

Supporting Materials

Proposed Selvas de Verdugo Historic District

April 1, 2022

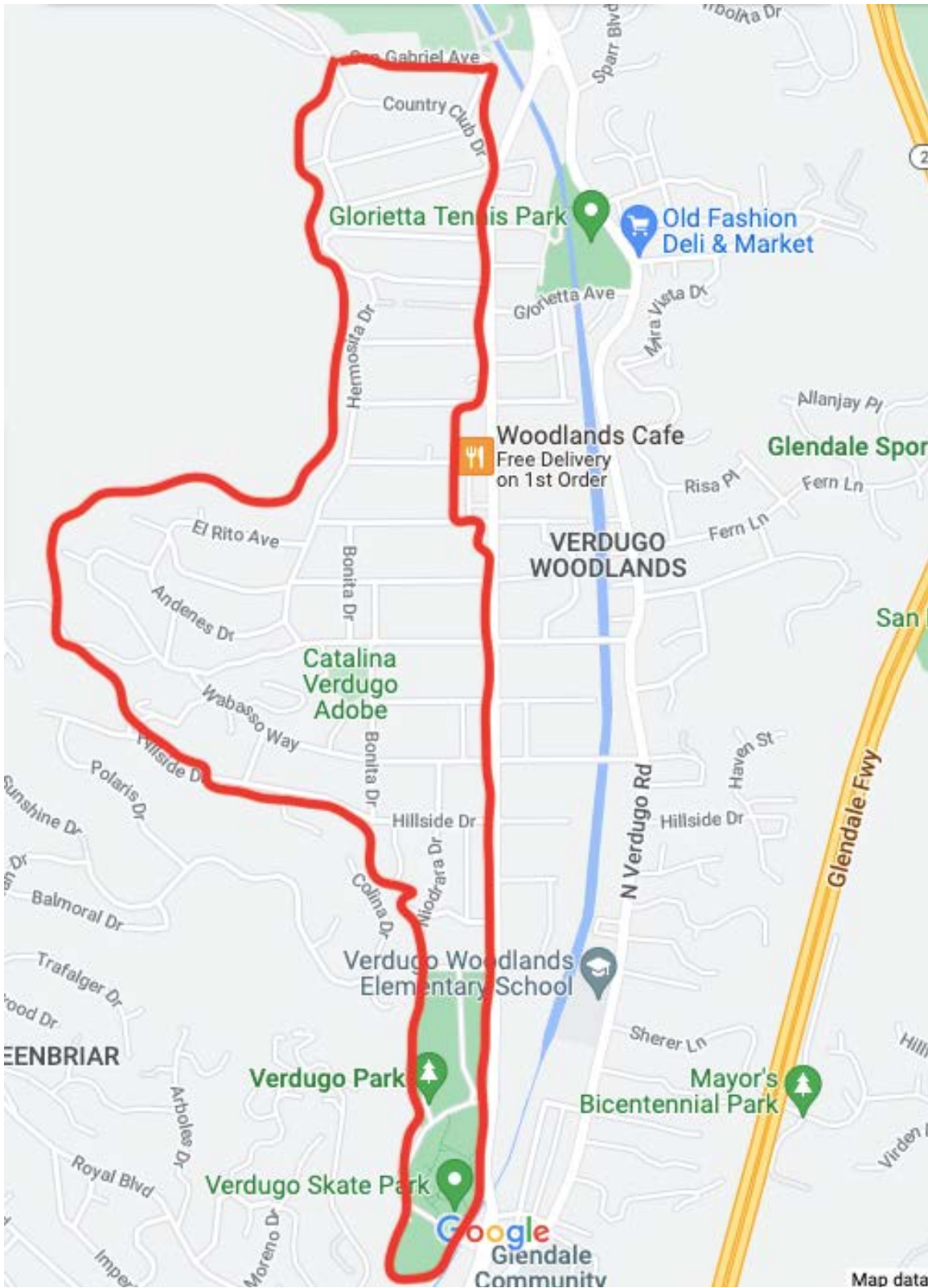


Figure 1. Map of boundaries of proposed Selvas de Verdugo Historic District. (Exclusions include the small commercial district and multi-family properties from 2425 Cañada Blvd. to 1654 Don Carlos Ave., 1400 - 1444 Hillside Drive, a tract resubdivided and developed in 1968, and an extension of San Luis Rey through Via Saldivar.)

Historic District Context Statement Development History

The Verdugos, John Pirtle, and the Verdugo Canyon Land Company

The proposed Selvas de Verdugo historic district comprises a significant portion of the 3,300 acres allotted to Catalina Verdugo, the daughter of the original Mexican owner of the vast Rancho San Rafael, and her nephew Teodoro in the Great Partition of 1871. The proposed district includes the Catalina Verdugo adobe (built by Teodoro, 2211 Bonita Drive), a neighborhood landmark and important material reminder of the area's rich Spanish and Mexican history. Another landmark on the property was the now deceased Oak of Peace, significant as the site of negotiations in 1847 that ultimately led to the end of the Mexican-American War.¹

Efforts to develop the Verdugos' property followed Teodoro's death in 1904, and in 1906 the Forest Grove Land Company came into possession of Tract 250. There were plans to subdivide the land for residences; these failed, likely due to the lack of frequent, reliable public transportation. The local press at the time noted broken promises to build an electric railway from Los Angeles. Until 1910, the only public transportation adjacent to the property was the Salt Lake Railway, which served it infrequently.²

In 1909 Tract 250 was acquired by the Verdugo Canyon Land Company, whose President John A. Pirtle had been involved with the Forest Grove Land Company. The boundaries of the renamed "Verdugo Canyon Tract" extended from the fork at Verdugo Road and Cañada Blvd. (south) to Glorietta Avenue (north), and from the foothills (west) to Verdugo Road (east). It included Verdugo Park, a favorite regional picnicking spot since at least the 1890s, which remained informal open space until the City of Glendale began acquiring land there for an official park in 1944 (see figure 2).³

Development of the tract was facilitated by the extension of the Glendale-Eagle Rock Railway line (a private line, opened in 1909) into the Verdugo Canyon in July 1910. Pirtle provided the necessary right-of-way and subscribed \$20,000 to guarantee its construction. To accommodate the railway tracks, Pirtle laid out Cañada Blvd. in a straight line, in contrast with the winding curves of nearby Verdugo Cañon Road (later renamed Verdugo Road).⁴

¹ Details of the history of the Verdugos' property ownership and sales are found in "A Historical and Architectural Assessment of the Verdugo Adobe," Glendale, California, prepared by Chambers Group, Inc. (August 1993), 5, Glendale Public Library, Special Collections (hereafter GPL-SC), Verdugo Adobe/Verdugo Family binder. For the Selvas de Verdugo historic district application, the applicants are indebted to the research of Architectural Resources Group on the Niodrara Drive Historic District historic context statement and Catherine Jurca for the Niodrara Drive Historic District application.

² "The Verdugo Ranch," *Glendale News*, October 2, 1909, GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders. See also "Verdugo Park to Be Cut Up," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1906, proquest.

³ See E. Caswell Perry and Carroll W. Parcher, *Glendale Area History*, 2nd ed. (Glendale, CA, 1981), 22, 167.

⁴ See "Road to Verdugo Park," *Glendale News*, April 22, 1910; and "Extended to Verdugo Park," *Glendale News*, July 8, 1910, GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders.



Figure 2. Members of the Concordia Club, Los Angeles, picnicking in Verdugo Park, 1908. Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

Pirtle’s name dominated Verdugo Canyon Tract advertising. He was called “the moving spirit” of the project, and he aimed for a high-class clientele. (figure 3).⁵ He worked hard



Figure 3. Postcard advertising the Verdugo Canyon Tract, with John Pirtle’s name, 1910. Glendale Public Library, Special Collections, Panoramas, Mountains, Canyons binder.

to ensure that the subdivision preserved the area’s remarkable natural features. He hired noted San Francisco horticulturalist John McLaren, “the father of Golden Gate Park,” to

⁵ “Transformation of Big Ranch,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1909, proquest.

lay out the streets in keeping with the natural contours of the land and to ensure that no coast live oaks or sycamores would have to be removed.⁶

An ad in the *Los Angeles Times* described lots “one-half acre to three acres, rolling grounds, live oaks, sycamore trees, running water and parks.”⁷ In May 1910 the company advertised the creation of “the most beautiful and artistic illustrated booklet of its kind ever published in Los Angeles” (figures 4 and 5).⁸ This expensive brochure likewise touted “large villa lots, trees, running water” but primarily told its story in pictures, including photographs of Verdugo Park, a wonderful asset to potential homeowners. Pirtle’s brochure also included a photo of the lot on which he proposed to build a house, which he did in 1912 (2101 Cañada Blvd.), the oldest house within the proposed district.⁹



Figure 4. “Lover’s Bridge” in Verdugo Park. “Verdugo Canyon Tract,” pamphlet, n.d. (circa 1910), Huntington Library.



Figure 5. Future homesite of developer John Pirtle. “Verdugo Canyon Tract.”

⁶ See *ibid.*

⁷ Ad for Verdugo Canyon Tract, *Los Angeles Time*, October 27, 1909, proquest.

⁸ Ad for Verdugo Canyon Tract, *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1910, proquest.

⁹ “Verdugo Canyon Tract,” n.d. (circa 1910), Huntington Library.

The Verdugo Canyon Tract focused on development on the west side of Cañada, and the layout of streets closely resembles the present configuration. Ten east-west streets from Colina Drive to Glorietta Avenue (“Avenue F”), along with the north-south streets of Niodrara Drive, Bonita Drive, and Cañada, were mapped and over 200 lots created. By contrast, the east side of Cañada was divided as six giant lots with a single street—Opechee—running east-west.

Despite Pirtle’s ambitions, only a few houses were built in the 1910s. Nonetheless, the Verdugo Canyon territory, including Pirtle’s subdivision, was annexed to Glendale in 1912, only the second area to join the city following its incorporation in 1906. The annexation enabled the city to exert control over important water rights linked to the abundant natural streams.¹⁰

Frederick Pennington Newport and Selvas de Verdugo

The pace of development picked up with the involvement of Frederick Pennington (F. P.) Newport, whose eponymous company purchased and re-subdivided much of the Verdugo Canyon Tract beginning in 1917. Newport re-named the area *Selvas de Verdugo*, later anglicized to Verdugo Woodlands, a name that eventually described a much larger area than that owned by Newport, extending as far as the 2 freeway (some properties on the far eastern edge of which were demolished to make way for it). Newport formally “opened” Selvas de Verdugo in June 1917, with a fiesta in Verdugo Park featuring Spanish music and dancing as well as lectures on California history by Charles F. Lummis and former State Senator Reginaldo Francisco del Valle.¹¹

The Selvas de Verdugo tract was expansive and irregular, its boundaries shaped by prior land sales; from the west side of Cañada it included not only streets platted in 1909 but also several new streets that extended up into the foothills, as well as the highly picturesque Hermosita Drive, which curves north along the base of the hills. Selvas de Verdugo expanded through the mid-1920s; in 1922 it was extended north from Glorietta to Santa Maria Avenue, and again in 1924 to the south side of San Gabriel Avenue. Newport also incrementally added property on the east side of Cañada Blvd., from the northern intersection of Cañada and Verdugo to the north side of El Rito. In addition, Newport owned and developed smaller tracts within the proposed historic district, including Fernbrook Place and other lots within the Niodrara Drive Historic District (designated 2016).

A brief biography of Newport in John Steven McGroarty’s *Los Angeles from the Mountains to the Sea: With Selected Biography of Actors and Witnesses to the Period of Growth and Achievement* (1921) specifically mentioned his “pioneering” development of “surpassingly beautiful home sites” in the “fertile foothill and valley lands in historic Verdugo Canyon.”¹² Like Pirtle, Newport emphasized the sylvan setting and touted

¹⁰ See “Vexatious Water Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1912, proquest.

