

BILDERRAIN RESIDENCE

124 East Avenue 33

CHC-2026-341-HCM

ENV-2026-342-CE

FINDINGS

- The Bilderrain Residence “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as a reflection of the early 20th century trend that romanticized the Spanish period of early California history.
- The Bilderrain Residence “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as a rare example of a single-family residence designed in the Mission Revival architectural style.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Bilderrain Residence meets two of the Historic-Cultural Monument criteria for designation under the Cultural Heritage Ordinance. It “exemplifies significant contributions to the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state, city or community” as a reflection of the early 20th century trend that romanticized the Spanish period of early California history, and also “embodies the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period, or method of construction” as a rare example of a single-family residence designed in the Mission Revival architectural style.

Permanent mission buildings extending from San Diego to Sonoma appeared in California as early as the mid-1770s. In the mid-1830s, the missions were secularized by the newly independent Mexican Republic and many were then abandoned and most became ruins by the final decades of the 1800s. However, enough remained to provide an architectural imagery that could be employed by novelists looking for a romantic setting and by publicists marketing a vision to tourists and potential settlers. Among writers, one of the earliest to make note of the missions was the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson in 1879. But two writers were particularly successful in spreading a somewhat idealized view of early California and its architectural forms. The first was Helen Hunt Jackson in her 1884 novel *Ramona*. The second was Charles Fletcher Lummis, originally a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, in his *Home of Ramona* and *The Old Missions*. In 1894, Lummis began editing a journal entitled *Land of Sunshine* that became a means of propagating the Mediterranean image of Southern California, along with the circulation of photographs. Constructed in this same time period, the subject property exemplifies the romanticized view of early California life in the early 20th century.

The Mission Revival architectural style emerged in California in the 1890s and predominated in the 1910s. As exemplified by the subject property, characteristic features of the style include stucco cladding, red-tiled roofs, arcaded porches, sculpted parapets, symmetrical facades, and arched openings. Similar to central courtyards typical of California adobe homes upon which Mission and Spanish Revival architectural styles are based, the Bilderrain Residence also features a central atrium—a rare architectural feature. Over 130 properties designed in the Mission Revival architectural style across the city appear in the city’s historic resources database, HistoricPlacesLA. These include both designated and properties identified as eligible for

designation, but represent very few examples of Mission Revival-style single-family residences remaining across the city.

At the Cultural Heritage Commission hearing on February 19, 2026, the Commission requested that the applicants provide additional information about the subject property as it relates to the Bilderrain family and the 1871 Chinese Massacre. The applicants submitted the attached supplemental material on April 17, 2026, which claims that the subject property “reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community” as an example of how working-class *Californios* continued to define their identities into the 20th century. However, staff are unable to make the finding based on this argument. It is not strongly supported in the nomination or addendum that Arthur and Mabel were working class *Californios*, in the sense that they were not laborers. Based on the list of their belongings as enumerated in a *Los Angeles Times* article about a robbery of the Bilderrain’s house in 1915, and the fact that they were able to buy additional land and commission the construction of the apartments at 126-128-1/2 S. Catalina Street in 1925, they appear to be middle class or upper middle class.

The SurveyLA historic context statement, *Spanish Colonial and Mexican Era Settlement, 1781-1849*, defines the *Californios* as “anyone of Spanish or Mexican descent who had been born in California...generally the children of the original settlers or of the presidio soldiers, and included their offspring following the American takeover in 1847.” The historic context statement further notes that, “...the large landowners liked to think of themselves as the true *Californios*, and referred to those of lesser status, such as skilled workers, ranch hands, and independent farmers, as *vecinos*, or neighbors. At the bottom of this self-defined social structure were the field hands and unskilled workers. They were called *cholos*, a term that originally referred to offspring of a *mulato* and a *mulata* in the old Spanish *casta* system of racial categorization.” In this sense, the term *Californio* reflected a particular social status. Given this definition, the children of the original settlers of the 1781 founding of Los Angeles, who were likely born in the late 1780s to early 1800s, would be *Californios*. While it may be possible to extend this overarching classification to Mabel and Arturo’s parents’ generation, Arturo and Mabel who were born over 100 years after the city’s founding, in 1872 and 1881, respectively, were not *Californios*. It should also be noted that Arthur’s father, Jesus Bilderrain, born in 1842 in Baja California Sur, was not a *Californio*. No details were provided in the application or addendum on the birth dates or locations for Arthur’s mother, nor for Mabel’s parents.

In addition, while the Bilderrain family was particularly known in the history of Los Angeles for Jesus Bilderrain’s part in the Chinese Massacre, he passed away in 1901, nine years prior to his son’s marriage to Mabel, and 11 years prior to the construction of the subject property. There was also no evidence provided in the nomination or the addendum that any other members of the Bilderrain family resided with Arthur and Mabel at the subject property. Nevertheless, the proposed designation is not for the Bilderrain family, but for the residence located at 124 N. Avenue 33.

Furthermore, in the addendum the applicant claims that the Bilderrain Residence imitates, both spatially and stylistically, Piedra Yorba de Sowl’s renowned Casa Verdugo restaurant. While the subject property shares the same architectural style and features a large central courtyard, the Bilderrain Residence is not a replica of Casa Verdugo. The applicant did not provide any documentation to substantiate the claim that the subject property served as a restaurant or catering business. However, staff was able to locate historic records showing that Mabel and Arturo operated a private restaurant at their home called El Bilderrain, but it is unknown how long they ran this business. Built in 1907, the historic Casa Verdugo building (listed on the Glendale

Register of Historic Resources) is located at 1235 N. Louise Street in Glendale, CA. Casa Verdugo was the second location of a restaurant operated by Piedad Yorba Sowl at the request of Glendale civic leader Leslie Brand and Henry Huntington to service the newly created Glendale line of the Pacific Electric Railway. Serving authentic dishes of Mexican origin, the restaurant capitalized on the romanticized image of Old California. Casa Verdugo quickly became an early tourist attraction in Glendale as evidenced by local ads and postcards of the restaurant, and spurred the development of a residential and commercial district that is currently being considered for designation as an historic district. Constructed five years later, the subject property may have imitated Casa Verdugo in some respects given that they both operated as restaurants. However, there is no evidence that the Bilderrains' restaurant had the same amount of recognition or cultural significance.

The subject property has been thoughtfully restored by its current owners and retains a high level of integrity of location, feeling, materials, design, workmanship, setting, and association to convey its significance.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT ("CEQA") FINDINGS

State of California CEQA Guidelines, Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 *"consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for protection of the environment."*

State of California CEQA Guidelines Article 19, Section 15331, Class 31 "consists of projects limited to maintenance, repair, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, conservation or reconstruction of historical resources in a manner consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic buildings."

The designation of the Bilderrain Residence as an Historic-Cultural Monument in accordance with Chapter 9, Article 1, of The City of Los Angeles Administrative Code ("LAAC") will ensure that future construction activities involving the subject property are regulated in accordance with Section 22.171.14 of the LAAC. The purpose of the designation is to prevent significant impacts to an Historic-Cultural Monument through the application of the standards set forth in the LAAC. Without the regulation imposed by way of the pending designation, the historic significance and integrity of the subject property could be lost through incompatible alterations and new construction and the demolition of an irreplaceable historic site/open space. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation are expressly incorporated into the LAAC and provide standards concerning the historically appropriate construction activities which will ensure the continued preservation of the subject property.

The City of Los Angeles has determined based on the whole of the administrative record, that substantial evidence supports that the Project is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section Article 19, Section 15308, Class 8 and Class 31. The project was found to be exempt based on the following:

The use of Categorical Exemption Class 8 in connection with the proposed designation is consistent with the goals of maintaining, restoring, enhancing, and protecting the environment through the imposition of regulations designed to prevent the degradation of Historic-Cultural Monuments.

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Furthermore, none of the exceptions to the Categorical Exemption Under CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply to the proposed Project. The proposed Project will not result in significant cumulative impacts from successive projects of the same type in the same place. The Project does not involve unusual circumstances as it is in a similar location, topography, and streetscape as other Historic-Cultural Monuments in the Northeast Los Angeles Community Plan Area. The Project will not damage scenic resources in a state scenic highway. The Project site is not on a list compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 related to hazardous waste sites. The Project will also not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource.

Categorical Exemption ENV-2026-342-CE was prepared on May 4, 2026.