

**2009 La Mesa Drive  
Santa Monica, California  
City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation Report**

Evaluation Report  
Assessor's Parcel Map  
Sanborn Maps  
Photographs



Prepared for:  
City of Santa Monica  
Planning Division

October 20, 2010

**2009 La Mesa Drive  
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City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation Report**



## **Environmental Setting**

The subject property, 2009 La Mesa Drive, is a large irregularly-planned single-family residential property. The two-story Period Revival residence combines elements of both the English Cottage and Tudor Revival styles. The residence is situated near the rear of the flat portion of the lot above a slope that descends to the Riviera Country Club golf course. The subject property is located near the middle of the 2000 Block of La Mesa Drive just north of the corner of 19<sup>th</sup> Street and San Vicente Boulevard. Building permits indicate that construction of the property began in 1925 and was completed in 1926. The property is located in a single-family residential neighborhood consisting primarily of large two-story Period Revival residences set back from the street, which is planted with tall Moreton Bay fig trees. The subject property was designed by Architect Elmer Grey, one of the most important Southern California architects from the first three decades of the twentieth century. Actress Katherine Grayson was a resident and owner of the property from 1945 until recently. Based on a site survey, available building permits, Los Angeles County Tax Assessor records, and Sanborn Maps, it appears that the original improvements to the subject property are extant and retain a high level of integrity. The legal description of the subject property is Tract 7233 Lots 10 and 11.

## **Regulatory Setting**

The subject property was originally surveyed during Phase 2 of the City of Santa Monica historic resources survey and was not listed as an individual resource or as a contributor to the “La Mesa Historic District.” Later, during the *North of Montana Area 2001-2002 Santa Monica Historic Resources Survey*, 2009 La Mesa was identified as a contributor to the La Mesa Drive District, both as 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 3D/4S2/5D.<sup>1</sup>

## **Architectural Description**

The sprawling linear-aligned, two-story stucco, single-family residential building spans two lots. The residence is situated towards the rear of the flat portion of the lot just south of a steep slope that descends down to the Riviera Country Club golf course. Between the residence and La Mesa Drive, there are several trees, including a Valencia Orange tree and Cedar tree, and a wide expansive turf lawn. A rounded brick and scored concrete driveway, which appears to be a later addition, begins at the west corner of the property on La Mesa Drive and curves to connect the street to the porte-cochere. The driveway continues running east, allowing access to the front door, and then makes a return curve to connect to the north edge of the lot at La Mesa Drive. Alterations to the landscape include an above ground pool, shed addition, new landscaping, and changes to the fence and gate at the street.

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<sup>1</sup> *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).*

The residence has a cross-gabled roof with differing gable heights and pitch angles, and includes both gable- and hipped-roofs sections. The primary elevation includes a ground floor, which is divided by the covered porte-cochere, and a second story, which spans above the porte-cochere. The walls of the primary elevation are smooth stucco with thick wood lintels over the apertures and above the porte-cochere. The windows are largely operable steel-frame casement windows along with some fixed multi-light windows with diamond-shaped lights. Several of the ground-floor windows were replaced with non-compatible new windows. A formal Tudor Style covered entranceway frames the front entrance door. The one-story side-gable entranceway is made of wood and topped with decorative Gothic archways, and includes highly ornate turned-wood balustrades between heavy timbered posts. The Gothic Style door, which is made of solid wood with twelve recessed panels, is just below a small section of the exterior wall surface with decorative half-timbering. Other notable character-defining features on the primary elevation include an eyebrow window above the porte-cochere and a double-flue chimney on the east end of the residence, which was repaired or rebuilt after the 1994 Northridge earthquake. The north elevation has smooth stucco walls, a side-gable ground-floor bay, and a hipped roof second story set back from the eastern border of the residence. A large wood frame bay window divided by thick wood mullions into three sections provides lighting for the large great-room which includes exposed arched wood roof framing, half timbering, a Gothic arched doorway, and a highly ornate decorative fireplace. The rear elevation has smooth stucco walls and steel-frame casement windows. The north side of the rear elevation is single height and the east side has two stories. The two-story section of the roof is front-gable with several dormers, while the single-story section has a steeply pitched front gable. A recessed porch supported with heavy bracketed timbers once ran to the north edge of the residence, but was enclosed with wood clapboard to create more interior space. Several of the ground-floor windows were replaced with non-compatible new windows. The west elevation was not accessible.