¹¹ “Grand Spanish Fiesta Program is Announced,” *Glendale News*, June 7, 1917. GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders. Similar articles/promotions ran on June 8 and June 9 as well.

¹² John Steven McGroarty, *Los Angeles from the Mountains to the Sea: With Selected Biography of Actors and Witnesses to the Period of Growth and Achievement* (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1921), 900.

natural features: references to mature trees and flowing streams were ubiquitous in his advertisements. An ad in the *Glendale Evening News* from 1924, for example, refers simultaneously to its history as the “estate of the distinguished Verdugo family” and the area’s “early hacienda days,” while also claiming its affinities with “the Riviera, Switzerland, and the rustic lanes of the English countryside” (figure 6). Newport created an extravagant pamphlet of his own, which urged that “Verdugo Woodlands is like a



Figure 6. Ad for “Verdugo Woodlands,” *Glendale Evening News*, October 31, 1924, GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders.

touch of old Switzerland,” with “[c]hattering brooks of sparkling mountain water—clear vistas of rugged mountains...laurel-covered foothills—great gnarled sycamores—evergreen live-oaks, clusters of alders.”¹³ Native oaks and sycamores are still prominent features of the proposed historic district.

Newport promised potential buyers a “high class” environment of single-family homes--“Restrictions on the property protect it against the encroachment of commercial, tenement, apartment house, bungalow court” and other “undesirable feature[s]”--which could serve as a code for discouraging lower-income groups and racial minorities, who might find development conditions more difficult to satisfy. Despite these promises, Newport focused on smaller lots more scaled to 1920s suburban development, in contrast with the large “villa” properties favored by his predecessor.¹⁴

¹³ “The Story of Verdugo Woodlands told in pictures,” n.d. (1920s), GPL-SC, Sparr Heights/Verdugo Woodlands binder.

¹⁴ “Restrictions Aid Tract’s Development,” *Glendale Evening News*, January 29, 1927, GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders.

The proposed historic district had other developers, but Newport was by far the most prominent and active, bringing to fruition the vision for a sylvan suburban setting first formulated by John Pirtle. Newport remained the driving force until 1935, when the F. P. Newport Company declared bankruptcy, one of many developer-victims of the Great Depression. The area was built out by the 1960s; later waves of development took place in areas beyond the proposed historic district boundaries, on streets that climbed higher into the foothills.

Relationship of District to Glendale Development Patterns, Events, and Persons.

Development Patterns

The neighborhood developed gradually at first and then steadily over decades, in keeping with patterns of development in other single-family neighborhoods in north Glendale. Development was made possible with the opening of the Glendale-Eagle Rock Railway line in 1910, but it only truly flourished with the ascendance of the private automobile, which made the extension of sidewalk-less streets into the western foothills of Selvas de Verdugo desirable.

As in other older Glendale neighborhoods that developed over time, with contributions from architects and builders who gave their individual stamp to properties built one at a time, the style of architecture is eclectic rather than homogeneous. The Craftsman style is represented, while Period Revival and Minimal Traditional homes predominate among properties developed before World War II. During the post-war period undeveloped lots were filled in, typically with Ranch-style homes as well as with some fine examples of Mid-century Modern.

The proposed historic district “is united historically [and] aesthetically by plan or physical development” (GMC 30.25.015). The same themes that applied to the Niodrara Drive Historic District (designated 2016), apply to the larger Selvas de Verdugo historic district, which is unsurprising given the outsized influence of F. P. Newport on both. Thus we propose the former be included within the larger historic district’s boundaries.

