

John Byers (Third) Residence
2034 La Mesa Drive
Santa Monica, California
City Landmark Assessment Report

Evaluation Report
Building Permit History
City Directory Research
Additional Photographs
Tax Assessor Map
Sanborn Map



Prepared for:
City of Santa Monica
Planning Division

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Santa Monica, California

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John Byers (Third) Residence
2034 La Mesa Drive
City of Santa Monica
APN: 4407-020-015
City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Description of site or structure, note any major alterations and dates of alterations

The subject property is situated on the south side of La Mesa Drive on Lot 44 in the 7233 Tract (originally Canyon Vista Tract) of the City of Santa Monica. The lot size is approximately 100 feet by 167 feet. The dwelling fronts north and is located in a single-family residential neighborhood richly landscaped with mature Moreton Bay fig trees.

The subject property was previously identified as an individual resource and as a contributor to the “La Mesa Historic District” in the *1985-1986 Santa Monica Historical Resources Inventory*. At that time, the property was given a National Register Status Code of 5B.¹ Additionally, the *North of Montana Area 2001-2002 Santa Monica Historical Resources Survey Inventory* identified the subject property (called the “Third John Byers House”) as a contributor to the La Mesa Drive District, both a potential National Register and City of Santa Monica historic district. Under the North of Montana Survey, the subject property was given a National Register Status Code of 3B/5D.²

Designed in the Monterey Revival style, this two-story, stuccoed covered single-family residence has an irregular-shaped plan. One of the most prominent features is the U-shaped wooden balcony, which wraps around the central section of the upper floor of the primary (north) elevation. Red tile hipped and gable roofs with projecting chimney caps the stuccoed clad, wood-frame dwelling. Wood-framed, recessed multi-paned casements windows are asymmetrically placed along each of the elevations at varying intervals. An enclosed front courtyard, previously remodeled, is incorporated into the east half of the façade and a one-story garage is attached along the west side of the house. Entry into the house is via an arched entry portal along the front courtyard’s stuccoed clad wall. The residence is setback from the street and is generously landscaped with a variety of plants, shrubs, and trees.³

According to building permits on file at City Hall, the residence has undergone a number of modifications over the years by Byers and subsequent owners. However, these alterations have taken place primarily at the rear (south) house, along secondary elevations and, therefore, have not compromised Byers’ original architectural design intent. Recorded

¹ *Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) National Register Status Code 5B: Ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but locally eligible under a City ordinance as both an individual Landmark property and as a contributor to a historic district.*

² *Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) National Register Status Code 3B/5D: Appears eligible for the National Register as an individual property and as a contributor to a historic district (3B); Ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places, but locally eligible under a City ordinance as a contributor to a historic district (5D).*

³ *Because the property has not been significantly modified since it was last evaluated, much of the architectural description has been drawn from the Historic Resources Inventory form previously completed for the property.*

modifications that have occurred over the years include:

- 1925: addition of a one-story, two room addition with shed roof (\$300);
- 1928: one-story, one room dining room addition with tile floor and shed roof covered with tiles (\$500);
- 1934: bedroom enlargement (\$300);
- 1941: repair work for roof leak;
- 1947: bay window enlargement (\$200);
- 1960: sandblasting permit;
- 1967: new kitchen cabinets and windows ((\$2,500);
- 1981: remodel to rear of house and add to existing residence (\$80,000);
- 1984: add one-story accessory building at rear (south) of lot (\$28,000);
- 1984: add pool and spa at rear (south) of residence (\$14,000);
- 1994: add 12 feet of block wall (location not specified), earthquake damage repair;
- 1996: install spa at rear of residence (\$3,000)
- 1996: kitchen remodel and new stairs in family room (\$9,000);
- 1996: add bay window and potting shed (\$4,500);
- 2000: new swimming pool installed (\$12,000) [note: the pool installed in 1984 was removed at some unspecified date and the area infilled with dirt and landscaped].

Statement of Architectural Significance

The property at 2034 La Mesa Drive is a very good example of the Monterey Revival style as interpreted by Santa Monica architect John Byers into large-scale residential design. The Monterey style was a free revival of the Angelo-influenced Spanish Colonial houses of northern California. These houses blended Spanish adobe construction with pitched-roof, massed-plan English shapes brought to California from New England. The revival version similarly fused Spanish Eclectic and Colonial Revival details. Monterey style dwellings are usually horizontal in character, two-stories with a low-pitched gabled roof (occasionally hipped); second-story balcony, which usually cantilevered and was covered by the principal roof form. The roofs are usually covered with wooden shingles or tiles. Wall cladding materials are either stucco, brick, or wood (weatherboard, shingle, or vertical board-and-batten). Other typical features of this style include an asymmetrical façade and/or the asymmetrical placement of doors and windows,

The subject property at 2034 La Mesa Drive displays many of these architectural features in its design and configuration. These particular features incorporated into this residence include the stucco covered siding, the red tiled roof, the asymmetrically placed casement windows and entry door, the cantilevered second-story balcony, and the horizontal massing. Additionally, the stout chimney with smooth stucco cladding is a typical design feature of Byers. The one-story addition located at the rear (south) of the lot was designed and built in 1984 with compatible materials, proportions, scale, and massing as that of the main front house. The addition's architectural style incorporates the Spanish Colonial Revival idiom and complements Byer's original overall design intent.

Statement of Historical Importance

Santa Monica. In 1875, the original townsite of Santa Monica was surveyed, including all the land extending from Colorado Street on the south to Montana on the north, and from 26th Street on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west. Between 1893 and the 1920s, the community operated as a tourist attraction, visited by mostly wealthy patrons. Those areas just outside of the incorporated city limits were semi-rural in setting and were populated with scattered residences. After the advent of the automobile in the 1920s, Santa Monica experienced a significant building boom, with homes being constructed in the tracts north of Montana and east of Seventh Street for year-round residents.

La Mesa Drive. Located at the northeast edge of the City of Santa Monica, La Mesa Drive is an intact, six block long, curving street of large and gracious homes mostly dating from the 1920s and 1930s. The street is parallel to San Vicente Boulevard, with access to it at each end and in the middle. Mature Moreton Bay fig trees, with their overhanging canopy of leaves and their large, intricate root systems, line both sides of the street. Vintage post top street lamps, with paired lanterns at the ends of the drive and single ones on the interior, illuminate La Mesa during the evening hours. Thirty-seven homes contribute to the historic quality of this district, which suffers little from intrusions. Opened in 1923, as the Canyon Vista Tract (now Tract 7233), a development of the Santa Monica Land and Water Company, La Mesa quickly became one of the most sought after addresses in Santa Monica. Several noted architects were commissioned to design the homes that soon lined La Mesa. Most prominent among the designers were Santa Monica's native son, John Byers, who is responsible for eight houses, including his own at 2034 La Mesa Drive. Byers' work on La Mesa showed him at his most characteristic, exploring the possibilities of Spanish, Mexican, and Monterey styling. Two important Pasadena architectural firms are also represented on La Mesa: Marston, Van Pelt and Maybury (2202) and Palmer Sabin (2233). In many ways La Mesa Drive was comparable to the elegant residential neighborhoods of Pasadena, which were made outstanding by the work of these firms, among others. Another architectural luminary who worked on La Mesa Drive was Paul Williams (2201, 2209) who was to Los Angeles residential architecture in the 1920s and 1930s what John Byers was to Santa Monica. Williams, more than any other single architect, created the upper middle class elegance of districts such as Hancock Park. The 1930s and 1940s on La Mesa saw the construction of two homes in the International Style by two architects of great stature in Los Angeles, Lloyd Wright, son of Frank Lloyd Wright (2323 La Mesa Drive) and a prolific and innovative architect on his own, and J. R. Davidson, a talented European expatriate who formed one of the circles associated with Richard Neutra (2501 La Mesa Drive). In addition, several less well-known designers put forth their efforts on La Mesa, most notably Gable and Wyant (1923). This tradition of hiring renowned architects continued well into the 1960s with the construction of the Niemeyer House by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer in 1964 (1911 La Mesa Drive).

