. Both buildings incorporate second-story Monterey-style balconies.

Crenellations

Crenellated design elements evoke the look of castle fortresses. Crenellations were added to parapets of Spanish Colonial Revival and Mediterranean Revival buildings constructed in the late 1920s to early 1930s.



2211 32nd Avenue, Mirsky & Sons, 1931.



1590 32nd Avenue, Henry Doelger, 1931.

Niches

Inset decorative niches and projecting faux niches were occasionally incorporated on the ground story of mid- to late-1920s tract houses, particularly those of the Mediterranean Revival barrel front design. The niches were typically arched and slightly recessed. A single niche was standard, though occasionally a building featured a niche on other side of the garage. Niches appear more common in tracts rather than individual buildings and were occasionally added to every other building within a tract. In ancient Roman times, niches (known as aediculae) were shrines that housed statues or small altars.



A projecting faux niche on 28th Avenue.



Niche located with an entry alcove.

Tradesman and Garage Doors

Garage doors from the 1920s to 1940s were typically paired double-hung paneled wood doors with multi-light glazing. Garages from this period display a wide range of decorative elements. In the 1940s, builders began to introduce overhead awning garage doors, which were typically more restrained in design. Today, there are very few buildings with original garage doors.

Though perpendicular to the primary façade and minimally visible from the street, the tradesman door was typically a wood paneled, multi-light door that often featured the same muntin pattern as the primary fenestration.



1726 22nd Avenue, 1936.



1658 21st Avenue, 1928.

Shutters

Non-functional wood shutters are a common design element of Sunset District tract houses constructed after 1940. The shutters are most often incorporated in the design of Minimal Traditional and Colonial Revival buildings and are often the primary decorative element for such buildings. Most shutters are solid wood or louvered, however, there are examples of shutters with cut-out designs including flowers, trees, and simple geometric shapes.



2727 Ortega Street, 1943.



2075 29th Avenue, 1939.

Balconies / Balconettes

Balconies and balconettes were incorporated in tract houses designed in a broad range of architectural styles. The design and materials of balconies were often a direct reflection of a building's style. Balconies inspired by the Monterey Revival style feature a full- or partial-width second story cantilevered balcony with a turned or sawn wood balustrade. Streamline Moderne balconies display horizontal wood speedline railings or delicate metal railings featuring interlocking circles and geometric shapes. Occasionally, Streamline Moderne balcony walls are solid, with stucco curves. Most fully expressed French Provincial houses feature one or more balconettes, topped with elegant decorative railings. Historic photos occasionally show people standing on tract house balconies, though many balconies and balconettes appear to be strictly decorative.



Above left: 1470 32nd Avenue, C.T. Lindsay, 1939.

Above Right: A cluster of French Provincial houses on 26th Avenue display elegant single and paired metal balconettes.



Left: 2238 Santiago Street, 1949.

STYLES AND CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

The following section provides a brief description of the primary and secondary styles found at the street-facing façades of Sunset District residential tracts constructed from the 1920s to 1950. The nine primary styles—Mediterranean Revival, Barrel Front Mediterranean Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, French Provincial, Storybook, Streamline Moderne, Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional—are the most commonly found styles in the Sunset District. A list of character-defining features is included along with photographs of buildings that display a range of expressions of each particular style. Not every listed character-defining feature must be present for a building to fit a particular style. Many buildings display characteristics of several styles rather than a pure expression of a single style. Examples are provided to demonstrate the various iterations of each style and are not necessarily an indication that a particular building is architecturally significant.

The five secondary styles are less commonly found in the Sunset District and/or display design influences that are more typically incorporated into the design of other styles. The secondary styles include: Pueblo, Churrigueresque, Monterey Revival, Art Deco, and Mixed / Eclectic / Transitional.

Primary Styles

MEDITERRANEAN REVIVAL

Mediterranean Revival is an umbrella term that encompasses design elements associated with Italian domestic buildings and the Moorish architecture of North Africa. It is often used interchangeably with the term “Spanish Colonial Revival,” though for the purpose of this historic context statement, it is called out as its own style. When first constructed as a residential revival style, it was marketed by builders as “Spanish” or “Mediterranean.”

The style had a long shelf life for the design of Sunset District tract houses, from the mid-1920s to the early 1940s. Significant examples of the Mediterranean Revival style typically display a full expression of the style including complexity of design, expressive massing, and articulated façades, and would draw from the character-defining features outlined below. Restrained versions of the style that incorporated some features and gestures of the style, yet displayed flush façades, simple plans, and minimal ornamentation, would not qualify as architecturally significant.

Character-defining features of the Mediterranean Revival style as expressed in c.1930-1940 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Gabled roof form topped with red Spanish clay tile
- Stucco cladding, often thickly textured
- Arched door openings and/or stairway entry arch
- Arched windows, often in a ganged configuration
- Muscular chimney stacks and/or towers
- Ornamentation can include molded rope mullions, vigas, cartouches, machicolations, and niches



1443 31st Avenue, Christian Anderson, 1936.



1561 34th Avenue, Rousseau, 1933.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

BARREL FRONT MEDITERRANEAN REVIVAL

The barrel front Mediterranean Revival house displays the characteristic elements of the Mediterranean Revival style—stucco cladding, Spanish clay tile, and emphasis on arches—within a constrained barrel front façade form. The barrel front refers to a bowed bay which projects over the garage opening. These buildings were typically constructed in the Sunset District from the mid-1920s until c.1931 and are reflective of the high level of standardization and “cookie cutter” approach taken with the earliest tracts. Barrel front Mediterranean Revival houses are most often the only style found in these early tracts. Occasionally, houses within these tracts alternated between crenellated and shaped roof parapets.

Significance is generally derived from the overall architectural effect of a grouping of barrel front Mediterranean Revival buildings and the relationship among neighboring buildings, rather than the importance of any one building.

Character-defining features of the barrel front Mediterranean Revival style as expressed in c.1925 -1931 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Shaped or crenellated parapet capped with Spanish clay tile
- Bowed bay window that projects above the squared or chamfered garage opening
- Smooth or textured stucco exterior cladding
- Wood sash windows, arched or squared, set in a ganged configuration of four or five openings
- Geometric muntin patterns, particularly at the upper quarter of the windows
- Applied ornament including cartouches, shields, inset geometric shapes, and/or corbeled cornice detailing
- Decorative niches or windows occasionally flank the garage opening



2257 29th Ave., 1926.



1478 31st Ave., Anderson, 1932.



1438 28th Ave., 1930.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

SPANISH COLONIAL REVIVAL

The terms “Spanish Colonial Revival” and “Mediterranean Revival” are often used interchangeably to describe a style that incorporates red Spanish Clay tile roofs, textured stucco walls, and arched window and door openings. Spanish Colonial Revival is differentiated from Mediterranean Revival in that it additionally references the thick adobe walls, shaped roof forms, exposed timber, bell towers, and ironwork of 18th century Mission churches. The style draws from the design elements associated with a romanticized interpretation of the Spanish Colonial rule. When first constructed as a residential revival style, it was marketed by builders as “Spanish.”

Examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style as applied to Sunset District tract houses often displayed greater variation in design and stylistic elements than other Period Revival styles. Its zenith in the design of Sunset District tract houses occurred c.1931–1935. Significant examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style would typically display a full expression of the style including complexity of design, expressive massing, articulated façades, and would draw from the character-defining features outlined below. The appearance of thick adobe walls is one of the style’s essential features. Restrained versions of the style that incorporated some features and gestures of the style, yet displayed flush façades, simple plans, and minimal ornamentation, would not qualify as architecturally significant.

