

# Anna Louise Murphy Vhay

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Anna Louise Murphy Vhay was one of Santa Barbara's noted practitioner in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Vhay was born in 1881 to a wealthy Michigan family, and came to Santa Barbara in 1919. Anna Louise Murphy Vhay, artist and architect, was born in Detroit, Michigan on January 1, 1881 to a wealthy Michigan family. In 1919, she came with her husband John D. Vhay to Santa Barbara, in 1922 they constructed their home at 903 Arbolado Road called El Arbolado. In 1923, the Vhay's purchased Casa de Ramirez (Ramirez Adobe) was one of Santa Barbara's first adobe homes and was restored by Vhay that sits at 835 Laguna Street. They also they purchased acreage off the 900 block of Garden Street in 1930, that she developed with other noted architects and artists a grouping 9 "studios" or bungalows around El Caserio Lane, a private street. The street became an artist colony called El Caserio. In 1939, she published a book with her husband entitled *Architectural Byways in New Spain: Photographs & Measured Drawings of Doorways, Windows, Fountains, Balconies, Etc.* Anna Louise Murphy Vhay died

in 1964. She went on to design small studio cottages and homes in Santa Barbara in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, one of which was featured in the *American Architect* in 1935. Vhay brought her knowledge and experience to the Community Arts Plans and Planning Committee in the early 1920s, which was responsible for transforming Santa Barbara into a Spanish-looking city. She also designed small houses and submitted them to the Better Homes American competition to help promote quality



835 Laguna, Ramirez Adobe restored by Vhay. Photo taken by Nicole Hernandez on December 7, 2022



903 Arbolado Road was designed by Vhay in 1922 as her home. Photo taken by Nicole Hernandez, 2022

small house designs (see photo of small house designs below, including 1116-1118 (formerly 1114 N Milpas.)

Works Cited:

Days, Mary Louis. *Staff Report for the Designation of "El Casario" as a City Landmark*. April 12 1989. City of Santa Barbara Community Development Landmark Files.

Smith, Valerie. "The Small House Movement of the 1920s: Preserving Small "Better" Houses." Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science in Historic Preservation Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation Columbia University May 2022. City of Santa Barbara Community Development Files.

1114 N Milpas

Model House A

1925 campaign

Brick house, made from used bricks

Similar to plan #51 -  
Community Arts  
Association - Leffler B.  
Miller

City Landmark or SOM?  
N



**A BETTER HOMES DEMONSTRATION HOUSE**  
Made from used brick. Mrs. John Vhay, Designer

1114 (Now 1116-1118) N  
Milpas was designed as a  
model house for the Better  
Home Model Houses, 1925  
Campaign. The house still  
remains in- tact as a historic  
resource on N Milpas Street.





El Caserio, 924 Garden St, Studio "A" constructed in 1930 for violin player, John Vhay. 1948, 1950, 1953 alterations by Lutah Maria Riggs



El Caserio, 924 Garden St., Studio "E" Designed in 1937 and altered in 1951 By Lutah Maria Riggs



FIRST PRIZE IN HOUSE AND GARDEN COMPETITION. MRS. JOHN D. VHAY, DESIGNER. PART OF THE BETTER HOMES ARTICLE ON PAGE 26

Figure 76 – First prize in the House and Garden competition. The house was designed by Louise Vhay, a woman designer at the Plans Committee. *California Southland*, 1926. Courtesy "The Small House Movement of the 1920s, Preserving Small "Better" Houses." by Valerie Smith 2022. Available at City of Santa Barbara Community Development Department.