2034 La Mesa Drive. In 1924, John Byers obtained a building permit to construct an eight room, two bath dwelling at 2034 La Mesa Drive with an estimated cost of \$15,000. The 1924 building permit listed Byers as the owner, architect, and builder. At that time, his

address was noted as 2102 La Mesa Drive. According to city directory research, except for a few years in the early 1930s Byers and his family lived at 2034 La Mesa Drive from when the dwelling was completed in 1925 through to the late 1950s. From the 1960s through to today, the property changed hands a number of times (see City Directory Research). This residence was the third house designed and built by Byers along La Mesa Drive. In total, Byers was responsible for the design and construction of eight houses on this street, including his own:

- 2021 La Mesa Drive (1924)
- 2034 La Mesa Drive (1924)
- 2101 La Mesa Drive (1924)
- 2126 La Mesa Drive (1925)
- 2141 La Mesa Drive (1928)
- 2153 La Mesa Drive (1925)
- 2210 La Mesa Drive (1925)
- 2535 La Mesa Drive (1948)

Person(s) of Historical Importance

According to building permits, city directories, and previously completed research, Santa Monica architect John Winford Byers designed, built, and occupied the subject property. Except for a few years in the early 1930s, the Byers occupied this residence for well over 30 years. Later residents included a Mr. Carter (1960), Thomas Dunlap (1967), Ralph Horowitz (1981), Robert Jones (1984), actress Amy Irving (1994), movie director John Wells (1996), and current owners William Finkelstein and Barbara Schnitzler (2000 to current).

The property is directly associated with Santa Monica architect John Winford Byers. In the period between World War I and World War II, John Byers made more of an impact on the Santa Monica architectural landscape than any other local practitioner. Byers, who had previously been employed as a schoolteacher, teaching Spanish and French, at San Rafael High School and Santa Monica High School, was a graduate from Harvard University.

By the mid 1910s, Byers was particularly interested in architectural forms and materials indigenous to California. He completed his first commission, a house at 510 Lincoln Boulevard for W.F. Barnum, the principal of the Santa Monica High School in 1916. Byers eventually established an architectural practice at 246 26th Street (now a Santa Monica City Landmark). He explored the possibilities of a number of architectural styles including Spanish, Mexican, and Monterey. He was most notable for his “Adobe” designed buildings, having written several articles in the 1920s and 1930s on adobe construction and its influence in California architect. Byers achieved a wide reputation in southern California for his unique architectural styling, acquiring a large following amongst entertainment world celebrities.

Byers’ career in Santa Monica spanned more than three decades. Examples of his work include the residences at 1707 (Albert Ahern residence) and 1717 (Donald Armstrong

residence) San Vicente, 217 17th Street (Laidlaw residence), 1602 Georgina (E.J. Carrillo residence), 500 25th Street (J.B. Nethercott residence), and 270 18th Street (Speers residence). Other dwellings were constructed in Coachella, Victorville, Bel Air, and Beverly Hills. Byers also constructed an adobe memorial recreation hall in Santa Monica, a clubhouse at Brentwood Park, and a church in San Fernando. In 1931, examples of Byers' work were displayed in the Architects Building Material Exhibit, held in Los Angeles. In 1936, Byers, along with architect, Edla Muir of West Los Angeles, designed a two-story ranch residence for R. A. Sperry in Encino. In 1946, he worked with Rose Connor, an architect from Pasadena, to design an adobe style residence in San Gabriel.

Statement of other significance

The property does appear to meet criteria for high aesthetic or artistic value as it is defined in *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*.

Is the structure representative of a style in the City that is no longer prevalent?

This large, single-family residence is a very good example of the Monterey Revival style as interpreted by local architect John Byers. However, there are other examples of his work, including those in the Monterey style, Spanish Colonial style, and the Adobe style, extant along La Mesa Drive and within other areas of the City. Additionally, many other dwellings designed in this particular architectural style still exist today and can be found elsewhere in the neighborhood and within the city at-large. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that this particular style is no longer prevalent within the City of Santa Monica.

Does the structure contribute to a potential historic district?

The subject property was previously identified as a contributor to the "La Mesa Historic District" in the City's *1985-1986 Historical Resources Inventory*. Additionally, the *North of Montana Area 2001-2002 Survey Update* identified the subject property (called the "Third John Byers House") as a contributor to the "La Mesa Potential Historic District," a potential historic district both eligible for National Register and City of Santa Monica designation (3B/5D).

