CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING THAT CITY COUNCIL DESIGNATE AS A CITY LANDMARK MONT JOIE- RESIDENCE 931 LAS ALTURAS ROAD SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA APN: 019-141-002

RESOLUTION 2014-10

NOVEMBER 19, 2014

WHEREAS, Section 22.22.050 of the Municipal Code of the City of Santa Barbara grants the Historic Landmarks Commission the authority to initiate a designation process to recommend to the City Council the designation as a City Landmark of any structure, natural feature, site or area having historic, architectural, archaeological, cultural or aesthetic significance; and

WHEREAS, the historic research in the Historic Structure Report, that was accepted by the Historic Landmarks Commission on May 1, 2002, has determined that the property listed in the title of this document qualifies for historic designation under City of Santa Barbara Master Environmental Assessment (MEA) criteria; and

WHEREAS, the Staff Report, prepared in 2014, found the property meets several City Landmark criteria listed in section 22.22.040 of the Municipal Code and concluded that Mont Joie, the private residence estate designed in 1928, is significant for its architectural influence on the heritage of the City; and

WHEREAS, on October 22, 2014, the Historic Landmarks Commission adopted Resolution of Intention 2014- to hold a public hearing to consider a recommendation to City Council for designation of Mont Joie located at 931 Las Alturas Road as a City Landmark; and

WHEREAS, the proposed boundary of the City Landmark designation is limited to the 1928 'L' shaped house and motor court and the designation boundary does not include any landscaping features or gardens that are considered historic consistent with the limited vegetation noted as per the original 1928 drawings; and

WHEREAS, the City and the Historic Landmarks Commission are in agreement that the there shall be no conditions placed for restoring the house to the original colors and that landscape plan alterations or changes in trees or plant materials are allowed consistent with city regulations; and

WHEREAS, under the provisions of Article 19, Section 15308 of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines and the City List of Activities Determined to Qualify for a Categorical Exemption (City Council Resolution Dated November 10, 1998), staff has determined that designation of Mont Joie as a City Landmark is eligible for a Categorical Exemption; and

WHEREAS, Section 22.22.050 of the Municipal Code of the City of Santa Barbara states that the City Council may designate as a Landmark any structure, natural feature, site or area having historic, architectural, archeological, cultural, or aesthetic significance by adopting a resolution of designation within 90 days following receipt of a recommendation from the Historic Landmarks Commission, and;

WHEREAS, in summary, the Historic Landmarks Commission finds that the Mont Joie residence at 931 Las Alturas Road, Assessor's Parcel No. 019-141-002, meets the following City Landmark criteria (A through K) listed in section 22.22.040 of the Municipal Code:

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

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

E. Its exemplification of the best remaining architectural type in a neighborhood;

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that on November 19, 2014, the Historic Landmarks Commission of the City of Santa Barbara hereby recommends to the City Council that it designate the Mont Joie residence located at 931 Las Alturas Road, Assessor's Parcel No. 019-141-002, as a City Landmark and makes findings based on the historic and cultural significance of facts presented in the Staff Report.

CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

Adopted: November 19, 2014

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION
LANDMARK DESIGNATION
STAFF REPORT
MONT JOIE-RESIDENCE
931 LAS ALTURAS ROAD
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA
019-141-002
NOVEMBER 19, 2014

Background:

Constructed in 1928, the L-shaped, two-story residential villa, known as Mont Joie is one of Santa Barbara's architectural gems that is a significant part of the heritage of the City. Mont Joie is the French term for Mount Joy and was designed using elements of the Italian Renaissance, Beaux Arts, and French Eclectic styles. A circular motor court brings visitors to the home, with a façade that features wrought-iron window railings, elegant balconies, flared eaves and French doors on the south elevation.

