

SurveyLA

Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey

LOS ANGELES CITYWIDE HISTORIC CONTEXT STATEMENT

Context: Architecture and Engineering

Theme: The Ranch House, 1930-1975

Theme: Housing the Masses, 1880-1975

Sub-Theme: Ranch House Neighborhoods, 1938-1975



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Department of City Planning
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PREFACE

The themes of “The Ranch House, 1930-1975” and “Ranch House Neighborhoods, 1938-1975” are components of Los Angeles’ citywide historic context statement and provides guidance to field surveyors in identifying and evaluating potential historic resources relating to the Ranch house type and style of architecture. Refer to www.HistoricPlacesLA.org for information on designated resources associated with this context as well as those identified through SurveyLA and other surveys.

CONTRIBUTORS

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INTRODUCTION

Conceived from a variety of stylistic influences that incorporated references to the past as well as those associated with the more forward-thinking, avant-garde tenets of Modernism, the Ranch house and Ranch style architecture made their formal debut in the 1920s. Ranch houses were built in the 1930s and 1940s but proliferated after World War II, when they became the preferred choice for residential design in many cities and suburbs across the nation including Los Angeles. Ranch style architecture was predominantly expressed in the form of single-family houses but was occasionally applied to multi-family residences, commercial buildings, and public and private institutional buildings, rendering it among the most widespread and recognizable components of Los Angeles’ postwar built environment.

Ranch style architecture in Los Angeles is addressed under two related themes within the Architecture and Engineering context: The Ranch House, and Housing the Masses/Ranch House Neighborhoods. The Ranch House theme examines custom-designed Ranch houses that are individually significant for their architectural quality and design. Houses addressed in this theme were individually commissioned and were typically designed by noted architects. The Housing the Masses/Ranch House Neighborhoods theme applies to post-World War II Ranch house neighborhoods that, as a whole, are significant for their architectural merit and represent some of the best concentrations of the style in Los Angeles. These include neighborhoods of mass produced “tract houses,” as well as neighborhoods of customized Ranch houses.

The Ranch House theme contains three sub-themes: Traditional Custom Ranch House, 1930-1975; Contemporary Custom Ranch House, 1945-1975; and Commercial and Institutional Ranch Style, 1945-1975. The Traditional Custom Ranch House examines custom-designed single-family houses that

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embody the Traditional Ranch style, which incorporates historicist elements and is commonly portrayed as the “quintessential Ranch house.” The Contemporary Custom Ranch House examines custom-designed, single-family houses that exemplify the Contemporary Ranch style, which blends together the prevailing design philosophy underpinning the Ranch house and the abstract forms and geometries of Modernism. Commercial and Institutional Ranch Style accounts for commercial, institutional, and multi-family residential properties that exhibit the characteristics of Ranch style architecture and demonstrate how the Ranch aesthetic was adapted to building types other than single-family residences.

Evaluation Considerations

Post-World War II suburbanization is a broad topic in Los Angeles that is covered in depth under the Residential Development and Suburbanization context. Although Ranch House neighborhoods may have singular significance for their architectural quality, they may also be significant under other themes relating to post WWII suburbanization. For these reasons, the Housing the Masses/Ranch House Neighborhoods theme may have some overlap with other themes as follows:

- Ranch house neighborhoods that exemplify post-World War II residential development concepts may be evaluated under the Suburban Planning and Development theme within the Residential Development and Suburbanization context.
- Ranch house neighborhoods that are associated with significant Los Angeles developers may be evaluated under the Developers and the Development Process theme within the Residential Development and Suburbanization context.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Few architectural idioms have had as profound an impact on the built environment of the nation – and particularly Los Angeles – as the Ranch house. While they were well-accepted prior to World War II, Ranch style houses are most strongly associated with the rapid suburbanization that occurred in the postwar period, during which time they were built in unprecedented numbers. Referring to the Ranch house in 1949, *Architectural Forum* declared that “never before in the history of U.S. buildings had one house type made such an impact on the industry in so short a time.”¹ Los Angeles in particular became well-known as a place inextricably tied to the Ranch house, helping to establish standards for the rest of the nation. By the 1970s, when their popularity had begun to wane, Ranch houses had become firmly ingrained in the public consciousness as a ubiquitous component of suburban America.

“Ranch House” is a broad term that refers to two related aspects of the built environment — a property type, and a style of architecture most commonly applied to residential buildings.² As a property type, the Ranch house refers to a one-story, single-family residence with a rambling footprint, horizontal massing, an open and free-flowing interior plan, and an integral relationship with the outdoors. Historians Alan Hess and John English note that the informal composition of the Ranch house type exhibits “many of the same spatial and structural tendencies seen in other Modern residential architecture of the period, though in a more moderate manner.” Moreover, Ranch houses were almost always accompanied by a

¹ Rosalyn Baxandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2000), 132.

² This paragraph is adapted from the work of Alan Hess and John English, who contributed to the Ranch House context in the early phases of SurveyLA.

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garage to house the family's car. As an architectural style, the Ranch house refers to a distinctive aesthetic that is defined by a number of essential physical characteristics: informality and asymmetry, low-pitched roofs, a variety of façade treatments that typically includes wood board-and-batten siding, picture windows, and the application of historicist or modern ornament and details.

The origins of the twentieth century Ranch house can be traced to multiple architectural and cultural antecedents, some of which embraced past traditions and others that rejected them. At the forefront were the vernacular residential buildings that peppered the landscape of the American West and Southwest in the nineteenth century, specifically the *haciendas* of Southern California and the simple, wood-frame farmhouses built by early American pioneers who set down roots in Northern California, Texas, and the plains of the American West.³ Erected when California was under Spanish (1769-1821) and later Mexican (1821-1848) rule, *haciendas* drew upon the vernacular architecture of Spain and typically featured adobe walls, low-pitched shed or gabled roofs, and decorative wood window grilles (*rejas*) and lattices (*celosias*).⁴ *Haciendas* eschewed rigid symmetry and formality and instead featured asymmetrical, rambling forms that were oriented inward and opened into a courtyard. Similarly, early American farmhouses assumed a plainspoken appearance and were characterized by their asymmetry, prominent front porches, board-and-batten siding, and cedar shake roofs.⁵ Both *haciendas* and early American farmhouses projected a sense of simplicity, directness, rusticity, and authenticity that proved ripe for reinterpretation in the early twentieth century, a time when the American public expressed a heightened interest in its collective past and Colonial-era roots.



Antecedents to the twentieth century Ranch house included Mexican-era haciendas (pictured left) and simple wood-frame farmhouses (pictured right) (Security National Bank Collection/Los Angeles Public Library).

A number of more progressive architectural trends that took root in the early twentieth century also influenced the Ranch house, albeit in a less direct manner. Of note was the Craftsman movement, which gained traction in Southern California and also in the hills of Berkeley in Northern California; the Prairie School, which proliferated in the Midwest and was championed by Frank Lloyd Wright; and early Modernism as expressed in the pioneering work of Modern architect R.M. Schindler. Though these movements all developed within different contexts and may not appear, at first glance, to work toward a common goal, they all rejected past traditions and advocated an aesthetic that was more simple and

³ Alan Hess, *The Ranch House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004), 20.