CONCLUSION

In summary, based on current research and the above assessment, the property located at 2034 La Mesa Drive appears to meet several applicable City of Santa Monica Landmark criteria. The property was evaluated according to statutory criteria as follows:

Landmark Criteria:

9.36.100(a)(1) It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.

The dwelling is a very good example of the Monterey Revival architectural style as

interpreted by architect John Byers in domestic architecture. The property at 2034 La Mesa Drive retains sufficient contextual and architectural integrity to manifest the residential development and architectural history of La Mesa Drive. Additionally, this property is representative of the City's overall development and architectural history. Therefore, in conclusion the subject property appears to satisfy this criterion.

9.36.100(a)(2) It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.

The subject property is a very good example of the Monterey Revival style as designed by local architect John Byers. The design execution of this house expresses the aesthetic ideals Byers so widely advocated during the 1920s and 1930s. Additionally, the landscaping in and around the property further complements the architectural styling of the residence. With these elements drawn together, the property at 2034 La Mesa Drive appears to possess high aesthetic or artistic qualities necessary for designation under this criterion.

9.36.100(a)(3) It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.

The property is associated with Santa Monica architect John Byers. Not only did Byers design this dwelling, he and his family also lived here for over 30 years. Because of his prolific and distinctive architectural portfolio here within the City of Santa Monica, which helped define the City's architectural landscape, John Winford Byers is considered a significant individual important in local history. Therefore, the subject property appears to satisfy this criterion.

9.36.100(a)(4) It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.

The property appears to satisfy this criterion. The subject property is a very good example of the Monterey Revival architectural style. It embodies a number of character-defining features of the style including an asymmetrical facade, red clay tile roof, stuccoed walls, wood framed windows with prominent lintels and sills, arched doorways, and wrought iron window grilles. Though modified (primarily at the rear of the residence) over the years, the quality and architectural context of the subject property have not been compromised to diminish Byers' original design intent.

9.36.100(a)(5) It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.

The subject property is directly associated with architect John Byers, a notable local architect. The residence was the third house (out of eight) designed and built by Byers along La Mesa Drive. This property was also Byers home, which he and his family occupied for several years. Hence, in conclusion it appears that the subject property satisfies this criterion.

9.36.100(a)(6) It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.

Though the subject property is located along La Mesa Drive, a very distinctive street itself, most of the dwellings in this neighborhood are of similar scale, massing, and proportion. Further, many of the homes along La Mesa Drive were designed by noted architects making the entire street, not just one or two homes, an architectural showcase. Therefore, in applying this criterion it does not appear that the subject property itself has a unique location or singular physical characteristic that makes it unique.

CITY DIRECTORY RESEARCH

2034 La Mesa Drive

Year	Entry
1927	Byers, John, architect (address listed as 2032 La Mesa Drive)
1928	Byers, John, architect
1930-31	Faragoh, Francis E. (Elizabeth) (address now listed as 2034 La Mesa Drive) Byers, John, listed at 246 26 th Street
1933	Davis, Percy R. (Herta), Superintendent of City Schools of Santa Monica
1936	Byers, John (Harriett), architect (office at 246 26 th Street)
1938	Byers, John (Harriett), architect (office at 246 26 th Street)
1940	Byers, John (Harriett), architect (office at 246 26 th Street)
1952-53	Byers, John (Harriett), architect (office at 246 26 th Street)
1954	Byers, John (Harriett), architect (office at 246 26 th Street)
1960	Carter (Mr.)
1967	Dunlap, Thomas
1981	Horowitz, Ralph
1984	Jones, Robert E.
1994	Irving, Amy
1996	Wells, John
2000	Finkelstein, William Trust Schnitzler, Barbara

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PHOTOGRAPHS



Primary (north) elevation with Moreton Bay tree in foreground, looking southwest



Primary (north) elevation, looking southwest



Walk to front courtyard, looking south



Front courtyard enclosure and front entry, looking west



Back of residence (south elevation), looking northwest



Pool and Accessory Building, looking southeast

MISCELLENOUS ATTACHMENTS