Niodrara Drive was designated primarily for its association with trends in residential development, subdivision design, and community planning, in particular those associated with a picturesque, sylvan ideal that sought to marry proximity to the city with a rejuvenating life in nature. Pirtle’s and Newport’s larger development activities were unique within Glendale in their consistent embrace of, and deference to, the natural environment, signaled by the initial hiring of San Franciscan horticulturalist John McLaren to lay out the streets so as to maximize natural features. This commitment is reflected in the river rock enclosures that protect trees in the middle of two streets, Niodrara Dr. and Selvas Place. While the landscaping along Niodrara is particularly striking, a similarly bucolic atmosphere pervades the rest of the proposed historic district. The commitment to preserving and enhancing natural amenities, evoked accurately by the “Selvas/Woodlands” name, resulted in a cohesive streetscape characterized by curvilinear, intersecting streets that embrace the contours of the hillside terrain, use of native stone, mature trees with an emphasis on natives, a lack of sidewalks, and historic streetlamps.

Not only is this area different in character from other neighborhoods in Glendale, but it is different from the east side of Cañada. The sliver of land between it and Verdugo Road is level. Streets are more linear and most dead-end at the Verdugo Wash, which forms a natural barrier. We believe that it would be possible in future to propose a second phase to the Selvas de Verdugo historic district from Cañada to the Wash. The development on the east side of Verdugo Road, only part of which is considered part of the Verdugo Woodlands, was not part of either the Verdugo Canyon or Selvas de Verdugo Tracts.

Events

The proposed historic district is the site of an important event in American history, the place, formerly memorialized by the Oak of Peace (figure 7), where the terms to end the Mexican-American War were negotiated in 1847, leading to the signing of the Treaty of Cahuenga. The former location of the oak is commemorated in the Catalina Verdugo Adobe park.



Figure 7. The Oak of Peace, n.d.
Los Angeles Public Library
Photo Collection.

Persons

The proposed historic district is associated with several notable individuals who played an important role in the history and development of this area. **Catalina and Teodoro Verdugo**, daughter and grandson of the original Mexican owner Jose Verdugo, owned the land as part of the holdings allotted to them in the Great Partition of 1871 and resided in the adobe that gives the neighborhood and city park its name.

Developer **John Pirtle** was not only was president of the Verdugo Canyon Land Company, but as president of Glendale Consolidated Water Company he was a player in Glendale's water wars, along with other such prominent figures as C. E. Thom and

Erskine Ross.¹⁵ The water rights to the canyon had been divided up as carefully as the land in the Great Partition of 1871. This precious commodity, which enabled the development of Glendale by providing most water for domestic use, belonged proportionately to the various claimants based on the percentage of land they had been awarded.¹⁶ For decades much of Glendale's water was thus controlled by a small number of prominent figures, with Glendale Consolidated controlling roughly 13 percent of the canyon's water in 1912, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.¹⁷ Pirtle was an original resident of the Verdugo Canyon Tract as owner of a "villa lot" on Cañada, which originally spanned from Wabasso Way to Camulos. The property's river rock wall and original house are extant.

F. P. Newport spurred development of Selvas de Verdugo/Verdugo Woodlands from 1917 until he lost his company to bankruptcy in 1935. He carried out Pirtle's original vision for a residential development that married proximity to the city with all the amenities that a forested, water-rich natural environment afforded. He also helped to ensure the preservation of the historic Catalina Verdugo adobe.

Period of Significance

The suggested period of significance for the proposed historic district is 1909 – 1965. This period aligns closely with the 1909 – 1962 period of significance for the Niodrara Drive Historic District. Apart from the adobe, which falls outside the period of significance, there are no buildings constructed before 1912; however, 1909 is appropriate as the date when the Verdugo Canyon Tract had been platted and open for inspection and when John McLaren made his notable contribution to the street plan and vision of this sylvan suburban neighborhood. There is still significant in-fill development into the mid-1960s. By 1966 there is a notable difference in the style of house, with a boxier massing that has more in common with development outside the proposed boundaries in 1968 and later than with the historic development within them.

Profile of Historic Resource Types

The Niodrara Drive Historic District, including its 32 properties and landscaping, is a historic resource within the boundaries of the proposed historic district.

Five properties in the proposed district are on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources. Several other properties are historically significant beyond their architectural merits. The list is by no means exhaustive, and further research will no doubt turn up other important properties.