⁴ "The Ranch House in Georgia," prepared by New South Associates for the Georgia State Office of Historic Preservation, 2010, Chapter 2: Context and Period of Significance, 5.

⁵ "The Ranch House in Georgia," Chapter 2, 7.

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honest, embraced the use of natural materials and abstract ornament, were configured in an open, free-flowing manner that enhanced livability, and were appropriately suited to their respective context. As noted by Alan Hess, these architectural movements helped to inspire the twentieth century Ranch house by laying “the foundations for new themes in residential architecture – themes related to informal living, indoor-outdoor spaces, rustic aesthetics and natural materials, simple materials simply expressed, a low profile, a fascination with the vernacular...which the Ranch House continued.”⁶

Also important to the conception of the Ranch house was the advent of the automobile. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, houses tended to be concentrated in areas within walking distance to streetcar lines and, given the finite amount of land around these lines, they tended to be small and compact. However, as more and more Americans purchased cars in the early twentieth century, it became feasible to build houses beyond those areas adjacent to transit lines. The freedom of movement afforded by the car made it possible for houses to assume more horizontal plans and to occupy wider lots than before, making the construction of rambling Ranch houses much more feasible.

From this amalgam of influences emerged what are considered to be the earliest examples of the twentieth century Ranch house. In 1903, architects Charles and Henry Greene, best known for their Craftsman style houses, designed what is considered to be one of the first examples of the Ranch house near Pasadena for the son and daughter-in-law of Don Juan Bandini, a prominent nineteenth century California land owner.⁷ Greene and Greene designed the Bandini House to resemble the vernacular architecture of California *haciendas*: the one-story house had a rambling, U-shaped plan; rooms were oriented around a rear-facing courtyard and were connected by an exterior corridor supported by hewn timber posts; and ornament was restrained as to maintain a rusticated and unassuming appearance.⁸ However, instead of adobe bricks, exterior surfaces were clad with board-and-batten siding that was most often seen on early American farmhouses. The Bandini House was demolished in the 1960s.

In 1927, Bay Area architect William Wurster designed another early example of the Ranch in Scotts Valley, California, several hundred miles north of the Bandini House. Commissioned by Sadie Gregory, the widow of a prominent San Francisco attorney, the dwelling was fashioned after the simple working ranch buildings of California’s Central Valley, where Wurster was raised. The Gregory Farmhouse was deliberately designed to project a crude and rusticated appearance and is often described as resembling “a collection of sheds.”⁹ Its low-to-the-ground profile, one-story configuration, L-shaped footprint, cedar shake roof, vertical board siding, and sparse ornament evoked vivid images of rugged nineteenth century California and a sense of authenticity. *Sunset* magazine prominently featured the house on the cover of its July, 1930 edition and described its aesthetic as “sophisticated rusticity.”¹⁰

The Bandini House and the Gregory Farmhouse were among the earliest buildings in California to exhibit the essential characteristics of the Ranch house. However, since this architectural type was still coming into being, neither residence was explicitly described as “Ranch” at the time of its construction. Rather, it was the work of one man, Cliff May, commonly referred to as “father of the Ranch house,” that propelled the style into the public consciousness and rendered it a popular choice for residential design.

⁶ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 25.

⁷ Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, “Full-Size Portion of Demolished Bandini House to be Re-Created, Installed as Part of Exhibition,” press release, July 7, 2008.

⁸ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 21; “The Ranch House in Georgia,” Chapter 2, 8.

⁹ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 26; Gordon Young, “Blueprint for Obscurity,” *Metro*, January 18-24, 1996, n.p.

¹⁰ “The Ranch House in Georgia,” Chapter 2, 9.



The Gregory Farmhouse in Scotts Valley, California, built in 1927 and designed by architect William Wurster, is considered to be one of the earliest examples of the Ranch house (Calisphere).

A sixth-generation Californian and a descendent of San Diego's pioneering Estudillo family, designer Clifford Magee "Cliff" May did not invent the Ranch house, but is arguably the figure most closely associated with its early popularization. It has been said that "more than any other designer, architect, or developer, it was Cliff May who perfected the graceful, informal, low-slung, single-story style marked by the mingling of interior and exterior spaces."¹¹ May, in collaboration with contractor Orville Miracle, designed his first Ranch house on speculation in San Diego in 1931. Between 1931 and 1937, May designed roughly 50 Ranch houses around San Diego before relocating his practice to Los Angeles in 1938. Drawing upon many of the ideas that Greene and Greene, Wurster, and others had experimented with in previous years, May developed his own distinctive aesthetic that was characterized by open and free-flowing interior plans, a blending of interior and exterior spaces, and a hand-hewn character that loosely resembled the *haciendas* of early California. The "California Ranch Houses" that represent May's early work are described by historian Mary van Balgooy as follows:

Generally, May designed his houses as asymmetrical, one-story dwellings with a low-pitched roof and wide overhanging eaves. One room deep, it was crucial that the house take an L- or U-shaped configuration to form a patio or courtyard in the back so that the rooms of the ranch house faced or opened into these areas. Like the California adobes of the nineteenth century, May's houses did not include an interior hallway. Instead an exterior *corredor*, or covered veranda, served as the primary hallway of the house. May also designed his houses so that they

¹¹ Sam Hall Kaplan, "Cliff May's Quintessential Ranch Houses," *Los Angeles Times*, February 7, 1987.

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presented a blank façade to the street; however, he modernized his ranch houses with the use of large picture windows for the rooms facing the back.¹²

As May's career progressed, so too did his interpretation of the Ranch style, and by the late 1930s his houses adhered to one of two basic design schemes. First was his quintessential "Mexican Hacienda," which featured clay tile roofs, troweled stucco exteriors, deeply inset windows and doors, and hewn lintels. Second was what May dubbed the "Early California Rancheria," which more closely resembled the farmhouses of the American West and exhibited such features as board-and-batten siding and wood shake roofs.¹³ May's designs were featured in popular magazines, most notably *Sunset*, which presented his interpretation of the Ranch house to a wide audience and thrust it into the national spotlight.



The Arthur Hess Residence in Northridge (1942) is typical of the custom Ranch houses built prior to World War II (Calisphere).

By about 1940, the Ranch style had emerged as a popular choice for residential architecture and had secured its position as "an accepted style for custom houses throughout the United States."¹⁴ Due to the commodious lots and desirable suburban settings that were generally required of these dwellings, Ranch style houses that were built prior to World War II tended to be large, high-style residences that

¹² Mary A. van Balgooy, "Designer of the Dream: Cliff May and the California Ranch House," *Southern California Quarterly* 86.2 (Summer 2004): 127-144.

¹³ Van Balgooy, "Designer of the Dream," 127-144.