The property was added to the City's Potential Historic Resource list in 2013 based on the findings in the 2002 Historic Structure Report that the building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historic Resources, and as a City Landmark for its architectural style. This staff report is a summary of the findings of the 2002 Historic Structure Report completed by Applied Earth Works, Inc. It is the opinion of the Historic Landmarks Commission Designation Subcommittee that the building is an excellent candidate for City Landmark designation.

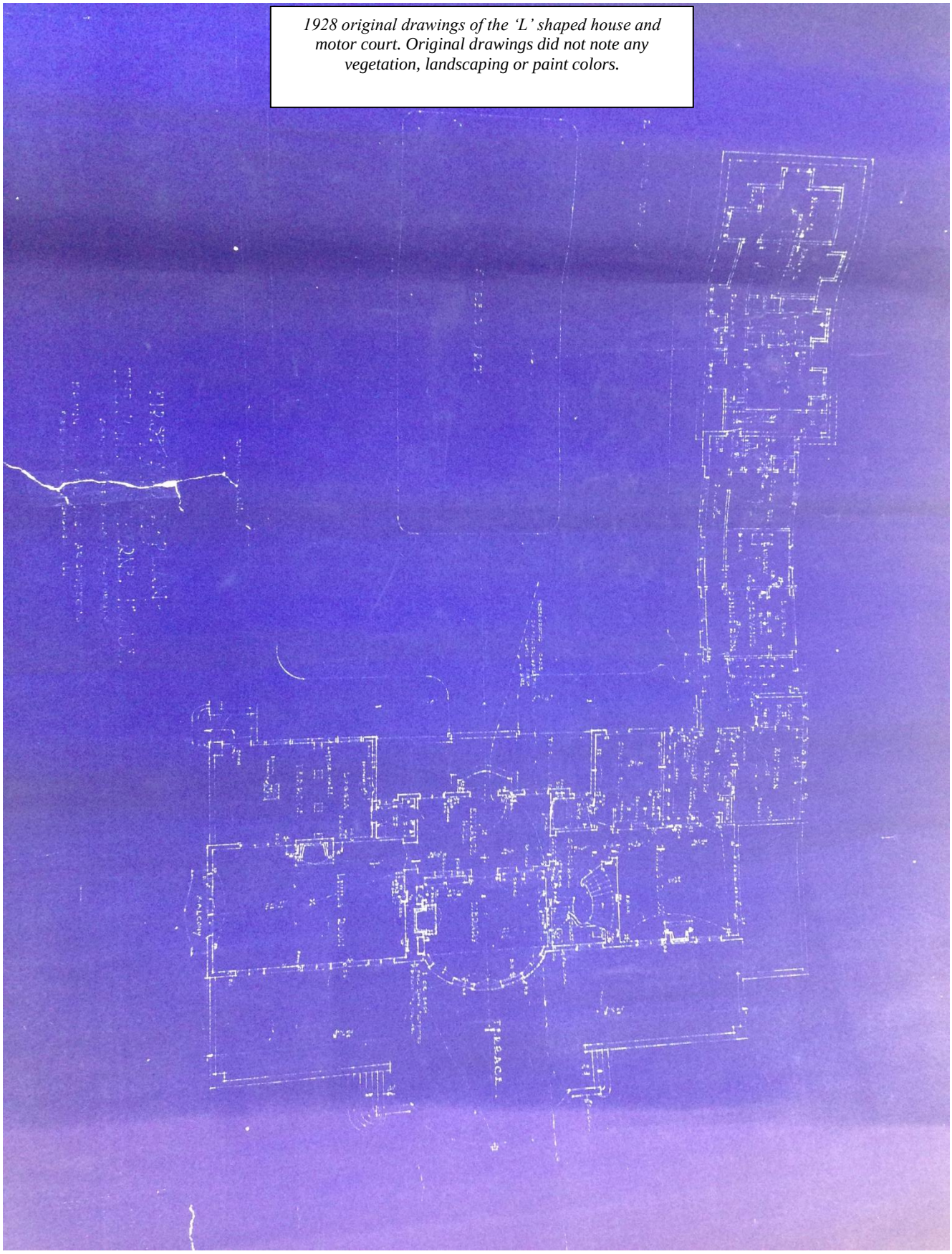
The designation of the building as a City Landmark will honor and recognize the importance of the Mont Joie as it will join the elite list of important structures contributing to the City's unique architectural traditions.