Character-defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style as expressed in 1930-1940 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Gable roof forms topped with red Spanish clay tile
- Muscular chimney stacks and/or towers
- The appearance of thick adobe walls
- Stucco cladding, often thickly textured
- Ground level entry alcoves
- Arched, chamfered or squared window or door openings, often with robust, turned wood mullions
- Ornamentation and design elements can include quatrefoils, wrought iron grilles, niches, sound holes, balconies, ogee arches and Churrigueresque detailing



1631 31st Avenue, Doelger, 1932.



1690 32nd Avenue, F.F. Nelson, 1937.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

TUDOR REVIVAL

Inspired by post-medieval English architecture, the Tudor style was occasionally applied to the façade of Sunset District tract houses. The style is occasionally referred to as Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Half-Timber.³¹⁰ Houses designed in the Tudor Revival style are fairly rare and display significant variability in design elements. Applied half-timbering imitates medieval or post-medieval buildings with “wattle-and-daub” or plaster in-fill. There are no known groupings of Tudor Revival tracts, individual examples of the style are found interspersed amongst other Period Revival façades. The style was applied to Sunset District tract houses from the early 1930s to the early 1940s.

Significant examples of the Tudor Revival style would typically display a full expression of the style including complexity of design, expressive massing, articulated façades, and would draw from the character-defining features outlined below. Restrained versions of the style, commonly constructed in the 1940s, that incorporated some features and gestures of the style, yet displayed flush façades, simple roof forms, and minimal gestures toward half-timbering, would not qualify as architecturally significant.

Character-defining features of the Tudor Revival style as expressed in c.1930 -1940 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Steeply pitched, prominent forward-facing gable roof forms, often with a cat slide or cross-gabled parapet
- Asymmetrical primary façade
- Stucco exterior cladding, smooth or roughly textured
- Half-timbering, invoking the appearance of wattle and daub
- Windows are typically multi-pane casement windows, ganged, topped with transoms, and set in squared, rather than arched surrounds
- Verge boards and finials
- Wood cross-hatched decorative elements, occasionally found at the balconette or verge board.



1641 31st Avenue, Doelger, 1932.



1531 32nd Avenue, Standard Building Co., 1935.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

³¹⁰ Gellner, *Storybook Style*, 10.

FRENCH PROVINCIAL

Common in tracts of Period Revival houses, the French Provincial style often displays highly standardized “cookie cutter” designs. There was typically very little variability in design as applied to Sunset District tract houses in the 1930s. By the 1940s, a stripped iteration of French Provincial was one of the dominant wartime and postwar styles used in residential tracts. A mansard roof is the primary element indicating the style in tracts from the 1940s.

Significant examples of the French Provincial style display a full expression of the style with a particular emphasis on exuberant ornamentation and draw from the character-defining features outlined below. Restrained versions of the style (common in the late 1930s to 1940s) that incorporated some features and gestures of the style, such as the mansard roof, yet displayed flush façades and minimal ornamentation, would not qualify as architecturally significant.

Character-defining features of the French Provincial style as expressed in c.1930 -1950 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Mansard roof form
- Symmetrical building features
- Smooth stucco exterior cladding
- Elegant, slender, ogee arched wood-sash windows with upper divided sash (primarily in early 1930s)
- Metal balconettes with elegant patterned metal railing
- Quoins at the corners and scored stucco at the ground story
- Applied ornament, including rows of dentils, finials, cartouches, shields, robust brackets, urns, and widow’s walk



1462 32nd Avenue, C.T. Lindsay, 1939.



1454 32nd Avenue, Christian Anderson, 1939.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

STORYBOOK

Storybook houses are exceptionally rare in San Francisco. In tract houses, the style is differentiated from related Period Revival styles by its exaggerated, whimsical designs and use of applied masonry accents to create the appearance of crumbling ruins. Faux stone accents were often applied at the building's base or on the chimney to create the illusion of weathered and aged exposed stonework beneath crumbling stucco.

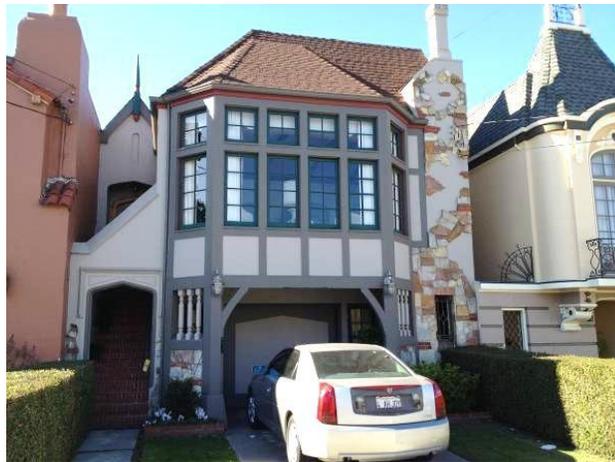
The whimsical style was applied to Sunset District tract houses for a period limited to the early 1930s. Significant examples of the Storybook style would typically display a full expression of the style including complexity of design, expressive massing, and articulated façades, and would draw from the character-defining features outlined below. Restrained versions of the style that incorporated some features and gestures of the style, such as rubble accent detailing, yet displayed flush façades, simple plans, and minimal ornamentation, would not qualify as architecturally significant.

Character-defining features of the Storybook style as expressed in c. 1931-1937 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Complex or asymmetrical roof forms
- Stucco exterior cladding, often embedded with rusticated masonry accents
- Wood sash windows, often multi-lite
- Occasional use of half-timbering
- Muscular chimney stacks
- Use of false stone accents to evoke a sense of age and weathering
- A range of decorative elements, which may include finials, balusters, balconettes, and applied ornament



1681 31st Avenue, Doelger, 1932.



2659 17th Avenue, 1933.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

STREAMLINE MODERNE

In San Francisco, the period of construction of Streamline Moderne buildings began in the late 1930s and continued to at least 1950. It was the first widely adopted Modern architectural style in San Francisco and, as expressed in tract houses, represented a radical departure from traditional and revival design vocabularies. The first known examples of Streamline Moderne tract building in the Sunset District neighborhood were constructed by Henry Doelger and Jason Arnott in 1937. It is one of the rarest styles found in San Francisco's residential builder tracts. There are scattered examples of adjacent Streamline Moderne houses; the style, however, is typically interspersed amongst a variety of revival styles.

Significant examples of the Streamline Moderne style would typically display a full expression of the style. Restrained versions of the style that incorporated some features and gestures of the style, yet displayed flush façades, and minimal ornamentation, would not qualify as architecturally significant.

Character-defining features of the Streamline Moderne style as expressed in 1937-1950 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Flat roof form
- Rounded corners and curved surfaces
- Balconies of curved stucco, often with wood speedline railings or decorative metal railings with circular motifs
- Smooth stucco exterior cladding
- Glass block window walls, occasionally curved
- Squared and porthole window openings
- Casement and fixed windows with horizontal muntins
- Applied speedlines (bands of horizontal piping, also known as "speed whiskers"³¹⁵), particularly near the cornice
- Absence of historically derived ornamentation



2815 Moraga Street, Doelger, 1940.



1786 36th Avenue, C.T. Lindsay, 1939.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, recessed garage opening, double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

³¹⁵ Michael F. Crowe, *Deco by the Bay: Art Deco Architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (New York: Viking Studio Books, 1995), 3.

COLONIAL REVIVAL

Design elements associated with the Colonial Revival style did not typically appear in Sunset District tract houses until the late 1930s. These elements were fairly minimal, often the presence of shutters and decorative wood cladding at the gable end signified Colonial Revival influence. The emergence of the style in the Sunset District corresponded with the mass production of tract houses in the 1940s and the associated decrease in façade ornamentation and expression. Considering the overall context of residential development in the late 1930s–1940s, the Colonial Revival style, as applied to Sunset District tract houses, would typically not qualify as architecturally significant. If, however, a Colonial Revival tract house displayed a full expression of the style, with complexity of plan and design, it could qualify as significant.

Character-defining features of the Colonial Revival style as expressed in c.1938–1950 Sunset District residential tracts:

- Shallow pitched roof form, often side-gabled
- Flush rather than recessed garage opening
- Smooth stucco exterior cladding
- Decorative wood window shutters
- Wood sash windows set in squared openings
- Horizontal or vertical wood board accents, particularly in the gable ends
- Scalloped trim



1310 Funston Avenue, 1941.



1746 35th Avenue, Doelger, 1940.

The list of character-defining features is not comprehensive. It does not include character-defining features of individual buildings such as one-story over integrated garage massing, awning or double-hinged garage doors, façade articulation, front yard setback, and design elements derived from a range of architectural styles.

MINIMAL TRADITIONAL

Tract houses constructed in the mid-1940s and during the immediate postwar era often fall into the category of Minimal Traditional. These mass-produced buildings are characterized by a lack of design intent and display minimal ornamentation. This restrained expression resulted from the scaling back of costly and time-intensive decorative elements in order to cut costs and speed construction. Considering the overall context of residential development in the 1930s–1940s, the Minimal Traditional style, as applied to Sunset District tract houses, would typically not qualify as architecturally significant because of the design restraint resulting from mass production. There is considerable overlap between the restrained Colonial Revival style and Minimal Traditional. Features that are characteristic of Minimal Tradition houses in San Francisco include the following:

- Shallow pitched roof form, often side- or cross-gabled
- Flush, rather than recessed, garage opening
- Tunnel entrance or straight side stair
- Smooth stucco exterior cladding, occasionally with wood board accents
- Decorative trim, often scalloped, at gable ends



2232 Santiago Street, 1949.



2282 34th Avenue, 1949.



2235 34th Avenue, Standard Building Co., 1938.



2283 34th Avenue, 1947.

Secondary Styles / Design Influences

In addition to the dominant façade styles of Sunset District houses, builders occasionally incorporated stylistic elements from the Pueblo, Churrigueresque, Monterey Revival, and Art Deco styles. The examples provided below feature uncommon design elements, pulled from specific styles, which are occasionally incorporated into the design of residential tract buildings.

PUEBLO

Often categorized as a subset of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, Pueblo is a regional style of the American Southwest. It mimics the appearance of adobe brick construction. It was not commonly adapted to residential tract architecture in San Francisco, though scattered examples do exist. In the Sunset District, it appears that Pueblo-influenced designs were constructed in the late 1920s. The primary character-defining features, as expressed in residential tract buildings, are its boxy massing with flat roof, stucco cladding, and projecting vigas (a wood member that projects out from the adobe walls of Spanish Colonial buildings).



1554 32nd Avenue, Doelger, 1931.

CHURRIGUERESQUE

This style is a variant of the Spanish Colonial Revival and references Moorish and Baroque motifs. The term Churrigueresque refers to Spanish Baroque architect and sculptor José Benito de Churriguera, whose elaborate decorative style was prolific throughout central Colonial Spain. The primary character-defining feature of the Churrigueresque style is the highly decorative stucco work that surrounds windows or entryways. As expressed in c.1930 to 1936 residential tracts, the style typically features ogee arched windows, stucco exterior cladding, and roof forms capped with Spanish clay tiles.



2166 32nd Avenue, Golden Gate Investment Co, 1935.



2219 32nd Avenue, Oscar E. Mittelstaedt, 1933.

MONTEREY REVIVAL

Monterey Revival is a variant of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. It is differentiated by the presence or suggestion of a full- or partial-width balcony and less commonly, an L-shaped house plan. Residential tract buildings influenced by Monterey Revival design are uncommon and, typically, a balcony is the primary design element to suggest the style.



1569 34th Avenue, Oliver Rousseau, 1933.



2830 Lawton Street, Oliver Rousseau, 1932.

ART DECO

Introduced in the 1920s, the Art Deco style is associated with San Francisco's commercial and institutional buildings and is less commonly found in domestic architecture. There are very few Art Deco single-family houses in San Francisco; however, the Sunset District contains scattered examples of tract buildings that display Art Deco stylistic elements, which can include a flat roof form with stepped roofline detailing; ziggurat forms; bold geometric elements, chevrons, and vertically oriented decorative lines; and the absence of historicist detailing. The onset of the Great Depression in 1930 and the resultant widespread decrease in building activity curtailed the construction of Art Deco buildings. As a result, relatively few buildings in San Francisco were designed in this style, which was largely replaced by the curvier Streamline Moderne in the late-1930s.



2083 29th Avenue, F. & T. Rossich, 1939.



1487 31st Avenue, L.L. & M.L. Wold, 1937.

MIXED / ECLECTIC / TRANSITIONAL

Although not a style unto itself, there are scattered examples of buildings in the Sunset District that display a mixed fusion of unrelated styles. Such examples may incorporate glass brick, portholes, or speedlines—design elements associated with Streamline Moderne styles—with features more typically associated with Mediterranean or Colonial Revival styles. A fusion of the Streamline Moderne style with traditional design elements such as a hipped roof and shutters may reflect a builder’s desire to incorporate emerging Modern design without alienating potential house buyers with too radical a style.



1526 31st Avenue, Standard Building Co., 1936.



This eclectic house on 21st Avenue displays Art Deco ziggurats (filled with glass block) and porthole garage windows, with Spanish clay tile and arches inspired by Mediterranean Revival design.



1767 31st Avenue. This 1940 building displays elements from multiple styles: Colonial Revival (shutters), Streamline Moderne (porthole windows), and Monterey Revival (wide projecting balcony).

Chapter 9

EVALUATION GUIDELINES: Individual Properties and Historic Districts

The following section provides an overview of the criteria for significance and the seven aspects of integrity used to evaluate properties in the Sunset survey area. It contains general information about the criteria of significance and aspects of integrity adopted by the National Park Service and the California Office of Historic Preservation as well as detailed guidance for evaluating the significance and integrity of residential tract buildings in the Sunset District. In addition, specific criteria and integrity considerations are outlined for both individual evaluations and potential historic district evaluations.

Significance

Significance establishes why, where, and when a property is important. The criteria for significance, as established by the National Park Service, are identical at the federal, state, and local level. The criteria apply to buildings as well as landscapes, structures, and objects. Properties are evaluated for significance within their relevant historic contexts using the following adopted criteria:

National Register	California Register	Definition
Criterion A	Criterion 1	Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Criterion B	Criterion 2	Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
Criterion C	Criterion 3	Displays distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, work of a master, high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
Criterion D	Criterion 4	Yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Integrity

Integrity is the authenticity of physical characteristics from which resources obtain their significance. When a property retains its integrity, it is able to convey its significance, its association with events, people, and designs from the past. Integrity is the composite of seven qualities: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The condition and alteration history of a building's interior spaces are not considered for this historic resource survey. The National Register defines the seven aspects of integrity as follows:³¹⁷

1. Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. Except in rare cases, the relationship between a property and its historic associations is destroyed if the property is moved.
2. Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. Design can also apply to districts. For districts significant primarily for architectural value, design concerns

³¹⁷ National Park Service. National Register Bulletin No. 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 2002).

more than just the individual buildings or structures located within the boundaries. It also applies to the way in which buildings, sites, or structures are related.

3. Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the *character* of the place in which the property played its historical role. It involves *how*, not just where, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space.
4. Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. A property must retain the key exterior materials dating from the period of its historic significance.
5. Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
6. Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character.
7. Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character.

Individual Resource Evaluation

For the Sunset survey, the following considerations were used to frame common themes of potential significance associated with individual properties. The bulleted considerations are meant to guide the evaluation of significance; additional considerations may emerge during the survey process.

In addition to qualifying under at least one criterion of significance, an individual property must retain sufficient integrity to convey this significance in order to qualify for listing on the California or National Registers. *National Register Bulletin No. 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* provided guidance in development of the integrity thresholds. A higher threshold of integrity is required for individual resources as compared to district contributors.

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion A / California Register Criterion 1

Association with significant events in local, state, or national history

Residential tract construction from 1925 to 1950 in the Sunset District is associated with several broad contextual themes including the shift to automobile-based housing; the expansion of San Francisco into the vast sand dunes; New Deal federal financing programs such as the 1934 Federal Housing Act (FHA); mass-production; and pre- and postwar development. Nearly every house constructed during this era is generally associated with some combination of these wide-ranging themes and patterns of development. However, in order for a theme to qualify as significant under Criteria A/1, there must be a *specific* association to an event, pattern of events, or historic trends. Moreover, a Sunset District house must be associated with the specific historic context in an important way. The aforementioned themes are too broad to qualify as significant under Criteria A/1.

Associations with specific events in the Sunset District that qualify as significant under Criteria A/1 include the little-known World War I veterans home ownership assistance program, the Veterans' Welfare Board, which predated and presaged the FHA mortgage financing programs. However, it is more likely for a historic district—as compared to an individual property—to convey the significance of this important government program.

Other specific events include the innovative marketing strategies employed by builders in the 1930s. An individual named “Model House” from the early 1930s, for example, located within a residential tract, may qualify as significant as it represents an early trend in residential marketing. By the late 1930s, however, “Model Houses” were commonplace, with many builders displaying a new model houses every few weeks, therefore, later examples of such houses would not qualify as significant under Criteria A/1.

Specific themes may also include racial integration of all-White/Caucasian residential tracts or tracts that were previously marketed with deed restrictions precluding purchase by non-Whites/Caucasians. An individual house may qualify if it is an important example of residential racial integration if, for example, it is linked to an important court case related to segregation. No such properties were uncovered during the research and writing of this context statement, though existence of such properties is likely.

INTEGRITY

The aspects of integrity most important for Criteria A/1 are determined by the significant association. Likewise, the retention of essential features in order to convey significance is determined by the identified significance and period

of significance. For example, an early model house that qualifies as a significant trend in residential marketing would have a period of significance related to its use as a furnished display house, open to the public, which typically corresponded to the year of construction. Because the design of model houses was used to entice prospective buyers, a high importance is placed on integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. In such cases, the integrity analysis documented for Criteria C/3 should be consulted. On the other hand, if an individual building is significant for its association with an important segregation court case, for example, the period of significance would likely correspond to the year(s) related to the court case rather than the year of construction. Retention of the physical appearance of the building during the period of significance would, in such instances, be more important than the appearance of the building when originally constructed. Other aspects of integrity, including feeling, location, setting, or association, may, in this example, have a higher importance.

Properties associated with an important event or person should retain sufficient integrity such that “a historical contemporary would recognize the property as it exists today.”³¹⁸ In general, a lower threshold of integrity is appropriate for properties significant under Criteria A/1 or B/2, provided there is sufficient historic fabric to convey the association with a significant event, trend, or person. Buildings that are significant solely for architecture, Criteria C/3, must retain higher integrity of materials, design, and workmanship.

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion B / California Register Criterion 2:

Association with significant individuals in local, state, or national history

Sunset District tract houses from 1925 to 1950 may be significant for their association with persons significant to San Francisco’s, California’s, or the nation’s history. In such cases, a house must be closely associated with the productive life and accomplishments of a significant person. The birthplace, childhood home, or temporary residence of a significant person would not qualify under this criterion. The private homes of individual builders may qualify, if occupied during key periods of activity and development. For example, Henry Doelger’s hillside residence on 15th Avenue, from which he could view his emergent residential tracts, would qualify as significant.

INTEGRITY

The aspects of integrity most important for Criteria B/2 are determined by the significant association. Likewise, the retention of essential features in order to convey significance is determined by the identified significance and period of significance. For example, if in the late 1940s, a prominent writer produced his/her important manuscripts from a study in his/her c. 1930 tract house, the identified period of significance would be the late 1940s, rather than the original construction date. The physical fabric, as it existed in the late-1940s, even if altered from the original c.1930 design, would be considered character-defining. In such cases, integrity of association and feeling would likewise be important.

Properties associated with an important event or person should retain sufficient integrity such that “a historical contemporary would recognize the property as it exists today.”³¹⁹ In general, a lower threshold of integrity is appropriate for properties significant under Criteria A/1 or B/2, provided there is sufficient historic fabric to convey

³¹⁸ National Park Service, Bulletin No. 15.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

the association with a significant person, event, or trend. Buildings that are significant solely for architecture, Criteria C/3, must retain higher integrity of materials, design, and workmanship.

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion C / California Register Criterion 3:

Possesses distinctive characteristics of a type, style, period, or method of construction; is the work of a master designer, builder, or craftsman; or exhibits high artistic values

Sunset District tract houses from 1925 to 1950 may be significant for their architecture if they possess the distinctive characteristics of a style as expressed in the form of a single-family house. Individual examples must be distinctive, though not necessarily architect-designed, with complexity of design, ornamentation, plan, or modulation. A house with muscular massing, an articulated façade, ornamental flourishes, and inventive design elements is more likely to qualify as distinctive than is a house with restrained gestures of a specific style. Modest examples with restrained architectural expression do not qualify under this criterion. Generally speaking, considering the overall context of residential development in the Sunset District, most tract houses from the late 1930s to 1950 are modest in design—due to efforts by builders to cut labor and materials costs and decrease construction time—and would not qualify as architecturally significant under Criteria C/3.

It is relatively rare for a single house within a uniform builder tract to meet this criterion. The primary exceptions, as described below, include exceptional houses designed in fully expressed Streamline Moderne, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Storybook-influenced styles.³²⁰

Streamline Moderne tract houses are significant as they represent a radical departure from traditional and revival styles and an early adaptation of emerging Modern design to mass-produced residential tracts. It was the first Modern style available to modest income homebuyers. Streamline Moderne tract houses are exceptionally rare, with the earliest known examples constructed in 1937. Prewar Streamline Moderne tract houses are typically more expressive, in terms of design and ornamentation, than postwar examples and therefore are more likely to qualify as individual resources under this criterion.

Early tract examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style often display greater variation in design and stylistic elements than other Period Revival styles and were less likely to be “cookie cutter.” The style’s zenith occurred in the early- to mid-1930s, a building era that typically emphasized more design and ornamentation than postwar tract houses; as a result, the Spanish Colonial Revival style is more likely than other Period Revival styles to qualify under this criterion.

