



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 10, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-004

HEARING DATE: January 23, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM 4 – ALBERTA SECURITY COMPANY/MARTIN V. MELHORN SPEC HOUSE #9**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Cole J. Ferguson and Jennifer M. Machian represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 1214 Sutter Street, 92103, Uptown Community, Council District 3
APN 451-161-14-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #9 located at 1214 Sutter Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn House Spec House #9 located at 1214 Sutter Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1924 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Eclectic style of architecture and retains integrity from its 1924 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features varied roof forms with tile roofing, little eave overhang, medium sand stucco cladding, asymmetrical primary facade, projecting front gable with focal window, a concrete front porch with stucco wall, and original wood fenestration of multi and single-light fixed, double-hung and sliding windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is an example of his work in the Spanish Eclectic style, which is shown through its combined roof forms, focal window, and courtyard. The resource expresses a quality of design seen in his other known works with its key elements of his style and retains integrity as it relates to the original 1924 design.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource.

The property was identified in the [2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey](#) and given a Status Code of 5D3, "Appears to be a contributor to a district that appears to be eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

The historical name of the resource, the Alberta Security Company/Martin V, Melhorn Spec House #9 has been identified as consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the Alberta Security Company, who constructed the house as a speculation house, and the name of Martin V. Melhorn, a Master Builder.

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 1214 Sutter Street is a one-story, Spanish Eclectic style, single-family residential building constructed in 1924 in the Uptown Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on site include a detached garage. The property is located on the north side of Sutter Street, in a residentially zoned neighborhood. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1924, the property has been modified as follows: the garage was expanded to the north in 1956. In 2016 the house was re-stuccoed in kind and the foundation was repaired. In 2023, a permit was approved for the restoration of the front window and secondary door on the southwestern elevation after a car crashed into the home. During the review, it was discovered that the front fixed window was originally operable and double hung, and was restored as part of the project. The 2016 and 2023 projects were reviewed by Heritage Preservation staff and determined to be consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. At unknown dates a window on the west side was modified and replaced with a vinyl window and on the rear elevation a sliding door was replaced with French doors in the existing opening.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D, and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The resource is a one-story, single-family residence constructed in 1924 in the Spanish Eclectic style. The house features a low-pitched gable, shed and flat roof with minimal eaves, mission half barrel clay tile roofing, and medium sand stucco cladding. The resource sits atop a sloping lot with concrete stairs leading to the side facing front entry covered by a small, shed roof with clay tile. The left of the front façade features a projecting gable with arched multilight focal window and a smaller arched multilight window beside the main door. A central front courtyard and recessed porch has three double hung windows and a low wall. To the right of the walled porch is a projection with a side facing French door which opens onto the courtyard, and a front facing double hung window. The west side elevation features a stucco chimney with a decorative curving shape. Fenestration consists primarily of original wood multi, and single-light double hung and sliders, and arched multilight windows.

Following the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition, the romantic ideal of Spanish and Latin American architecture was revived. What resulted was the Spanish Eclectic style which was the predominant style in Southern California between 1915 and 1940, significantly altering the architectural landscape until the Modernist movement took hold during and after WWII. The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance inspirations, and unusually rich and varied series of decorative precedents. The style employed a variety of floor plans, as well as gabled, cross-gabled, gabled and hipped, hipped, and flat roof forms with parapets. Other character defining features include Mission and Spanish clay tile; focal windows; arched windows and other openings, and accented entries.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Eclectic style. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, retains overall integrity of design, materials, and workmanship despite the modifications. The modifications are designed in a manner that is consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The expansion of the garage, re-stuccoing, foundation repair and restoration of the front door and window do not impact the resource's character-defining features. The modification of the side window and rear door are limited and minor modifications on secondary facades do not significantly alter the property's integrity. The 2023 project, which restored the front window after the car crash back to being an operable double hung window, helped to restore integrity to the primary facade. Therefore, the property retains its integrity to its 1924 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Eclectic style of architecture and retains integrity from

its 1924 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features varied roof forms with tile roofing, little eave overhang, medium sand stucco cladding, asymmetrical primary facade, projecting front gable with focal window, a front courtyard, and original wood fenestration of multi and single-light fixed, double-hung and sliding windows.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