South facade of Mont Joie, photo from September 2002 Historic Structure Report

Vicinity Map, City of Santa Barbara Mapping Analysis and Printing System, 2013

Red line indicates the boundary of the city Landmark designation.

1928 original drawings of the 'L' shaped house and motor court. Original drawings did not note any vegetation, landscaping or paint colors.



Historic Context:

North façade and east wing of Mont Joie, photo from September 2002 Historic Structure Report

The L-shaped, two-story, stucco-clad building was constructed in 1928 for Montgomery Ward heir, James Ward Thorne and his wife, Narcissa Niblack Thorne. During a visit to Santa Barbara from Chicago, James and Narcissa Thorne purchased the hilltop locale on the Santa Barbara Riviera. The Thornes commissioned their friend, Chicago architect Edwin Hill Clark, to design a west coast residence at 931 Las Alturas Road. Clark had designed their Lake Forest, Illinois, summer home in 1910. Snook and Kenyon constructed the opulent villa, known as Mont Joie in 1928. James Ward Thorne is considered important for his association with and development of the Montgomery Ward catalog and department stores. His wife, Narcissa Thorne is also a nationally significant person recognized for her historically accurate miniature rooms on display at major art museums. Although they commissioned the opulent Mont Joie, the Thornes rarely spent time there and sold the estate in 1941. In 1946 Charles M. and Ida B. Urton purchased the property and lived there until 1951. Charles Urton was locally renowned for maintaining high standards in the construction of many Santa Barbara residential estates and many of Santa Barbara's treasured landmarks including the Granada Theatre, the News Press Building, Los Banos del Mar, the Santa Barbara airport terminal and several schools and churches.

The house passed through several owners and in 1997, Charles and Jennifer House, computer specialists from Silicon Valley, purchased the house in a state of disrepair with crumbling terrace balusters, plumbing problems and in dire need of landscaping. Fortunately, the Houses successfully restored grandeur to the opulent mansion with no significant exterior alterations made to the original composition of the building.

The original plans by architect Edwin H. Clark included the driveway around the turf court on the north elevation, but no other landscaping is shown in the archive drawings. According to the Historic Structure Report, the landscaping has changed several times since the original owners constructed the house and the Houses added the south lawn, including the low retaining wall on the east side and the four scarlet oak trees in the late 1990s.

The Houses sold the estate in 1999 to John Marsch who refurbished the exterior, deteriorated roofline balustrade with a foam replica and other minor exterior alterations.

Architectural Style:

The house shares elements of the Italian Renaissance, Beaux Arts, and French Eclectic styles. In particular, wrought-iron window railings, roofline balustrades, and bowling pin-shaped balusters are typical Italian Renaissance components. Although Mont Joie is not as ornate as most examples of Beaux Arts, it has the Beaux Arts features of decorative swags, floral patterns, columns, wrought iron balconies and balustrades. The flared eaves and dormer windows on the garage and extensive use of French doors are features common to French Eclectic architecture. The architect's training in classical Renaissance architecture and the owners' appreciation of fine European architecture contributed to the fusion of these European styles.

