



Site of the El Encanto Hotel Historic District with the 24 historically significant structures and landscape elements highlighted in green.

INTRODUCTION

El Encanto hotel (“The Enchanted Place”) began as a school dormitory for the State Normal School of Santa Barbara. It was converted by 1918 to a cottage style resort on the recently named American Riviera. Once an undesirable hillside near a largely agricultural community, the El Encanto began its career at a time when Santa Barbara was beginning to market itself as a vacation destination. The original 1913 bungalows were designed in the Craftsman style. In the 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival style bungalows were added as the city adopted the style in an effort to move towards a unified look and feel. They are surrounded by beautiful gardens lined by sandstone walls and centered around a pergola and lily pond. Much of the campus is intact, as the historic bungalows were carefully restored during the remodel that was completed in 2013. There are 35 buildings and 8 landscape features within the boundaries the El Encanto Hotel Historic District. Of this total, 17 buildings and 7 landscape features contribute to the historic significance of the district. As the buildings and landscaping are united historically and aesthetically by plan and physical development, the creation of the Historic District recognizes the significance of the site as a whole.

El Encanto Hotel Historic District



The pergola and pond were constructed as the centerpiece of the site in 1918. Photo taken February 2013.

HISTORY

Period of significance: 1913-1930

El Encanto land was owned by James M. Warren, who in June 1913, hired the noted architectural firm of Winsor Soule and E. Russell Ray to design a cluster of eight Craftsman style cottages to provide housing for the faculty and students of the State Normal School. By 1917, the site was open as a cottage hotel rather than school housing. Warren hired Winsor Soule to design a large main building in the Craftsman style to complement the existing Craftsman bungalows. As part of the hotel development, the grounds were landscaped by Charles Frederick Eaton. Eaton was one of the major figures of the Arts and Crafts movement on the South Coast of California. Eaton emphasized the use of native plants, weaving them around the large eucalyptus trees that had been on the site for 40 years. The centerpiece of the grounds was a large red brick pergola and lily pond in the central area between the cottages. Above the pergola, Eaton designed a rockery with a series of waterfalls that cascaded down to the lily pond.

The luxury hotel offered a telephone in every room, steam heat from the central boiler, underground utility lines and soft water. The new central building contained an office, lobby, living rooms, card rooms, a dining room, breakfast and tea room overlooking the ocean and twelve bedrooms. As tourism grew with the advent of the automobile, El Encanto continued to develop. By 1928, the A. K. Bennett Hotel Corporation bought the property and hired the noted local architectural firm of Edwards, Plunkett and Howell to design more cottages in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, a style that was adopted by Santa Barbara in the 1920s. Edwards, Plunkett and Howell were instrumental in helping transform Santa Barbara into Spanish Colonial Revival city.

Since 1930, the hotel has undergone many management changes, each making some minor exterior changes. In 2013, the Orient Express Hotels, Ltd., completed an extensive restoration and redevelopment project of El Encanto. Unfortunately, the original central building was structurally unsound and had to be reconstructed to match the original. However, 17 original bungalows and 7 landscape features were restored and rehabilitated with an extremely high standard in attention to small details, like matching the historic buildings' historic window mutton profiles and the arbor's historic brick. The project showcases how Santa Barbara's historic architectural treasures can be appropriately altered to accommodate high-end, modern conveniences, continuing the property's community relevance and importance.



One of the original Craftsman style bungalows constructed between 1913 and 1920. *Photo taken February, 2013*



One of the Spanish Colonial Revival cottages constructed in 1929. *Photo taken February, 2013.*