## **Historical Background**

### ***La Mesa Drive***

Opened in 1923 as the Canyon Vista Tract, a development of the Santa Monica Land and Water Company, La Mesa Drive quickly became one of the most sought after addresses in Santa Monica. Located at the northeast edge of the city, La Mesa Drive is an intact, six-block long, curving street of large single-family residences 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. Morton Bay fig trees, notable for their overhanging canopy of branches and leaves and for their large, intricate root systems, line both sides of the street. Vintage post-top streetlamps, with paired lanterns at the ends of the drive and single ones in the interior, illuminate La Mesa at night. Several noted architects were commissioned to design the homes that soon lined La Mesa. Most prominent among the designers was Santa Monica's John Byers, who is responsible for seven houses, including his own (2021, 2034, 2101 (the subject property), 2126, 2141, 2153, 2210). Byers' work on La Mesa showed him at his most characteristic, exploring the possibilities of Spanish Colonial Revival, Mexican Colonial Revival, and the Monterey styles. Notable Pasadena architectural firms are also represented on La Mesa: Marston, Van Pelt and Maybury (2202), Palmer Sabin (2233), and Elmer Grey (2009). Paul Williams, a prominent Los Angeles architect, also designed several houses in the La Mesa Drive area (2201, 2209). During the 1930s and 1940s, La Mesa saw the construction of two homes in the

International Style by Lloyd Wright and J.R. Davidson. In 1962, a residence based on plans prepared by the renowned Brazilian architect, Oscar Niemeyer, was erected at 1911 La Mesa Drive.

2009 La Mesa was designed for A. N. Kemp, the Vice President of California Bank. The residence was purchased by actress Katherine Grayson in 1945, who owned and resided there until her recent passing.

### ***Period Revival Architecture***

By the 1920s, architecture in Los Angeles at every scale – from the grandiose to the mundane – drew from European precedents. Hollywood’s most famous export created a permissive, open-minded and pioneering atmosphere in the city at-large with regards to the built environment. In addition to Spanish and Mediterranean Revival styles, the French Renaissance and English Tudor styles became an additional source of aesthetic inspiration in production design and architecture.

While architects and designers in Los Angeles during the first decades of the twentieth century borrowed heavily from established European traditions, non-European and “exotic” places also captured the public imagination. An architecture of fantasy then emerged from eclectic sources, and Los Angeles proved to be fertile ground for testing these experiments. Tudor Revival architecture was loosely based upon the architecture of Medieval cottages to grand houses that emphasized high-pitched gable roofs, half-timbering, parapets, patterned stonework, and elaborated chimneys. During the 1920s and 1930s Tudor Revival became a popular style for residential architecture. The architecture of the Tudor Revival Style was defined by a steeply pitched, gable roof, decorative half-timbering, narrow windows with multi-pane glazing, heavy wood timber posts and lintels, and massive chimneys. By the end of the 1930s the popularity of the style lessened.

### ***Elmer Grey***

Architect Elmer Grey is credited as being one of the most influential practitioners of the Period Revival Style in Southern California.<sup>2</sup> Along with his contemporaries including, John Byers, Roland Coate, Myron Hunt, Gordon Kaufmann, Wallace Neff, and George Washington Smith, Grey was an excellent designer who was able to master the use of historical precedents and combine them with Southern California landscape to create highly successful architectural environments that were highly site sensitive. Grey was also a significant landscape painter in California history, whose watercolors are on permanent exhibit at the Chicago Art Institute. Grey is responsible for two important residences in Santa Monica, the Landmark Robert Gillis House at 406 Adelaide Drive, and the subject residence at 2009 La Mesa Drive. Another property, the Colony Club, was designed by Elmer Grey in Santa Monica but it is unclear if that building is still extant.

Grey was born in 1872 in Chicago, and learned drafting and design while working at an architectural firm in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Grey struck out on his own in 1890 after winning a prestigious award for his design of a water tower and pumping station in New York. Grey achieved immediate

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<sup>2</sup> David Gebhard and Robert Winter, *An Architectural Guide to Los Angeles*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2003). 21.

success and earned many commissions around the Midwest. After completing the design of the First Christian Science Church of Milwaukee, Grey experienced health problems, which he later attributed to “nerves,” and subsequently took time off from architecture. Grey’s “nerves” were a reoccurring problem that followed him throughout his life. Grey traveled to Southern California during this time eventually ending up in Pasadena forming a partnership with fellow architect Myron Hunt. The firm of Hunt and Grey (1904-1913) produced many important buildings including the Huntington Mansion in Pasadena, Mount Wilson Observatory, Valley Hunt Clubhouse in Pasadena, Throop College (later Cal Tech University) in Pasadena, and Occidental College in Eagle Rock. While both Hunt and Grey also took solo commissions during the tenure of their partnership, the two ultimately went separate ways and formed architectural offices of their own. Both the Gillis House and 2009 La Mesa were designed after Grey and Hunt disbanded their firm. Important buildings designed by Grey during his solo practice include the Beverly Hills Hotel, the Pasadena Playhouse, and the Bel-Air Bay Club. Elmer Grey died in 1963 at the age of 91 in Pasadena.

## **Evaluation of Significance**

### Person(s) of Historical Importance

The property is associated with two persons of historical importance: Architect Elmer Grey and Actress Katherine Grayson. 2009 La Mesa is significant for its architecture created by Elmer Grey, but not for its association with the professional practice or private life of Grey.

Actress Katherine Grayson (1922-2010) was a resident of 2009 La Mesa Drive from 1945 to 2010. Grayson is largely known for her work on musicals during the 1940s and 1950s. Some of her important roles were in *Anchor’s Away*, *Showboat*, and *Kiss Me Kate*. Although Grayson did reside at the subject residence during the height of her career, 2009 La Mesa did not influence her acting or function as an important site in the development of her craft. Furthermore, the architecture of the subject residence does not directly connect to her acting identity or to themes in her acting career.

### Statement of other significance

No evidence was discovered in current research of the property that indicates other significance.

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

While there are many Spanish Colonial Revival residences in the City of Santa Monica, other variants of the Period Revival Style are extremely rare. 2009 La Mesa is a highly intact and thoughtfully executed example of the Tudor Style with English Cottage influences. The subject property exhibits many of the character defining features of the Tudor Revival Style, with its steeply-pitched gabled roofs, dormers, thick timber lintels and posts, Gothic apertures with diamond-shaped multi-light windows, Gothic ornamentation and smooth stucco surfaces. The distinctive eyebrow window, rectangular openings with casement windows, and hipped roofs, derive from the English Cottage style. The subject property is a rare excellent example of the Tudor Revival and English Cottage Style in the City of Santa Monica.

Does the structure contribute to a potential historic district?

During the *North of Montana Area 2001-2002 Santa Monica Historic Resources Survey*, 2009 La Mesa was identified 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 3D/4S2/5D.<sup>3</sup>

**Conclusion**

In applying the City's significance criteria for individual recognition as a proposed City of Santa Monica Landmark, 2009 La Mesa Drive does appear to rise to the threshold of significance for Landmark designation. As both an individual resource and as a contributor to a district, the subject single-family residence possesses sufficient historical importance and architectural merit to warrant designation.

**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 Tudor Revival Style is a highly important sub-category under the larger Period Revival Style umbrella. During the 1920s, Period Revival architecture was the predominate style in the City tied to the notion of Southern California as an exotic alternative to the Midwest and East Coast. During the population and construction boom of the 1920s many of these Period Revival residences were constructed in the north of Montana area. 2009 La Mesa is exceptionally significant in that it is one of the few excellent examples of the Tudor Revival and English Cottage Style built during the 1920s. Therefore the subject property appears to meet this criterion.

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

The resource does not appear to meet this criterion. The building lacks the sufficient aesthetic or artistic interest or value necessary for this designation.

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

2009 La Mesa is not directly connected to the professional lives of either Elmer Grey or Katherine Grayson. Therefore, the subject property does not appear to satisfy this criterion

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*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.*

During the 1920s and 1930s, Tudor Revival became a popular style for residential architecture. The architecture of the Tudor Revival style was defined by a steeply pitched, gable roof, decorative half-timbering, narrow windows with multi-pane glazing, heavy wood timber posts and lintels, and massive chimneys. While there are many Spanish Colonial Revival residences in the City of Santa Monica, other types of the Period Revival Style are extremely rare. 2009 La Mesa is a highly intact and thoughtfully executed example of the Tudor Revival Style. The subject property exhibits many of the character defining features of the Tudor Revival Style, with its steeply-pitched roofs, dormers, thick timber lintels and posts, Gothic apertures with diamond-shaped multi-light windows, smooth stucco surface, and Gothic ornamentation. The distinctive eyebrow window, rectangular openings with casement windows and hipped roofs derive from the English Cottage style. The subject property is a rare excellent example of the English Cottage and Tudor Revival Style in the City of Santa Monica. Therefore the subject property appears to meet this criterion.

*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 was designed by Architect Elmer Grey who is one of the most important Southern California architects from the first three decades of the twentieth century. With only one other known extant residence attributed to Grey in the City of Santa Monica, 2009 La Mesa is highly significant as an excellent example of his work. Therefore the subject property appears to meet 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.*

The subject property does not appear to meet this criterion.

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

**Current Photographs**

**Assessor's Map**

**Sanborn Map 1950**



### Current Photographs



Primary (South Elevation), View North

2009 La Mesa Drive  
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East Elevation, View West



North Elevation, View Southeast

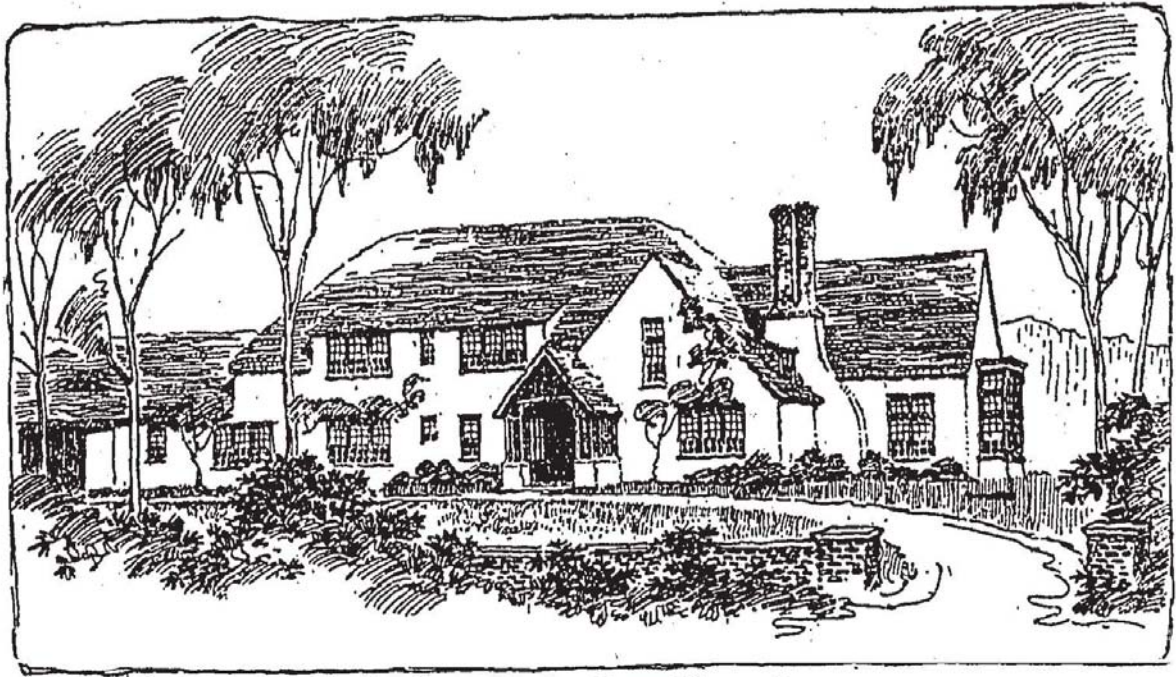
2009 La Mesa Drive  
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North Elevation, View Southwest