Architect: Edwin H. Clark

Edwin Hill Clark was born in Chicago in 1885. He received his education at Yale University and studied abroad in England, France, and Germany where he was deeply influenced by classical European Renaissance architecture. Clark deigned numerous private estates and Chicago landmarks such as the Brookfield Zoo, Winnetka Villa Hall and Lincoln Park Administration Building. Two of his works are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

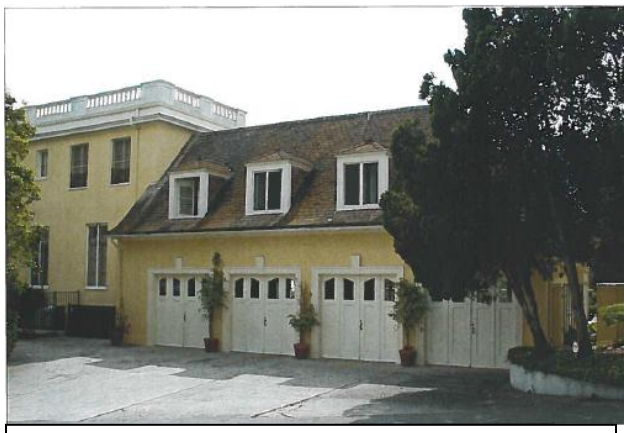
North façade showing Beaux Arts detailing over the front door, photo from September 2002 Historic Structure Report.

Significance:

The City of Santa Barbara defines historic significance as outlined by the Municipal Code, Section 22.22.040. Any historic building that meets one or more of the eleven criteria (Criteria A through K) established for a City Landmark or a City Structure of Merit can be considered significant. The Mont Joie meets the following criteria:

Criterion A: its character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation;

The 1928 building represents an example of the elegant fusion of Beaux Arts, French Eclectic, and Italian Renaissance architectural styles gives it a grand presence as it overlooks the city from the top of the Riviera. The building's character is a significant part of the heritage of Santa Barbara.



Four-car garage at the north end of the east wing, photo from September 2002 Historic Structure Report.

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

Mont Joie embodies a distinctive style of architecture with its fusion of Beaux Arts, French Eclectic, and Italian Renaissance architectural styles. It also represents a distinctive National trend toward construction of opulent mansions during the early twentieth century.

Criterion E: Its exemplification of the best remaining architectural type in a neighborhood;

The property represents the best, and only, remaining late 1920s opulent estate in its neighborhood. The building's style is unique and impressive. *Mont Joie* survived the Sycamore Canyon fire in 1977 that engulfed a number of neighboring residences as well as the 1928 gardener's cottage that once stood on the estate. The house also survived the Tea Fire in 2008 that destroyed the house across the street as well as several houses to its north.

East Elevation of Mont Joie, photo from September 2002 Historic Structure Report

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

The building embodies not only outstanding attention to design, but extreme attention to detail, materials and craftsmanship as expressed throughout the curved bay of the south facade, balustrades on the terraces, elegant, wood windows and decorative brackets under the eaves.

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

The monumental estate has been an established and familiar feature on its ridge top location since 1928.

Historic Integrity:

Integrity is the ability to convey the original appearance of the building. The original building plans show that Mont Joie remains essentially the same as when it was constructed in 1928. There are essential physical features that must be considered to evaluate the integrity. The building has retained its integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling so that it can still convey its original appearance.

Recommendation:

Staff Recommends that the Historic Landmarks Commission adopt a resolution to recommend to City Council that the Mont Joie at 931 Las Alturas be designated as a City Landmark with the boundary of the City Landmark designation limited to the 1928 'L' shaped house and motor court and the designation boundary does not include any landscaping features or gardens. This is consistent with the limited vegetation noted as per the original 1928 drawings and that any original landscaping has been altered or removed and is not considered historic. The City and the Historic Landmarks Commission are in agreement that the there shall be no conditions placed for restoring the house to the original colors and that landscape plan alterations or changes in trees or plant materials are allowed consistent with city regulations.

Works Cited:

Applied Earthworks, Inc. *Historic Structure Report and Addendum Pool and Landscaping Plan, Historic Architectural Survey Report for Mont Joie, 931 Las Alturas Road (APN: 019-141-002) dated September 2002.* City of Santa Barbara Planning Division Files, 630 Garden Street.