¹⁴ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 37.

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were custom-designed for individual clients. Cliff May was one of the designers most closely associated with the architectural type, but almost every architect and designer of note included Ranch in the “menu” of architectural styles she or he offered clients. In and around Los Angeles, noted architects including Gerard Colcord, H. Roy Kelley, Wallace Neff, Lulah Maria Riggs, Sumner Spaulding, and Paul R. Williams incorporated Ranch into their repertoire, as did many others. In the 1930s and early 1940s, a number of these sprawling, custom Ranch houses were constructed in some of Los Angeles’ more affluent neighborhoods including Bel Air, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, and the hills of the San Fernando Valley, all of which possessed the rural, suburban backdrop that was so strongly associated with this architectural type. Cliff May designed several custom Ranch houses in the Brentwood and Pacific Palisades area around this time, including the Cliff May Experimental House at 1831 Old Ranch Rd. (HCM #716), which for a period served as his personal residence.

In the years immediately preceding World War II, several Los Angeles architects and builders began to experiment with the construction of Ranch style houses on a larger scale. In 1939, Cliff May embarked upon the development of Riviera Ranch, a small subdivision composed of custom Ranch houses off of Sunset Boulevard in the Brentwood area.¹⁵ Deed restrictions ensured that the houses constructed in Riviera Ranch kept in character with May’s trademark California Ranch style, and many of the houses were designed by May himself. Opened to the public in 1940, Riviera Ranch is generally considered to be the most complete embodiment of May’s early work. Advertisements for Riviera Ranch were awash in imagery and hyperbole, extolling the merits of the semi-rural lifestyle that these houses offered and emphasizing the historical association to the respective Mexican *rancho* on which they were situated.



A tip
FROM THE TACK ROOM

★ "If you're of those few people who talk our language, Riviera Ranch can show you things about homes you've always had as an ideal but considered could only be an idea."

So you want a stable and the place to enjoy it? You can here and it will seem like you had the whole wide world in which to leisurely lope along.

We're sorry, but Riviera Ranch is already faced with a shortage. Half of all the available estate-sites have been sold in this 26-acre haven with its miles of community-owned bridle trails.

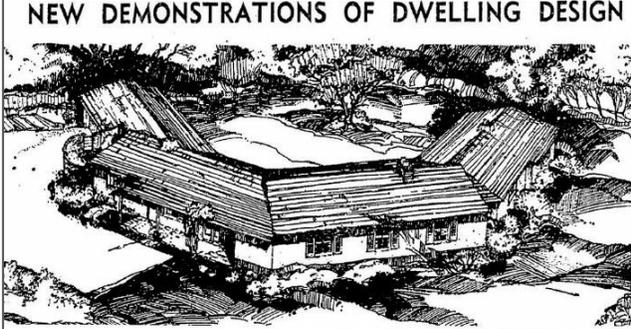
Take this tip from any Riviera Ranch tack room—we are holding open house today for those few families who appreciate and recognize the best when they see it.

SEE RANCH HOMES CREATED BY CLIFF MAY
Starting at \$15,000, including estate-site

Typical features: 2 1/2 to 3 acre sites bordered by hand-split rail fences—fruit trees, lawns, shrubs—three master bedrooms—servants quarters—living room that can never be crowded—placed sun room—two-stall stables with tack-room, feed-room and paddock—motor court—walled patios

RIVIERA RANCH
RANCHO SAN VICENTE

13151 SUNSET BOULEVARD ★ OPPOSITE RIVIERA COUNTRY CLUB POLO FIELDS



NEW DEMONSTRATIONS OF DWELLING DESIGN

DISTINCTIVE—This architectural sketch shows the early California ranch house-type dwelling being built at 1591 Old Oak Road, for E. G. Lloyd in the new Riviera Ranch area being developed by Cliff May. The tract is directly across Sunset Blvd. from the Riviera polo field. The plan provides for three bedrooms and two baths. A brick loggia will extend the length of the living room and there also will be a long ranch porch. A hand-split rail fence also is included. The structure, with site, represents investment of approximately \$15,500. Sale of the property by May was conducted by Dorothy Harrison of the George H. Prindle Co., Beverly Hills realtors.

Newspaper advertisements for Cliff May’s Riviera Ranch subdivision, 1940-1941 (Historic Los Angeles Times).

At around the same time that Cliff May developed Riviera Ranch, several California merchant builders experimented with the incorporation of Ranch style architecture into the design of mass-produced dwellings for households of more modest means. This “democratization” of the Ranch house took root in the late 1930s, as the need for new housing became apparent in areas of the country such as Los Angeles that were experiencing considerable growth in their defense and aircraft industries. Developers

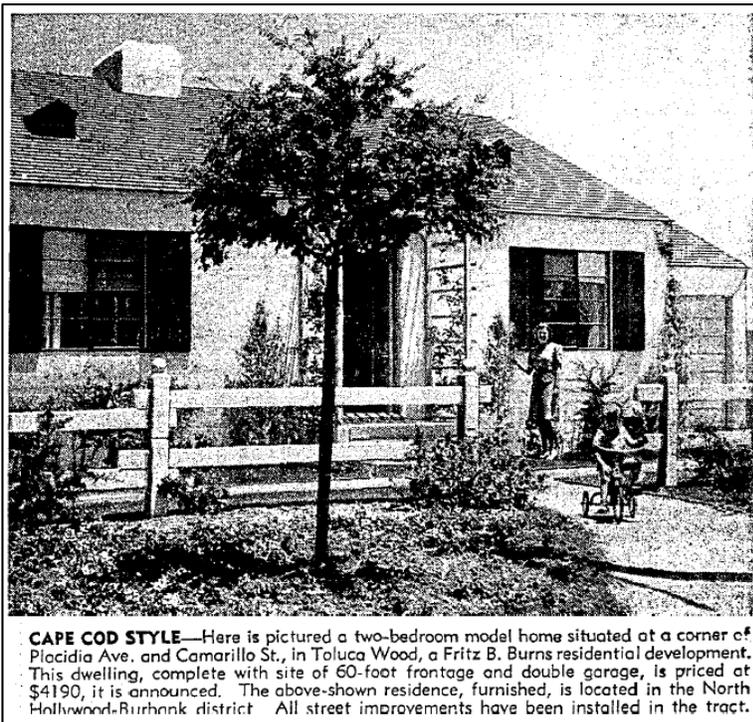
¹⁵ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 34.

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and community builders responded to the increased demand for housing by devising new methods of erecting small, economical houses by the hundreds. The construction of houses on such a large scale marked a diversion from what were then considered to be more conventional methods of residential development, in which local builders would develop a handful of houses in a piecemeal manner.¹⁶

Leading the charge toward the mass production of housing were merchant builders Fred Marlow and Fritz Burns of Los Angeles, and David Bohannon of the San Francisco Bay area. Marlow and Burns pioneered mass production efforts in Los Angeles by developing entire new communities including Windsor Hills (1938), Westside Village in West Los Angeles (1939), Westchester (1941), and Toluca Wood in the San Fernando Valley (1941). Bohannon spearheaded similar large-scale building efforts in Northern California, specifically in the suburbs of San Francisco.



TOLUCA WOOD

REGARDLESS OF RISING PRICES... "HOMES AT WHOLESALE" IS STILL A FACT IN TOLUCA WOOD TODAY!

"Assembly line" methods — carload buying and quantity production coupled with smartly styled homes in a most excellent location merits immediate ATTENTION of all prospective home buyers . . .

Fastest Home Building Development in the Entire Valley!

- Eight minutes from the heart of Hollywood.
- Convenient to Lockheed and Vega aircraft—Columbia, Disney, Warner Bros. and Universal picture studios.
- Choice of two complete shopping centers—two bus lines.
- Schools, shops, play-places.
- A secluded, quiet, refined "pre-planned" residential district.

Choice of several designs—luxury features found only in homes costing many hundreds of dollars more . . . ALL 60-FOOT (or more) FRONTAGE LOTS

- Sewers
- Paved Streets
- Driveways
- Tree-planting

2-BEDROOM HOUSE—LOT DOUBLE GARAGE **\$4190**

(3 bedroom, double garage, \$4690)

SMALL DOWN PAYMENT—EASY MONTHLY TERMS

313 ALREADY SOLD —ONLY 38 LEFT!

Bring Your Check Book With You

Newspaper advertisements for Marlow-Burns' Toluca Wood development, 1941 (Historic Los Angeles Times).

Marlow, Burns, Bohannon, and their contemporaries all expressed a strong preference for Ranch style architecture in their new, mass-produced communities.¹⁷ Specifically, they took the essential form and aesthetic of the custom Ranch houses that had been designed by Cliff May and others and pared them down, producing a much more modest interpretation of the Ranch house that was standardized and easy to produce at a large scale. Called Minimal Ranches, these modest dwellings laid the groundwork for the mass production of housing after World War II. This nexus between mass-produced housing and Ranch style architecture is attributed in large part to aesthetics and cultural associations; since Ranch style architecture had historically been associated with affluence and high style design, it was also

¹⁶ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 38.

¹⁷ The topics of merchant builders and FHA design standards are addressed in greater detail in the Residential Development and Suburbanization context.

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embraced by those of more modest means. However, several other factors were also at play. The open, free-flowing interior plans that characterized Ranch houses were efficient and thus well-suited to mass production. Ranch style architecture proved quite easy to manipulate and could accommodate a wide variety of personal tastes, thereby providing each standardized house with an individual flair. Perhaps most importantly, the Ranch house had been vetted by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) due to its efficiency and adaptability, and was deemed an appropriate choice for the design of new, economical housing. Winning FHA approval meant that these mass-produced Ranch houses satisfied the eligibility criteria for the agency's low-cost home loans – “an essential component to successful mass sales.”¹⁸



Minimal Ranch house in Toluca Wood, developed by Marlow and Burns (Alan Hess).

While the Ranch house had become firmly ingrained in the public consciousness and was a well-established architectural type prior to World War II, it surged in popularity in the decades after the war as American society entered into a period characterized by a prevailing sense of optimism and economic prosperity. A variety of factors including pent-up consumer demand, soldiers' return from battle en masse, a steadily increasing birth rate, and favorable lending conditions provided by the FHA and Veterans Administration (VA) coalesced to produce an unprecedented demand for new, middle-income housing in the suburbs. The Ranch house emerged as the architecture of choice within these new developments. A housing industry report issued in 1945 asserted that “a California-styled house – like the ranch type – built in a carefully planned neighborhood or community with all the essentials for good living is your best bet for the post-war.”¹⁹ “By the 1950s, the Ranch house had become the predominant choice for detached, single-family residences, a position it held well into the 1960s,” said architectural

¹⁸ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 40.

¹⁹ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 51; “The Ranch House in Georgia,” Chapter 2, 18.

historian David Bricker.²⁰ By some accounts, it is estimated that eight of every ten new houses built in the 1950s embodied the Ranch aesthetic in one way or another.²¹

There are several reasons why the Ranch style proved so popular among middle-income Americans at this time. First was that the Ranch house was widely disseminated in popular media and was touted as the ideal dwelling for the modern American family. In collaboration with Cliff May, *Sunset* magazine released two influential publications – *Sunset Western Ranch Houses* (1946), followed by *Western Ranch Houses by Cliff May* (1958). Both read as architectural pattern books, with renderings and floor plans for Ranch style houses that were developed by May and other prominent West Coast architects.²² General interest magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *House Beautiful*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* often published full-page spreads of the Ranch house and cast this architectural type to a national audience.

Here's the book you've been waiting for...

You'll find ideas galore in *Sunset's* new, thorough treatment of the ranch house subject. Here the ranch house is colorfully portrayed as a type of architecture particularly suited to indoor-outdoor living . . . adaptable to city or suburb, small family or large . . . constructed of a miscellany of materials . . . full of tradition, but modern as tomorrow.

Here are sample inside pages of the Ranch House book

Advertisement for “Sunset Western Ranch Houses” (xamary.wordpress.com).

²⁰ David Bricker, “Ranch Houses Are Not All the Same,” 2000, accessed April 2015 via the National Park Service (NPS).

²¹ Ryan Reft, “Home on the California Range: Ranch Housing in Postwar America,” accessed April 2015 via KCET.

²² Bricker, “Ranch Houses Are Not All the Same.”

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American consumers thus became infatuated with the Ranch style and the casual, informal lifestyle that became associated with its aesthetic. Cliff May asserted that the Ranch house, “because of its name alone, borrows friendliness, simplicity, informality, and gaiety from the men and women who, in the past, found those pleasures in ranch-house living.”²³ Many of the Ranch houses built in the postwar era were sited in mass-produced subdivisions and were erected by the hundreds, and sometimes by the thousands, but their perceived association with historical ranches and the American West projected a sense of individualism and self-determination that appealed to middle-income Americans who were newly prosperous and were looking to settle on a ranch of their own, however modest, in the suburbs. In the eyes of these buyers, they were not simply purchasing a house; they were buying into a lifestyle.

On a more practical level, the design of Ranch houses readily met the day-to-day needs of the average American family. Their location in the suburbs provided a much-welcomed change from the congested and polluted urban environments in which many Americans lived prior to World War II. Spacious, open floor plans and blurred divisions between interior spaces facilitated interaction and coincided with postwar society’s heightened emphasis on the family unit. These houses’ rambling footprints could easily be expanded upon as a young family grew. Ranch houses typically came with amenities that were at one time out-of-reach for the average family including fully-equipped kitchens, attached garages to house the family’s automobile, and spacious front and rear yards where children could safely play.