Martin V. Melhorn was born in Indiana in 1866. He worked in real estate in Denver, Colorado, before moving to San Diego in 1911 with his wife, Alberta, and their son, William. With John Jacob Wahrenberger and John C. Rice as partners, Martin formed the Bay City Construction Company in 1911. Melhorn and Wahrenberger produced mainly Craftsman-style houses during this period. In 1913, Melhorn started another company, the Alberta Security Company, with his wife Alberta, which focused on the financial aspects of his construction business.

After Bay City Construction Company dissolved around 1916, Melhorn began working under the name Martin V. Melhorn Investments. During this time, Melhorn's design style shifted away from the Craftsman style and became more experimental. He also began to design larger residences for leading citizens of San Diego. Some of his experimental designs at this time included cottages and bungalows in which he incorporated Prairie, Neoclassical, Colonial Revival, Mission Revival and Japanese-inspired elements, as well as stucco finishes. By 1922, Martin V. Melhorn Investments had given way to M. V. Melhorn & Son, when Martin partnered with his son William, who is also established as a Master Builder by the HRB. This partnership lasted until Martin's unexpected death in 1925.

Although Melhorn was established a Master Builder by the HRB, he also designed his buildings. Melhorn's status as a Master Builder was established in 2003 with the designation of the Neil Brown/Martin V. Melhorn House at 4195 Palmetto Way (HRB Site #583).

Partial List of Notable Works:

- HRB #318- Melhorn-King Residence (1302 Washington Place), 1913
- HRB #489- Joseph S. Mack House (3932 Alameda Place), 1919
- HRB #583- Neil Brown/Martin V. Melhorn House (4195 Palmetto Way), 1921
- HRB #780- Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #1 (1201 West Arbor Drive), 1914
- HRB #790- Tudor Rodgers/Martin V. Melhorn House (4060 Alameda Drive), 1912
- HRB #823- Franklin and Helen Boulter/Martin V. Melhorn House (4119 Palmetto Way), 1921
- HRB #1005- John and Emilie Wahrenberger/Martin V. Melhorn House (1329 Fort Stockton Drive), 1911
- HRB #1200- Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House # 4 (3917 Alameda Drive), 1917
- HRB #1259- Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House # 7 (3851 Hawk Street), 1920
- HRB #1311- Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #1 (4130 Lark Street), 1916
- HRB #1423- Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #8 (3956 Alameda Dr), 1916

The subject resource was built by Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn in 1924 as a speculation house during a period of transition for Melhorn in which he moved away from the building of Craftsman styled homes in favor of the Prairie, Colonial Revival, and Spanish Eclectic styles. It is an example of Melhorn's work in the Spanish Eclectic style and expresses this through its varied roof form, front courtyard, and use of focal windows. The house continues to convey his skill as a builder through its high-quality design and craftsmanship.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion D as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, retains overall integrity of design, materials, and workmanship despite the modifications. The re-stuccoing, foundation repair, and restoration of the front door and window do not impact the resource's character-defining features. The 2023 project restored the front window after the car crash and back to being an operable double hung window, help to restore integrity to the primary facade. These changes do not impair the resource's ability to convey its significance as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1924 period of significance under HRB Criterion D.

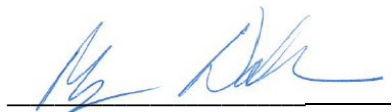
Significance Statement: The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is an example of his work in the Spanish Eclectic style, which is shown through its combined roof forms, focal window, and courtyard. The resource expresses a quality of design seen in his other known works with its key elements of his style and retains integrity as it relates to the original 1924 design.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS


Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #9 located at 1214 Sutter Street be designated with a period of significance of 1924 under HRB Criterion C as an example of Spanish Eclectic style architecture, and HRB Criterion D as representative of a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn.



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City Planning Department

MW/sa/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover