

## Once Upon A Time in North Park

### The Mediterranean Revival Style and North Park Development

By Joey Perry

Between 1920 and 1930, the city's population doubled from 74,000 to 148,000 residents. San Diego's growth during the "Roaring 20's" was very apparent in suburban areas such as North Park. As our local economy boomed, many well-to-do San Diegans chose to build new homes on the edges of the city, especially after roads were built to connect the more "remote" areas to downtown. The 1922 completion of Pershing Drive opened up for residential development the areas to the northeast of Balboa Park, in present-day North Park.

A report about one of the houses built during this time period, on 28<sup>th</sup> Street south of Upas, is the source of this report. The impressive Rolland C. Springer House, located at 2737 28<sup>th</sup> Street, was designated Historic Site 388 by the City's Historical Resources Board. Historic designation of this structure is warranted for several reasons: it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival architectural style; it was designed by two local master architects, Richard L. Requa and Herbert L. Jackson; it reflects the growth and development of local suburban communities in the 1920s and; its primary owner, Rolland C. Springer, made numerous contributions to the development of San Diego's title insurance and legal professions. This report will highlight the first reason, architectural style, generically, rather than focus on this specific designated site.

The Rolland C. Springer House is a free interpretation of the Mediterranean Revival architectural style adapted to an upscale residential area. Its Mediterranean imagery reflects a time when architects, planners, and builders sought to transform Southern California into "America's Riviera." The southwestern edge of the U.S. was sprinkled with red tiled stuccoed Spanish, Moorish and Italian influenced houses complete with their patio gardens.

Mediterranean and Spanish Colonial inspired architecture at the 1915 Panama-California Exposition was a bit too monumental and Baroque for most residential purposes. By the early 1920s many architects had adapted Mediterranean and Spanish Colonial Revival styles to unpretentious residential areas. An informal design and rural character were typical of the Andalusian and Mexican haciendas and farmhouses and was suitable for working class suburban neighborhoods. The well-to-do often sought residential styles between these two cutting-edge extremes.

The Italian villa concept offered many residential design opportunities. Renaissance-inspired Tuscan Italian villa residential construction boom peaked in the 1920s. The underlying key was simplicity in style and form, whether the house was an expensive manor or a simple suburban home. Usually two-story, the Italian or Mediterranean Villa form featured a main block wider than it was deep, with a low broadly-overhanging red tile-covered roof and room extensions to one or both sides of the main structure. A key

factor was the studied attention given to its landscape. The manipulation of the outdoor space, particularly in the rear patio area, allowed the romantic interplay of flowers, trees, and shadows off the house's white stucco walls and red tile roof.

By the mid-1920s the Mediterranean Revival style and other Period Revival styles, like the Spanish Colonial, English Tudor, and Eastern Colonial, formed a storybook style into which modern Americans, especially Southern Californians, could retreat. As one tootles around North Park it is impossible to miss the various styles so popular during the booming 20s and it is easy to see that many beautiful homes are indeed still worth retreating to.

*Article based on: Historic Site Designation Report: Rolland C. Springer House prepared by Historical Consultant Alex Bevil, in July 1999.*