Aesthetics also factored into the extraordinary appeal of the Ranch house. By blending together historical references and the open, free-flowing plans that many considered to be Modern, the Ranch style struck a measured balance between conservative and contemporary tastes and could easily be adapted to suit what seemed to be an endless array of preferences. Historian Russell Lynes captured this point in an observation he made about the Ranch house in the 1950s, when Ranch style architecture was at its heyday: “Nobody could mind it. It was not experimental enough to be considered ‘ugly’ by even the most conservative, and it was not tricked-up enough to be considered ‘ugly’ by the experimental. It was merely ‘nice.’ It was ‘unobjectionable.’ It was ‘homey, and it was said to be ‘practical.’”²⁴ There did exist a circle of critics who disparaged the Ranch house as banal, ubiquitous, and lacking ingenuity. The Ranch house, and the domesticity that it so strongly facilitated, also drew the ire of some women’s rights advocates, who saw this housing type as contributing to the angst and lack of fulfillment experienced by suburban housewives, as well as sociologists who expressed concern at the culture of uniformity that was emerging as middle-income Americans purchased Ranch style houses in the suburbs.²⁵ However, the opinions espoused by these critics were generally not in line with those of society at large; in actuality, said urban planner Alexander Garvin, “most people were happily moving into their ranch houses and were happy to have a nice house in a nice neighborhood.”²⁶

Between the mid-1940s and 1970s, entire neighborhoods of Ranch houses were rapidly developed in the hinterlands of cities across the nation. Utilizing the mass production methods that had been honed by merchant builders in the wartime years, these neighborhoods were composed of hundreds, and sometimes even thousands, of houses. In Los Angeles, Ranch house neighborhoods arose in areas of the city with ample open land for new development including Baldwin Hills, Westchester, parts of West Los Angeles, and the San Fernando Valley. The Valley proved to be particularly well-suited to the

²³ Michael Chapman, “The Ranch-Type House: Evolution, Evaluation, and Preservation” (Master’s thesis, University of Georgia, 2003), 27.

²⁴ Bricker, “Ranch Houses Are Not All the Same.”

²⁵ Clifford Edward Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 227-235.

²⁶ Samon (2003), 22.

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proliferation of this architectural type, as its vast expanses of open land provided “the perfect blank canvas on which to paint an array of Ranch houses in the post-World War II years.”²⁷ Across the Valley, what were historically farms, ranches, and other agricultural enterprises quickly gave way to sprawling subdivisions in just a few years’ time. Thousands upon thousands of new suburban houses were hastily constructed in these new subdivisions, dramatically transforming the Valley from a semi-rural bastion of agriculture into one vast, sprawling suburb of Los Angeles. Local historian, journalist and native son Kevin Roderick notes that the suburbanized Valley served “as the nation’s favorite symbol of suburbia run rampant.”²⁸



Mass-produced Ranch tract houses in Westchester, 1947 (Herald-Examiner Collection/Los Angeles Public Library).

Ranch house neighborhoods generally adhered to three key patterns of development that are associated with postwar suburbanization: residential subdivisions, residential neighborhoods, and planned communities.²⁹ Residential subdivisions consisted of a parcel of land that was subdivided into individual lots and generally reflected the vision of a single developer. Residential neighborhoods were also composed of numerous individual lots, but were often composed of multiple subdivisions or portions of subdivisions and therefore had boundaries that were not as clearly delineated. Planned communities were large-scale developments – such as the communities of Westchester and Panorama City – that were conceived and developed as singular units and incorporated a variety of land uses.

²⁷ Los Angeles Conservancy, “Home on the Ranch,” n.d., accessed April 2015.

²⁸ Kevin Roderick, *The San Fernando Valley: America’s Favorite Suburb* (Los Angeles: LA Times Books, 2001), ii.

²⁹ Topics relating to patterns of post-World War II residential development are addressed in greater detail in the Residential Development and Suburbanization context.

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Many of these Ranch house neighborhoods consisted of tract houses that were modest in size and appearance and adhered to one of several basic floor plans; these floor plans could then be manipulated in terms of orientation, materials, and ornament to provide each house with an individual flavor without compromising their economy or disrupting the continuity of the tract. Several prominent developers, including Julian Weinstock and William Mellenthin, became well-known for their role in developing Ranch house neighborhoods in Los Angeles; Mellenthin, who was active in the San Fernando Valley, is known for designing Ranch tract houses that incorporated exaggerated dove-cotes and other expressive features associated with Traditional Ranch style architecture.



Houses located in Ranch house neighborhoods. At top are mass-produced tract houses that adhered to standardized plans; at bottom are houses that were mass-produced but featured customized designs (Architectural Resources Group).

While tract houses accounted for many of the dwellings that were constructed in postwar Ranch house neighborhoods, some of these neighborhoods were instead developed with customized Ranch houses, which were marketed to upper-middle income households and struck a kind of “middle ground” between the economical, modest tract houses that were being developed en masse and the high-style custom Ranches that were out of reach to all but the most affluent homebuyers. Instead of selecting from one of several predetermined house plans and décor packages, individual buyers could design a Ranch house of their choosing, so long as its design was compatible with the overarching vision for the subdivision or neighborhood in which it was located. Toward this end, developers of these tracts often built demonstration houses as a model for new dwellings, provided design assistance as needed, and required that new houses be vetted by an architectural review board prior to their construction. These customized Ranch houses are similar to tract houses in that they were constructed on a large scale and comprised a larger residential development; however, in contrast to tract houses these customized

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dwelling were larger in size, exhibited a higher degree of articulation, occupied considerably larger lots, and were deeply set back from the street. In Los Angeles, customized Ranch house neighborhoods can be found in the San Fernando Valley, particularly in the Northridge area and in several of the communities located to the south of Ventura Boulevard.

Since architects had a difficult time working within the confines of the commercial building industry, postwar Ranch houses were most often designed and built by local contractors rather than by architects. However, there were some notable exceptions to this trend, as the challenge of bringing good design to the average person's house preoccupied many architects of the period. For instance, noted architects Walter Wurdeman and Welton Becket (Wurdeman and Becket) designed model houses for the master-planned suburban community of Panorama City, several of which typified the stripped-back aesthetic of the Minimal Ranch and were marketed as "Kaiser's California Ranch House."³⁰ Charles Dubois, perhaps best known for his flamboyant "Swiss-Miss" style houses in Palm Springs, designed Ranch houses within the Woodside subdivision in Woodland Hills and incorporated contemporary elements into their design.³¹ Edward Fickett and Palmer and Krisel worked in tandem with several prolific developers and became involved in the design of mass-produced tract Ranch houses.³² In the early 1950s, Cliff May, in collaboration with architect Chris Choate, devised a much smaller, scaled-down interpretation of his trademark California Ranch house that was based on a modular plan and could be replicated on a much larger scale. Averaging 950 square feet, these houses are notable for their innovative manufacturing and distributing system; whereas May and Choate designed the models and determined their specifications, the houses' construction was franchised out to individual builders. Marketed as the "Cliff May Homes," these economical Ranch houses were constructed in residential tracts across the nation; in Southern California, examples of these modest dwellings can be found in the Los Angeles County areas of Long Beach and West Covina, and throughout suburban Orange County.