Due to its rarity, exuberant expression of design, and limited period of construction (the early 1930s), Storybook-influenced designs are more likely than other Period Revival styles to qualify under this criterion. Storybook style is exceptionally rare in San Francisco and incorporates elements of Period Revival styles, in particular the Tudor Revival, Norman Revival and French Provincial. The whimsical style is typified by exaggerated interpretation of medieval styles and, often, the use of applied faux stonework to suggest age or weathering.

³²⁰ Additional exceptions may include fully expressed buildings, with clear design intent, that do not fit a particular style.

Although Streamline Moderne, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Storybook are more likely to qualify as individually significant, other styles, if fully expressed, and displaying many of the key character-defining features as outlined on pages 88-100 may also qualify under this criterion, as many buildings are not a pure expression of a single style.

Tract houses may also qualify as significant under Criteria C/3 if they represent a prototype for an experimental method of production or design that was later adopted for mass production. Such properties could include early examples of influential building typologies such as the tunnel entrance, or patio plan interior courtyards.

A house designed by a master builder or architect may also qualify as significant under Criteria C/3 if it expresses a particular aspect or phase in the development of his work. Henry Doelger's early 1930s transitional phase from buildings designed in near-uniform form and massing, to buildings expressing highly individualized form, massing, and design may qualify as significant under this criterion. Master builders identified in this context statement include Henry Doelger, the Stoneson Brothers, Oliver Rousseau, and the Standard Building Company. Charles O. Clausen is the sole master architect associated with the design of Sunset District residential tracts from 1925 to 1950 within the Survey area.

The following considerations are intended to guide the selection of criterion used to evaluate individual properties as well highlight the level of architectural expression required to qualify under architectural significance, Criteria C/3. It is not a comprehensive list.

- Refer to "Chapter 8: Architectural Styles" for an overview of stylistic evolution, design elements and key character-defining features of a particular style.
- Several styles including Colonial Revival and Minimal Traditional were constructed primarily in the 1940s, a period characterized by simple massing and designs, restrained ornamentation, and minimal façade articulation. Such styles, therefore, are unlikely to qualify as individually significant due to the inherent design restraint of mass production in the 1940s.
- Physical integrity does not constitute architectural significance. A single well-preserved house, located in an area that contains a concentration of heavily altered buildings, might stand out due to physical intactness; however, the well-preserved house must first qualify for its architectural significance.

INTEGRITY

The aspects of integrity most important for Criteria C/3 are design, materials, and workmanship. The following character-defining features are essential and must be present in order to meet the minimum threshold for integrity for properties significant under Criteria C/3:

- Historic massing, form, setback, and roofline
- Historic cladding materials
- Historic entryway and/or stairs configuration
- Historic window openings or changes to window openings that are minimal and compatible
- Architectural detailing that reflects historic design and key elements of a style

Important Features

The following building features are important and, in combination with other elements, contribute to the building's

design. Prior replacement of the building features, as described below, will not necessarily impact integrity to the extent that the building is no longer eligible for listing on the California or National Registers.

- **Windows.** Windows are a prominent feature of tract houses. With few exceptions, Sunset District tract houses constructed from 1925 to 1950 were originally built with wood sash windows, often in a fixed, awning, or casement configuration. Divided light steel sash windows were occasionally used in high-style architect-designed houses during the period. Aluminum sliders were not installed prior to the 1950s.

The retention of original window configuration, wood sash material, and decorative muntin patterns is important. The prior replacement of historic windows, however, may not impact the building's eligibility for listing if the original window shape, framing, and openings are retained.

- **Doors.** Unlike most residential buildings constructed prior to the 1920s, the entry door has a subordinate position in the design of residential tract houses and is often minimally visible from the sidewalk. Prior replacement of doors may not impact the building's eligibility for listing.

Residential tracts, particularly those constructed between 1925 and 1939, often featured a secondary pedestrian door, called a tradesman door, perpendicular to the primary façade and contained within the recessed garage opening. Prior replacement of this tradesman door may not impact a building's eligibility for listing.

- **Garage Doors and Openings.** Prior to 1940, most garage doors were set in deeply recessed openings. Retention of these openings, if original to the design, is important, though not essential for integrity.

Originally, the garage doors of tract houses were paired and double-hinged, often with decorative detailing and divided lights. Some houses were designed with an overhead awning-style garage door. Historic garage doors do exist, but are extraordinarily rare. As such, the prior replacement of such doors may not impact a building's eligibility for listing.

- **Tunnel Entrance.** An open passageway and visual connection to the deeply recessed, light-filled interior stairway of "Tunnel Entrance" tract houses is a key character-defining feature for that building type. The presence of added security gates does not result in a loss of integrity; however, the enclosing of these openings with a solid door and walls may impact a building's eligibility for listing.
- **Additions.** Horizontal or vertical additions that are minimally visible, and respect the scale and massing of the historic building, may not impact a building's eligibility for listing. Additions that are out of scale with the historic building may impact integrity.
- **Setting and Landscape Features.** Builders often, though not always, provided a small front lawn and/or planted shrubbery. Occasionally, the driveway or walkway displayed concrete scored in curvilinear or geometric patterns. Such landscape features contribute to a property's setting, though retention of such elements is not essential to the overall design of individual buildings. The prior removal of such elements may not impact a property's eligibility for listing.

Additional Integrity Considerations:

- **Cumulative Impact.** The cumulative impact of multiple minor alterations must be considered when evaluating the integrity of individual properties. Nonetheless, an exceptional building, that displays the full expression

of a particular style, may feature contemporary garage doors, entry doors, and windows and yet still retain sufficient integrity to convey significance.

- **Common Styles.** A higher threshold for integrity may be warranted for expressions of often-copied styles that display little differentiation. For example, the French Provincial style, as introduced in the Sunset District in the late 1930s, is largely limited to a single standardized façade design; in such cases, the building should retain nearly all of its original features, including window configuration and muntin pattern.
- **Rare Building Types.** A lower threshold for integrity may be warranted for unique or rare high-style expressions of tract houses. Such expressions are more likely to occur on unusually expansive corner properties, houses of early Streamline Moderne design, and/or one-off architect-designed houses.
- **Interiors.** The condition and alteration history of a building's interior spaces are not considered for this historic resource survey.

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion D / California Register Criterion 4:

Yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history

Individual residential buildings constructed from 1925 to 1950 are unlikely to convey significance under this criterion, which is primarily focused on ruins or subsurface remains.

Historic District Evaluation

For the Sunset survey, the following considerations were used to frame common themes of potential significance associated with eligible historic districts. The bulleted considerations are meant to guide the evaluation of significance; additional considerations may emerge during the survey process.

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion A / California Register Criterion 1

Association with significant events in local, state, or national history

Residential tract construction from 1925 to 1950 in the Sunset District is associated with several broad contextual themes including the shift to automobile-based housing; the expansion of San Francisco into the vast sand dunes; New Deal federal financing programs such as the 1934 Federal Housing Act (FHA); mass-production; and pre- and postwar development. Nearly every house constructed during this era is generally associated with some combination of these wide-ranging themes and patterns of development. However, in order for a theme to qualify as significant under Criteria A/1, there must be a *specific* association to an event, pattern of events, or historic trends. Moreover, a Sunset District tract must be associated with the specific historic context in an important way. The aforementioned themes are too broad to qualify as significant under Criteria A/1.

Associations with *specific* events in the Sunset District that qualify as significant under Criteria A/1 include the little-known World War I veterans home ownership assistance program, the Veterans' Welfare Board, which predated the FHA mortgage financing programs. It is more likely for a historic district—as compared to an individual property—to convey the significance of this pioneering government program.