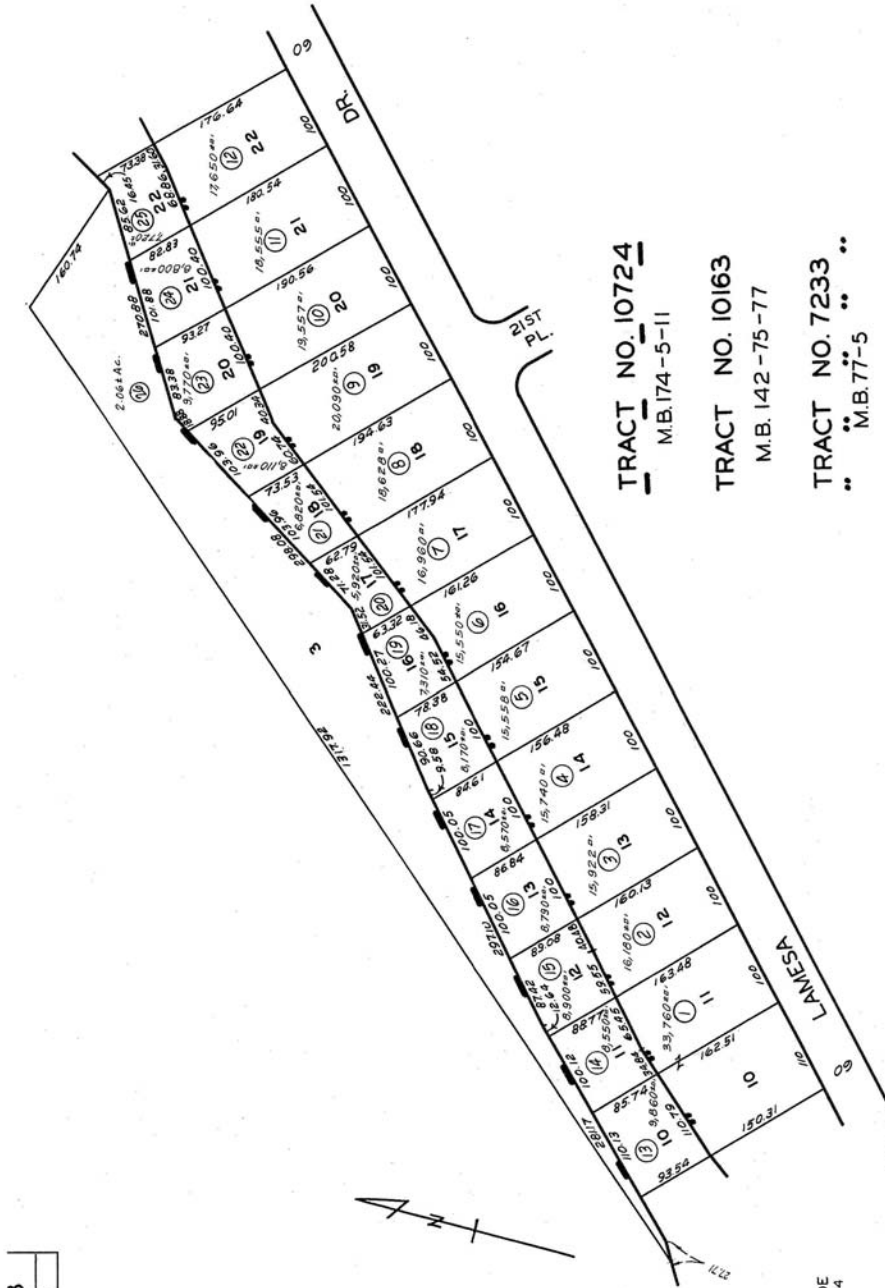
Porte-Cochere, View North



Historic Rendering, *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 1925

Assessor's Parcel Map

3-15-88  
 4-9-88  
 7-9-88  
 7-19-88



4407 | 18  
 SCALE 1" = 100'

CODE  
 8604

FOR PREV. ASSMT. SEE: 4407-18

ASSESSOR'S MAP  
 COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

### Sanborn Map 1950