Ranch tract houses in the Woodside subdivision in Woodland Hills, designed in 1959 by architect Charles Dubois (Architectural Resources Group).

By the postwar era, two prevailing Ranch house styles had emerged: the Traditional Ranch style and the Contemporary Ranch style. Derived from these two basic Ranch house styles were several sub-styles,

³⁰ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 54.

³¹ Los Angeles Conservancy, "Home on the Ranch."

³² Hess, *The Ranch House*, 70.

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most of which drew upon other architectural trends that were popular at the time. The various styles and sub-styles associated with the Ranch house are broken down as follows:

- The **Traditional Ranch** style draws heavily upon the plainspoken architecture of nineteenth century working ranches. Buildings designed in this style are often described as resembling the “quintessential Ranch house.” The Traditional Ranch style was immensely popular and appeared in many popular magazines and architectural pattern books. It is distinguished by its rusticated aesthetic and incorporation of ornament that pays homage to the Ranch house’s vernacular antecedents. The style was applied to both custom and mass-produced houses.
- The **Contemporary Ranch** style reflects architects and builders’ attempt to reconcile the basic form of the Ranch house and the abstract geometries and contemporary details of Modernism. This style was popular in the postwar era and was also applied to both custom and mass-produced houses. As to assume a more Modern aesthetic, Contemporary Ranches are generally devoid of the historicist references and rusticated details that are found on Traditional Ranches



Examples of the Traditional Ranch (left) and Contemporary Ranch (right) styles (Architectural Resources Group).

Many buildings that are designed in the Traditional Ranch style are true-to-form examples of the style and can simply be described as “Traditional Ranches.” However, Traditional Ranches may also embody one or more of the following sub-styles, all of which are evolutions of the Traditional Ranch style:

- **American Colonial Ranches** take on the essential form, massing, and configuration of a Ranch house, but also incorporate architectural elements that are associated with the American Colonial Revival style. Common features include symmetrical facades with formal gable ends, horizontal board siding, cupolas, and other Colonial-inspired ornament and details.
- **Cape Cod Ranches** also exhibit the form, massing, and configuration of a Ranch house but exhibit elements that are commonly found on Cape Cod style houses. Notably, in Cape Cod Ranches the irregularity of the Ranch style is transposed into Salt Box forms including steeply pitched roofs, a diversion from the typical low-slung roof of other Ranch variations. Common features include horizontal board siding and shallow eaves.
- **Cinderella Ranches** resemble the Traditional Ranches from which they are derived, but they are distinguished by their highlighted and often exaggerated details. Common features include scalloped bargeboards, shutters and fascias reflecting Swiss Chalet details, and over-scaled turned columns or supports.

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- **Hacienda Ranches**, as their name implies, are designed to loosely resemble the *haciendas* of nineteenth century California. Common features include clay tile roofs, roughly textured stucco exteriors, and deeply-inset windows that resemble adobe construction.
- **Minimal Ranches** are pared down versions of the Traditional Ranch house. These houses were generally built in accordance with FHA design guidelines as to attain eligibility for federal home loans. These houses tend to be more austere and modest in appearance than Traditional Ranches, and their footprints are simple and adhere to a basic square or rectangular plan. Wall materials tend to lack variation, and the application of ornament is restrained.

Likewise, Contemporary Ranch houses can also be true-to-form examples of the style and can simply be described as “Contemporary Ranches,” or they may embody one or more of the following sub-styles:

- **Oriental Ranches** are distinguished by their incorporation of Asian-inspired motifs. Common features include roofs with tapered, extended ends that sweep upward; circular moon gates at doors and windows; wood screens; and Oriental decorative paneling. It is not uncommon for some Oriental Ranches to exhibit Polynesian-inspired elements or motifs.
- **Regency Ranches** incorporate elements of Hollywood Regency style architecture into the Ranch house form. Distinguishing features include delicate and refined ornament, mansard roofs, wrought iron front porch columns, hexagonal decorative windows, and cupolas.



Some common variations of the Traditional and Contemporary Ranch styles include the American Colonial Ranch (upper left), Cape Cod Ranch (upper right), Cinderella Ranch (lower left), and Oriental Ranch (lower right) (Architectural Resources Group).

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Examples of non-residential Ranch style buildings include commercial buildings in Sherman Oaks (top left) and Toluca Lake (top right), and the UCLA Faculty Center (bottom), designed in 1959 by Austin, Field and Fry (Architectural Resources Group).

The Ranch style transcended the single-family house and was applied to other property types in the postwar era. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was not uncommon for apartment buildings and other types of multi-family residences to also exhibit the low-to-the-ground profile, horizontal massing, board-and-batten siding, and rusticated details that typified the single-family Ranch house. In 1960, the Shell Oil Company pioneered the concept of the Ranch style service station in Millbrae, California, in response to a local planning commission's request that the station be compatible with an adjacent housing tract. Shell responded by designing a prototype that resembled the houses within the tract and eventually

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came to operate thousands of these Ranch style gas stations nationwide.³³ Other commercial developers followed suit, designing commercial complexes and buildings that resembled Ranch houses and thus blended into the suburban environments in which they were constructed. A handful of public and private institutional properties were designed in the same vein.

By the 1970s, the Ranch style had fallen out of favor among developers and the American public for a variety of reasons. Due to the rapid pace of postwar suburbanization, buildable land became more and more scarce, and thus more expensive to acquire and improve. Rising energy costs made it more expensive to cool, heat, and maintain a sprawling Ranch house than in the past.³⁴ Since many of those in the market to purchase a new house in the 1970s had themselves been raised in a Ranch house, the Ranch aesthetic was seen as antiquated and as something to be associated with past generations. By the 1970s, then, the Ranch house gave way to new types of housing including more compact, two-story dwellings and townhouses. These buildings shied away from the informal and rusticated aesthetic that had been popularized through the Ranch house and instead drew upon historical references and idioms, often referred to as Neo-Traditional architecture. The open, free-flowing interior spaces and informal plans associated with the Ranch house were supplanted by features commonly seen in 1970s and 1980s domestic design including formal great rooms, cathedral ceilings, and grand foyers.³⁵

³³ Tim Russell, *Fill'Er Up! The History of American Gas Stations* (St. Paul: Voyageur Press, 2007), 106.

³⁴ Hess, *The Ranch House*, 17.

³⁵ Katherine Ann Samon, *Ranch House Style* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 2003), 22-24.

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THEME: The Ranch House, 1930-1975

SUB-THEME: Traditional Custom Ranch House, 1930-1975

Summary Statement of Significance: Traditional Custom Ranch Houses evaluated under this theme are significant for the quality of their architecture and are important individual examples that exemplify the Traditional Ranch style and the Ranch house type. Often described as resembling the “quintessential Ranch house,” the Traditional Ranch style is distinguished by its rusticated appearance and incorporation of elements reminiscent of the vernacular, nineteenth century buildings of California and the American West. It was the Traditional Ranch aesthetic that was widely disseminated in popular magazines and replicated across the nation. Identified examples are custom-designed, were typically designed by a noted architect, and stand out as among the best examples of the style. These characteristics help to distinguish Traditional Custom Ranch houses from the scores of mass-produced tract houses designed in the Traditional Ranch style.

Period of Significance: 1930-1975

Period of Significance Justification: Traditional Custom Ranch houses were built over the entire period during which the Ranch style was a popular choice for residential architecture. The period of significance begins in 1930, when the Ranch style first began to appear in Los Angeles, and ends in 1975, when Ranch houses fell out of favor.

Geographic Location: Citywide, with concentrations in the hills of the San Fernando Valley, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, Bel Air, and Beverly Crest

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Residential – Single-Family Residence

Property Type Description: The Traditional Custom Ranch style is almost always expressed in the form of a one-story, single-family residence. Houses designed in this architectural style include several identifying characteristics such as rambling, elongated plans; a horizontal emphasis; general asymmetry; free-flowing interior spaces; and a designed connection to the outdoors. Traditional Ranch style houses are distinguished from other variations of Ranch architecture by their incorporation of elements associated with the working ranches that historically dotted the vernacular landscape of California and other western states. Features such as low-pitched roofs with wide eaves, a combination of cladding

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materials including board-and-batten siding, brick and stone chimneys, and large picture windows were commonly applied and evoked an aesthetic that was reminiscent of these past architectural traditions. Decorative features such as wood shutters and dove-cotes were often added to enhance the rusticated appearance of Traditional Ranch houses.

Property Type Significance:

Traditional Custom Ranch Houses are reflective of important trends in domestic architecture between the early 1930s and mid-1970s. Specifically, these houses underscored Americans' infatuation with their collective past and Colonial-era roots, and also represented the casual and informal way of life that came to define patterns of living both before and after World War II. Single-family residences that are evaluated under this theme are custom-designed (as opposed to mass produced) and are among the best examples of the Traditional Ranch style. These residences were typically designed by noted architects.

Eligibility Standards:

- Is an important individual example that exemplifies the Traditional Ranch style and Ranch house type
- Was constructed during the period of significance
- Was custom-designed (as opposed to mass-produced)

Character-Defining Features:

- 1,500 – 3,500 square feet in size
- Asymmetrical informal composition with one or more wings
- Attached garages, often forming one wing
- Brick or stone chimneys
- Close relationship to its yard
- Dutch doors
- Eaves with exposed rafter tails
- Exposed post and beam construction
- French doors
- Gabled roof, originally shingled
- Garage door with barn door crossing brace
- One or two stories in height
- Shutters
- Sliding glass doors
- Two-story versions can include Monterey Colonial elements, including second-story balconies
- Typically designed by a well-known architect

Integrity Considerations:

- Additions may be allowed if not visible within public view
- Roof line alterations are not acceptable
- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Materials, and Workmanship

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THEME: The Ranch House, 1930-1975

SUB-THEME: Contemporary Custom Ranch House, 1945-1975

Summary Statement of Significance: Contemporary Custom Ranch Houses evaluated under this theme are significant for the quality of their architecture and are important individual examples that exemplify the Contemporary Ranch style and the Ranch house type. Unlike the rusticated aesthetic and historicist references associated with the Traditional Ranch, Contemporary Custom Ranch Houses blended together abstract geometries and Modern ornamental details with the essential form, massing, and configuration of the Ranch house. The style's rise in popularity coincided with the American public's intrigue with progress and modernity in the postwar era. Identified examples are custom-designed (as opposed to mass produced), were often designed by a noted architect, and stand out as among the best examples of the style. These characteristics distinguish Contemporary Custom Ranch houses from the scores of mass-produced tract houses designed in the Contemporary Ranch style.

Period of Significance: 1945-1975

Period of Significance Justification: Contemporary Custom Ranch houses were popular after World War II. The period of significance begins in 1945, considered to be the beginning of the postwar era, and ends in 1975, when Ranch houses fell out of favor.

Geographic Location: Citywide, with concentrations in the hills of the San Fernando Valley, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, Bel Air, and Beverly Crest

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: NR: C CR: 3 Local: 3

Associated Property Types: Residential – Single-Family Residence

Property Type Description: The Contemporary Custom Ranch style is almost always expressed in the form of a one-story, single-family residence. Like the Traditional Ranches with which they are associated, Contemporary Custom Ranch Houses exhibit essential characteristics that typify the Ranch style including rambling plans, general asymmetry, a horizontal emphasis, free-flowing interior configurations, and a designed connection to the outdoors. However, many of the historicist references and vernacular details that are expressed in Traditional Ranches are replaced by more abstract geometries and ornamental details that are generally associated with Modern architecture.

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Contemporary Custom Ranch Houses were often of post-and-beam construction; carports frequently took the place of garages; exterior surfaces tended to be clad in a more simplistic palette of stucco and wood board-and-batten siding; roofs were of a lower pitch and sometimes took on expressive or flamboyant forms; and ornament assumed an abstract appearance and was more judiciously applied. Additional features such as rock roofs and clerestory windows were often incorporated as a means of enhancing these houses' contemporary styling.

Property Type Significance:

Contemporary Custom Ranch Houses are reflective of important trends in domestic architecture in the postwar era, specifically the period between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s. Houses designed in the style are significant for melding together the core tenets of the Ranch house and those of Modernism, producing a dwelling type that was resolutely Ranch but incorporated contemporary forms and details that appealed to young families and fashion-conscious consumers in the postwar era. Single-family residences that are evaluated under this theme are custom-designed (as opposed to mass produced) and are among the best examples of the Contemporary Ranch style. These residences were typically designed by noted architects.

Eligibility Standards:

- Is an important individual example that exemplifies the Contemporary Ranch style and Ranch house type
- Was constructed during the period of significance
- Was custom-designed (as opposed to mass-produced)

Character-Defining Features:

- 1,500 – 3,500 square feet in size
- Abstract in form
- Carports common
- Gable ends filled with clerestory windows
- Gable roofline, sometimes low pitched
- Many are post and beam construction
- Modern ornamental details
- One or two stories in height
- Plain fascia board trim
- Porches or carports may be screened with concrete block or wood screen in an abstract design
- Typically designed by a well-known architect
- Wall materials of stucco, vertical and horizontal wood board, board and batten
- Windows and doors treated as void elements composed to balance the solid walls

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Integrity Considerations:

- Additions may be allowed if not visible within public view
- Roof line alterations are not acceptable
- Should retain integrity of Location, Design, Materials, and Workmanship

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THEME: The Ranch House, 1930-1975

SUB-THEME: Commercial and Institutional Ranch Style, 1945-1975

Summary Statement of Significance: Resources evaluated under the Commercial and Institutional Ranch Style theme are significant for the quality of their architecture and are important individual examples that exemplify the Ranch style and the Ranch house type, as applied to multi-family dwellings and non-residential building types. While the Ranch style was most commonly applied to single-family residences, it was adapted to a variety of other property types in the post-World War II era as developers sought to make these buildings compatible with the suburban environments in which they were located. Identified examples stand out as particularly distinctive, inventive, or expressive adaptations of the Commercial and Institutional Ranch style.