Other specific events include early trends in residential marketing employed by builders in the 1930s, such as the display of named “Model Houses.” Such houses, however, were typically scattered over many blocks rather than grouped together and are therefore more likely to qualify as significant individually rather than as a historic district.

INTEGRITY

In addition to possessing at least one criterion of significance, a historic district must retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance in order to qualify for listing on the California or National Registers. Taken as a whole, buildings within the district must collectively retain enough historic fabric in order to convey its significance. The condition and alteration history of a building's interior spaces were not considered or evaluated during the historic resource survey.

The impact of alterations on the district's overall integrity—including contributing elements other than buildings—depends upon their scale, number, and conformity with the historic design.³²¹ A lower threshold of integrity is required for district contributors as compared to individual historic resources, though the majority of buildings within a district should display moderate- to high-levels of physical integrity. The final decision about integrity is based on the condition of the district as a whole and its ability to convey significance.³²²

Properties associated with an important event or person should retain sufficient integrity such that “a historical contemporary would recognize the property as it exists today.”³²³ Although there are no absolute requirements

³²¹ National Park Service, *Historic Residential Suburbs*, 101.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ National Park Service, Bulletin No. 15.

regarding the minimum percentage of district contributors, in the case of Sunset District residential tracts, it is reasonable to require that the vast majority of buildings within an identified eligible district should maintain sufficient integrity in order to convey the district's significance.

Essential Features

The following building features are essential and must be present in order to meet the minimum threshold for integrity for district contributors:

- Historic massing, form, setback, and roofline
 - Historic cladding materials
 - Sufficient character-defining features to convey the historic style
-

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion B / California Register Criterion 2

Association with significant individuals in local, state, or national history

Sunset District tract houses from 1925 to 1950 may be significant for their association with persons significant to San Francisco's, California's, or the nation's history. In such cases, a property or grouping of properties must be closely associated with the productive life and accomplishments of a significant person. The birthplace, childhood home, or temporary residence of a significant person would not qualify under this criterion. A historic district is less likely than an individual building to meet this criterion.

It should be noted that associations with a specific architect or builder should be evaluated as "the work of a master" under Criteria C/3, rather than Criteria B/2. However, this association may be considered under Criteria B/2 if a significant architect or builder resided within a tract during or shortly after construction.

INTEGRITY

In addition to possessing at least one criterion of significance, a historic district must retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance in order to qualify for listing on the California or National Registers. Taken as a whole, buildings within the district must collectively retain enough historic fabric in order to convey its significance. Moreover, it is critical that the specific building associated with a significant person (e.g., the personal residence of a significant builder) retain integrity of design, materials, location, and workmanship.

The impact of alterations on the district's overall integrity—including contributing elements other than buildings—depends upon their scale, number, and conformity with the historic design.³²⁴ A lower threshold of integrity is required for district contributors as compared to individual historic resources, though the majority of buildings within a district should display moderate- to high-levels of physical integrity. The final decision about integrity is based on the condition of the district as a whole and its ability to convey significance.³²⁵ The condition and alteration history of a building's interior spaces were not considered or evaluated during the historic resource survey.

³²⁴ National Park Service, *Historic Residential Suburbs*, 101.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

Properties associated with an important event or person should retain sufficient integrity such that “a historical contemporary would recognize the property as it exists today.”³²⁶ Although there are no absolute requirements regarding the minimum percentage of district contributors, in the case of Sunset District residential tracts, it is reasonable to require that the vast majority of buildings within an identified eligible district should maintain sufficient integrity in order to convey the district’s significance.

Essential Features

The following building features are essential and must be present in order to meet the minimum threshold for integrity for district contributors:

- Historic massing, form, setback, and roofline
- Historic cladding materials
- Sufficient character-defining features to convey the historic style

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion C/ California Register Criterion 3

Possesses distinctive characteristics of a type, style, period, or method of construction; is the work of a master designer, builder, or craftsman; or exhibits high artistic values

Several significant architectural themes are associated with the evolution of residential tract design in the Sunset District, from 1925 to 1950. These themes, as outlined below, are additional considerations for the evaluation of architectural significance of residential tracts.

Uniform style and form. Tracts from the 1920s displayed near identical massing, stair typologies, roof forms, window configuration, and ornamentation, typically reflective of the Mediterranean Revival style, set in cohesive blocks. Slight differences and the placement of alternating parapets, muntin detailing, and decorative elements differentiated individual buildings from their immediate neighbors. Significance is derived from the overall architectural effect of the district, and the relationship between similar buildings, rather than the importance of any one building. In order to qualify as significant, the district’s buildings must display full and related expressions of a particular style. Examples include full blocks of barrel front Mediterranean Revival houses designed with close attention to detail at the window and bay, and with inventive design elements such as alternating niches, crenellations, or decorative ground story windows.

Uniform style, diverse forms. Transitional tracts from the early 1930s are significant as examples of a short-lived shift from a uniform style and form (barrel front Mediterranean Revival), to the same style applied to a diversity of forms. Though still drawing from the Mediterranean Revival style, these tracts often featured unusual design elements including the angled side stair typology, asymmetrical double bays, and center entry porticos. Houses also featured a profusion of design elements unheard of in earlier tracts including miniature towers, articulated façades, ogee arched openings, and other exuberant details. The overall effect was a dramatic departure from the standardized barrel front configuration typical of the late 1920s and presaged the greater diversity expressed in later mixed-style Period Revival tracts. Typically, these transitional tracts were constructed in the early 1930s and were relatively small, containing far fewer buildings than tracts described above. In order to qualify as significant, the district’s buildings

³²⁶ National Park Service, Bulletin No. 15.

must display full expressions of a particular style with complexity of form, façade articulation, and diversity of ornamentation.

Diverse styles, diverse forms. Tracts displaying a range of Period Revival styles as applied to a variety of building forms and massing are significant as examples of a short-lived (c.1931 to 1937) period of highly expressive, picturesque residential tract design. These tracts are typically dominated by exuberant iterations of the Mediterranean Revival, French Provincial, Spanish Colonial, and Tudor Revival styles. The buildings are muscular, well-articulated and display a complexity of design and profusion of design elements not commonly found on the typical Sunset District tract house. Façades styles and ornamentation are highly individualized as are the form and massing; however, the tracts retain cohesion through unified front yard setbacks, the scale of roof forms, and limited entry typologies. In order to qualify as significant, the district's buildings must display full expressions of the various Period Revival styles with complexity of form, façade articulation, and diversity of ornamentation.

In addition the themes outlined above, tracts of Sunset District houses may be broadly significant for their architecture if they possess the distinctive characteristics of a style or styles. Tracts must be distinctive, though not necessarily architect-designed, with complexity of design, ornamentation, plan, or modulation. A grouping of buildings that display muscular massing, articulated façades, ornamental flourishes, and inventive design elements is more likely to qualify as distinctive than houses with restrained gestures of a specific style. Modest examples with restrained architectural expression do not qualify under this criterion. Generally speaking, considering the overall context of residential development in the Sunset District, most tract houses from the late 1930s to 1950 are modest in design—due to efforts by builders to cut labor and materials costs and decrease construction time—and would not qualify as significant under Criteria C/3.

Tracts may also qualify as significant under Criteria C/3 if they represent a prototype for an experimental method of production or design that was later adopted for mass production. Such properties could include early examples of influential building typologies such as the tunnel entrance or Oliver Rousseau's innovative "patio plan" interior courtyard, which was widely adopted by competing builders.

A tract designed by a master builder or architect may also qualify as significant under Criteria C/3 if it expresses a particular aspect or phase in the development of his work. Henry Doelger's early 1930s transitional phase from buildings designed in near-uniform form and massing, to buildings expressing highly individualized form, massing, and design may qualify as significant under this criterion. Master builders identified in this context statement include Henry Doelger, the Stoneson Brothers, Lang Realty, Ray Galli, Oliver Rousseau, and the Standard Building Company. Charles O. Clausen is the only known master architect associated with the design of Sunset District tracts in the Sunset survey area. A tract must be an important example of a builder's or architect's accomplishments; not all tracts designed or developed by master builders or architects qualify as significant.

The following considerations are intended to guide the selection of criterion used to evaluate clusters of buildings as well highlight the level of architectural expression required to qualify under architectural significance, Criteria C/3. It is not a comprehensive list.

- Refer to "Chapter 8: Architectural Styles" for an overview of stylistic evolution, design elements, and key character-defining features of a particular style.
- Several styles including Colonial Revival and Minimal Traditional were constructed primarily in the 1940s, a period characterized by the simple massing, restrained ornamentation, and minimal façade articulation resulting from efforts by builders to cut costs and speed construction. Such styles, therefore,

considering the overall context of residential development in the Sunset District, are unlikely to qualify as individually significant due to the design restraint of mass production in the 1940s.

- By 1940, restrained iterations of various Period Revival, Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional styles dominated the design of residential tracts. For example, a stripped iteration of the French Provincial house was commonly constructed throughout the 1940s. Though identifiable by mansard roof forms, tracts of these houses do not display the distinctive characteristics and full expressions of the style. Tracts designed in a restrained iteration of a particular style, or range of styles, are unlikely to qualify under Criteria C/3.
- Physical integrity does not constitute significance. A cluster of well-preserved houses might stand out due to the retention of historic features and overall physical intactness; however, the potential district must first qualify for its significance.
- A tract does not need to be the first or *most* important example of a “significant and distinguishable entity” and more than one district may qualify under this criterion.
- Streamline Moderne tract houses are significant as they represent a radical departure from traditional and revival styles and are an early adaptation of emerging Modern design to mass-produced residential tracts. However, Streamline Moderne was typically just one of a number of façade styles offered to house buyers. It was very rarely the dominant or only style of a particular tract.³²⁷ Moreover, the style was introduced in the late 1930s, a period that corresponded with the introduction of simple massing and designs, restrained ornamentation, and minimal façade articulation. Although it is more likely for a Streamline Moderne building to qualify as individually eligible than to contribute to a Period Revival tract that qualifies as architecturally significant, it is possible for districts to contain Streamline Moderne contributors.

INTEGRITY

In addition to possessing at least one criterion of significance, a historic district must retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance in order to qualify for listing on the California or National Registers. Taken as a whole, buildings within the district must collectively retain enough historic fabric in order to convey its significance. The aspects of integrity most important for buildings significant under Criteria C/3 are design, materials, and workmanship.

The impact of alterations on the district’s overall integrity—including contributing elements other than buildings—depends upon their scale, number, and conformity with the historic design.³²⁸ A lower threshold of integrity is required for district contributors as compared to individual historic resources, though the majority of buildings within a district should display moderate- to high-levels of physical integrity. The final decision about integrity is based on the condition of the district as a whole and its ability to convey significance.³²⁹

Although there are no absolute requirements regarding the minimum percentage of district contributors, in the case of Sunset District residential tracts, it is reasonable to require that the vast majority of buildings within an identified eligible district maintain sufficient integrity in order to convey the district’s significance. The condition and alteration history of a building’s interior spaces were not considered or evaluated during the historic resource survey.

³²⁷ Just one small tract of five Streamline Moderne houses was identified in the Sunset survey area, though four of the five buildings no longer display integrity.

³²⁸ National Park Service, *Historic Residential Suburbs*, 101.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

Essential Features

The following building features are essential and must be present in order to meet the minimum threshold for integrity for district contributors:

- Historic massing, form, setback, and roofline
- Historic cladding materials
- Sufficient character-defining features to convey the historic style

Additional Integrity Considerations:

- **Setting and Landscape Features.** An evaluation of integrity should include the district's setting and landscape features, if any, such as fencing, streetscape elements, pillars, and street layout. Builders often, though not always, provided a small front lawn and/or planted shrubbery around each individual building. Such landscape features contribute to a property's setting, though retention of such elements may not be essential to convey the potential historic district's overall design.

SIGNIFICANCE: National Register Criterion D / California Register Criterion 4

Yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history

Groupings of residential buildings constructed during the Period of Significance are unlikely to convey significance under this criterion, which is primarily focused on ruins or subsurface remains.

Examples: Individual Building Evaluations of Significance and Integrity

The following examples illustrate the level of architectural expression and integrity required to qualify as significant under Criteria C/3.



Example 1: Small-scale Mediterranean Revival

Though small in scale, this 1931 house, with its miniature tower, double-bay configuration, angled stairs, decorative stair tile, projecting vigas, ogee entry arch, thickly textured stucco, and machicolated bay, is a distinctive and full expression of the Mediterranean Revival style and is significant for its architecture under Criteria C/3. It was constructed at a time when most Mediterranean Revival houses were designed in a few standardized façade options (e.g. the barrel front typology). Although the front door, garage doors, and windows at the angled bay were replaced, the building retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as an inventive expression of the Mediterranean Revival style.

Architecturally Significant: Yes

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: individual historic resource



Example 2: Spanish Colonial / Mediterranean Revival

Built in 1939 by Boyd Lindsay, this house features design elements inspired by Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival styles. Its expressive tower, entry alcove, façade articulation, and ornamentation qualify as architecturally significant under Criteria C/3. Alterations appear limited to the replacement of the primary window and tower window.

Architecturally Significant: Yes

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Individual historic resource



Example 3: Mediterranean Revival

Designed in 1931 by small-scale builder O. E. Mittelstaedt, this Mediterranean Revival house is a fairly typical example the Mediterranean Revival style (paired arched windows with arched entry) with ornamentation largely limited to an inset niche. It appears largely intact, with the exception of replacement garage doors. Nonetheless, because it is a common and restrained iteration of the style, and lacks facade articulation and complexity of design, the building does not qualify as an expressive version of the style and period and is not individually architecturally significant under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: No

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Not an individual resource



Example 4: Tudor Revival

Built in 1936 by the Golden Gate Investment Co., this large corner building displays Tudor detailing at both façades. The house features elaborate design and ornamentation including a two-sided projecting bay (not visible in photo), extensive stickwork, balconette, and a steeply pitched gable roof form. It retains integrity of materials and design, despite the likely replacement of historic windows on the secondary facade. As a full expression of the Tudor Revival style, the house is architecturally significant under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: Yes

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Individual historic resource



Example 5: French Provincial

Built in 1939 by Christian Anderson, a smaller-scale builder who specialized in this style, the house features unusually elaborate ornamentation for the French Provincial style, including a widow's walk, extensive quoining, balconette, dentils, and requisite mansard roof form. It also retains high integrity of materials and design. The unusually expressive version of this common style is architecturally significant under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: Yes

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Individual historic resource



Example 6: Restrained French Provincial

This 1940s building retains its original garage doors, balconette, and metal widow's walk. However, in the 1940s, near-identical examples of this restrained version of the style proliferated in the Sunset District. The house does not display the ornamentation, articulation, and design qualities necessary to qualify as significant under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: No

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Not an individual resource



Example 7: Rare Streamline Moderne cluster

This heavily altered house is one of five adjacent, nearly identical Streamline Moderne buildings constructed in 1938 by the Golden Gate Investment Company. With the exception of speedlines and chimney stack, the original design is no longer apparent. Alterations include a new window opening and window sash, new garage door, brick cladding at the ground story, and the removal of glass block accents. Of the five extant buildings, just one retains its physical integrity, which provides clues as to this building's historic, architecturally significant design. As originally constructed, this house would qualify as significant under Criteria C/3; however, its compromised integrity renders it ineligible for listing.

Architecturally Significant: Yes

Retains integrity: No

Eligibility: Not an individual resource



Example 8: Early Streamline Moderne

Designed in 1938 by C.T. Lindsay, a prolific early builder noted for his exceptional Streamline Moderne tract houses, this house on 31st Avenue is significant for its architecture under Criteria C/3. The use of a curved two-story glass block window wall is a hallmark of Lindsay's design. In addition, the circle-patterned metal balconette, rounded garage opening, speedlines, and glass block sidelights embody the style's sleek and streamlined design. It is a rare iteration of style. The building retains its key character-defining features specific to the style and retains its integrity despite the replacement window and garage doors.

Architecturally Significant: Yes

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Individual historic resource



Example 9: Streamline Moderne

Built in 1940 by Boyd Lindsay, the design of this house draws from the Streamline Moderne design vocabulary of speedlines and curved surfaces. It retains high integrity of design and materials and features original windows and garage door. Nonetheless, the restrained version of the style does not qualify as architecturally significant under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: No

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Not a historic resource



Example 10: A cluster of angled stair tract houses

This cluster of 1943 tract houses on 45th Avenue was built by the United Investment Corporation. Regardless of integrity considerations, the restrained interpretation of Streamline Moderne design, the lack of architectural detailing, the flush garage door opening, and appearance of flat elevations does not express substantial design intent or architectural detailing necessary to qualify as significant for its architectural design under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: No

Retains integrity: No

Eligibility: Not an individual resource



Example 11: Minimal Traditional

Built in 1949, this house displays several features associated with Minimal Traditional tract houses, including scalloped ends, side gable, and tunnel entrance. Like most Minimal Traditional houses, this example displays minimal ornamentation, and lacks architectural expression. It does, however, retain integrity (with the exception of replacement windows). It does not qualify as architecturally significant under Criteria C/3.

Architecturally Significant: No

Retains integrity: Yes

Eligibility: Not a historic resource

Chapter 10

Recommendations

The following is a set of recommendations for future activities related to the documentation, evaluation, and protection of the Sunset District's significant architectural resources.

1. Conduct a focused evaluative survey of Henry Doelger's first residential tract development located on the 1400 block of 39th Avenue in the Sunset District. Doelger is arguably the most influential builder in the Sunset District in the late-1920s to mid-1940s and his first tract may qualify for significance under Criterion A/1. An evaluative survey would determine if this tract retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance.
2. Conduct a focused evaluative survey of Art Deco / Streamline Moderne duplexes and apartment buildings in the Sunset District. Although Art Deco-inspired design is rare for single-family houses, there are several groupings of duplexes and apartment buildings, particularly on the Judah and Kirkham Streets corridor that display a fusion of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne design elements. Many of these buildings appear to be potential historic resources. A survey of these buildings will help identify the most important examples of individual buildings and, potentially, a discontinuous historic district.
3. Conduct a focused evaluative survey of barrel front Mediterranean Revival style houses in the Sunset District. Although there were relatively few examples of this property type in the Sunset survey area, it appears to be the most commonly and uniformly constructed style in the mid-1920s.
4. Promote the repair and retention of historic wood windows. A surprisingly high percentage of Sunset District tract buildings feature replacement windows at the primary façade. The historic muntin pattern, configuration, sash, and openings are important design elements of these houses and retention should be encouraged. Strategies for promotion may include co-sponsorship of wood-window-repair workshops, development of website content focused on repair, or wider distribution of the Department's existing Windows Replacement Standards.
5. Facilitate property owner support for local landmark district designation. The Sunset District contains several clusters of extraordinarily picturesque Period Revival / Storybook residential tracts that may warrant local landmark designation. The recently expanded access to Mills Act contracts, which can provide a significant reduction in property taxes, may spur San Francisco property owner interest in such protections. Activities to encourage owner interest may include presentations at local neighborhood groups, a mailing to property owners, and/or additional website content. If property owner support is evident, the Department may consider a recommendation to add these tracts to the Historic Preservation Commission's Landmark Designation Work Program.
6. Periodically update the *Sunset District Residential Builders, 1925–1950 Historic Context Statement*, particularly the activities of merchant and small-scale builders, as more information becomes available.

Chapter 11

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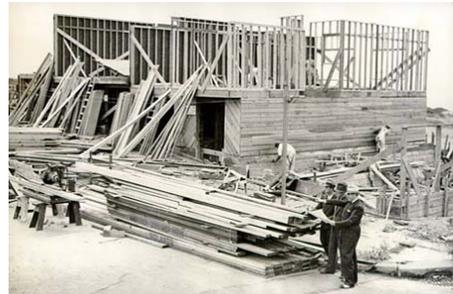
Notice to Property Owners:

This notice is to inform you that the Planning Department (Department) will soon undertake a historic resources survey in the Sunset District neighborhood. The survey is limited to single family houses, built between 1925-1950, located in an area roughly bounded by 36th Avenue, Kirkham Street, 29th Avenue, and Santiago Street. The survey is conducted from the sidewalk and is focused only on the buildings' visible exterior. Department staff will not ring your doorbell or ask to see the interior of your home. Similar architectural surveys are underway, or were recently completed, in the Mission District, Japantown, Oceanside, South of Market, Bayview, and Glen Park.

The Department will keep you updated on the survey progress and of upcoming events such as neighborhood history walking tours and informational "Ask a Planner" drop-in events. Additional information, including document drafts, event announcements, and the survey findings will be posted on the project webpage. Please contact the planner listed below if you are interested in volunteering or sharing historical information regarding your house or the neighborhood.

For more information, contact Mary Brown at Mary.Brown@sfgov.org or 415-575-9074. To speak with a Chinese-speaking Department staff member, please call 415-558-6476 or email Cathy.Thai@sfgov.org.

<http://sunsetsurvey.sfplanning.org>



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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特此通知，規劃局（本局）很快將對日落區社區進行歷史性資源調查。這項調查限於1925至1950年建造的獨立屋住宅，調查區域以36大街、Kirkham街、29大街和Santiago街為界。這項將在人行道上進行，只是注重房屋看得見的外部。本局人員不會按您的門鈴或者要求看屋子裏面。在米遜區、日本城、Oceanside、South of Market、Bayview和Glen Park的類似建築調查正在進行，或者最近剛剛完成。

本局將隨時向您通報調查的進展情況以及即將舉辦的活動，比如社區歷史步行遊和提供資訊的“詢問規劃者”投遞活動。在項目網站上會張貼更多資訊，包括文件草稿，活動通知和調查結果。如果您有興趣做義工或者提供關於您的房屋或社區的歷史性資訊，請與下列規劃者聯繫。

相關詳情，請與 Mary Brown 聯繫，電子郵件：Mary.Brown@sfgov.org，電話：415-575-9074。
欲與本局講中文的工作人員聯繫，請致電415-558-6476 或者發電子郵件至 Cathy.Thai@sfgov.org