Period of Significance: 1945-1975

Period of Significance Justification: Multi-family dwellings and non-residential buildings that were designed in the Ranch style were popular after World War II. Accordingly, the period of significance begins in 1945, considered to be the beginning of the postwar era, and ends in 1975, when the Ranch style fell out of favor.

Geographic Location: Citywide, particularly along major commercial corridors in the San Fernando Valley

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: **NR: C** **CR: 3** **Local: 3**

Associated Property Types:

- Residential – Multi-Family Residential
- Commercial
- Institutional

Property Type Description: The Commercial and Institutional Ranch style is expressed through a variety of building types. Multi-family residences designed in the style most often took the form of one and two-story apartment buildings. Commercial properties included motels, restaurants, supermarkets, and shopping centers that were most often located on major arterial streets and catered to passing motorists. Institutional properties that embody the style are associated with both public and private entities and include schools, churches, civic buildings, and clubhouses.

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- Property Type Significance:** Incorporating many of the same essential characteristics of single-family Ranch houses designed in the Traditional Ranch and Contemporary Ranch styles, buildings designed in the Commercial and Institutional Ranch style are important for representing the broad appeal and adaptability of Ranch style architecture and the Ranch house type. Moreover, commercial and Institutional Ranch style buildings reflected planners and developers' attempt to create an architectural type that was compatible with the suburban environments in which these buildings were located. The Commercial and Institutional Ranch style was applied to a variety of multi-family residential, commercial, and institutional properties built in the postwar period. These buildings were sometimes, but not always designed by a noted architect of the period.
- Eligibility Standards:**
- Is an important individual example that exemplifies the Ranch style and type
 - Was constructed during the period of significance
- Character-Defining Features:**
- May also feature the Rustic style of the Traditional Ranch with board and batten, eaves, and exposed beams
 - May embody the Traditional or Contemporary Ranch house features
 - One or two stories in height
- Integrity Considerations:**
- Additions may be acceptable if not within public view, do not alter the original roofline, and are subordinate to the original design intent
 - Additions may be allowed if not visible within public view
 - Filling in of articulated volumes or filling in spaces meant to act as voids is not acceptable
 - Irreversibly covering exposed framing is not acceptable
 - Major changes to the roofline are not acceptable
 - Original wood may be painted
 - Replacement of some windows may be acceptable if the openings have not been changed or resized
 - Should retain integrity of Design, Materials, Workmanship, and Feeling

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THEME: Housing the Masses, 1880-1980

SUB-THEME: Ranch House Neighborhoods, 1938-1975

Summary Statement of Significance: Ranch House neighborhoods evaluated under this theme are significant for the quality of their architecture and are important concentrations of Ranch style architecture and the Ranch house type. As they consist of multiple properties, these neighborhoods are evaluated as potential historic districts. Eligible Ranch House neighborhoods consist of both mass-produced tract houses and concentrations of customized houses that exhibit characteristics associated with one or more variations of the Ranch style. These neighborhoods stand out as among the City's best concentrations of Ranch houses, and demonstrate how the Ranch style was adapted to large-scale residential development in the post-World War II era.

Period of Significance: 1938-1975

Period of Significance Justification: Developers began to experiment with the mass production of Ranch houses in the years preceding World War II. The period of significance begins in 1938, when Marlow-Burns opened the first of their mass-produced communities in Windsor Hills, and ends in 1975, when the Ranch style fell out of favor.

Geographic Location: Citywide, with concentrations in the San Fernando Valley, Baldwin Hills, and West Los Angeles

Area(s) of Significance: Architecture

Criteria: **NR: C** **CR: 3** **Local: 3**

Associated Property Types: Residential – Post-War Suburb (Subdivision, Neighborhood, Planned Community)

Property Type Description: As they were primarily developed after World War II, Ranch House neighborhoods adhere to patterns of development that are associated with post-World War II suburbanization. These patterns include residential subdivisions, which generally follow original subdivision boundaries and reflect the vision of their respective developer; residential neighborhoods, which do not follow original subdivision boundaries, but exhibit a strong sense of place and are notable for the quality and cohesion of their architecture; and planned communities, which are large-scale residential developments that were planned and developed as singular units. Each is composed of concentrations of single-family houses designed in one or more variations of the Ranch style. Planned communities always consist of mass-

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produced tract houses, but subdivisions and neighborhoods may consist of either mass-produced tract houses or concentrations of customized houses. In addition to the houses themselves, these neighborhoods are most often characterized by distinctive planning features including curvilinear street networks, cul-de-sacs, and different types of physical infrastructure including curbs, sidewalks, and lighting.

Property Type Significance:

Ranch House neighborhoods are significant for the quality and cohesion of their architecture and are evaluated as potential historic districts. When treated as a singular unit (as opposed to evaluating each of their individual houses in isolation), eligible subdivisions, neighborhoods, and planned communities stand out as among the strongest and most distinctive concentrations of Ranch style architecture and Ranch type houses in Los Angeles. Eligible Ranch House neighborhoods exemplify how Ranch style architecture was adapted to large-scale residential development in the post-World War II era, and demonstrate the popularity and proliferation of the Ranch house style and type.

Eligibility Standards:

- Because Ranch house neighborhoods are common in Los Angeles, eligible examples must include a majority of residences which embody the distinctive characteristics of the Ranch house type and styles
- Conveys a strong visual sense of overall historic environment from the period of significance
- May include one or a full range of Ranch house types and styles
- Must retain the majority of the original planning features including street patterns, setbacks, landscape or street features
- Was developed during the period of significance

Character-Defining Features:

- Carports may be common
- Custom Ranch houses typically constructed on large parcels with deep setbacks
- District boundaries will typically follow the original subdivision plates, although vacant parcels and non-contributing buildings may be excluded along the perimeters
- Garages may be attached or unattached
- May also be evaluated as significant within the Post-WWII Suburbanization theme
- May include more than one subdivision if they were platted at a similar period of time and contain houses designed in Ranch house styles
- May include some multi-family residential types
- Primarily comprised of one-story residences
- Streets often curvilinear with cul-de-sacs

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Integrity Considerations:

- An accumulation of minor alterations may render a residence non-contributing
- District as a whole should retain integrity of Location, Setting, Design, Workmanship, Feeling, and Materials
- Physical infrastructure such as curbing, street lights, street trees, and other amenities will ideally be present if they existed originally
- Residences with second-story or large one-story additions are non-contributing
- Within districts, the threshold of integrity for contributing properties is defined as the ability of a particular building to reflect the architectural style and form that it would have possessed at the time of construction

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