¹⁵ See "The Verdugo Ranch," *Glendale News*, October 2, 1909, GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders; "The Beautiful Verdugo Canyon," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 17, 1910, California Digital Newspaper Collection; "Royal Boulevard Historic Resources Survey," prepared by Historic Resources Group, City of Glendale, March 2008, 12; and "Vexatious Water Problem."

¹⁶ John Calvin Sherer, *History of Glendale and Vicinity* (Glendale: Glendale History Publishing Company, 1922), 116. Sherer would know: he helped to organize the Verdugo Canyon Water Company and was president, secretary, and treasurer at various times as well as a stockholder. As such he was an interenor in an 1893 lawsuit over rights to the stream.

¹⁷ "Vexatious Water Problem," *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1912, proquest.

Catalina Verdugo Adobe, 2211 Bonita Drive



Built by Catalina's nephew Teodoro (dates are variously cited as 1828 and 1860s or 1870s), the adobe is listed on the Glendale Register of Historic Resources (#1) and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Nearby was the Oak of Peace, also listed on the National Register, but the tree has since died of natural causes. The adobe—and plans for its preservation—was prominently mentioned in advertisements from both the Verdugo Canyon Land Co. and F. P. Newport.¹⁸ The adobe falls outside the period of significance. The adobe and its surroundings were purchased by the City of Glendale in 1989 and are now a city park.

Verdugo Park, 1621 Cañada Blvd.

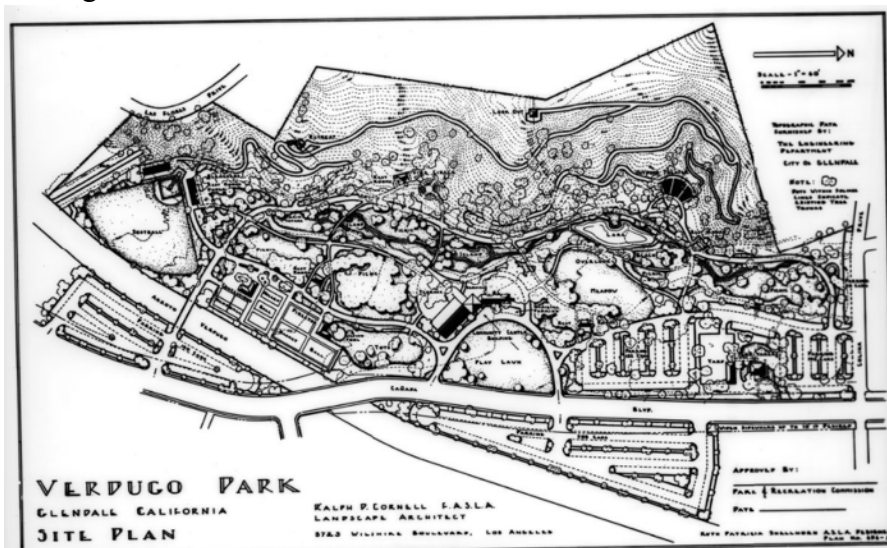


Figure 9. Site Plan for Verdugo Park, Glendale, [1945], Ralph D. Cornell Papers, UCLA Library, Special Collections.

¹⁸ See, for example, “The Verdugo Ranch,” *Glendale Evening News* Real Estate, October 2, 1909, and “Beauties of Nature Are Carefully Preserved,” *Glendale Evening News*, October 31, 1924, p. 16, GPL-SC, Verdugo Woodlands folders.

Verdugo Park was a major selling point for all iterations of development within the general Verdugo Woodlands area. It was never subdivided and remained informal open space before Glendale acquired it for a city park in 1944. The park was designed by celebrated landscape architect Ruth Shelhorn, working for Ralph Cornell. Shelhorn designed many important public landscaping projects in southern California including Disneyland and Bullocks Pasadena as well as other branches of the iconic department store.

Pirtle House, 2101 Cañada Blvd.



Side view of the 1912 Craftsman-influenced property built for John Pirtle, who created the initial subdivision as part of the Verdugo Canyon Land Company. Master architect and Glendale resident Alfred Priest designed the house. An octagonal roof-top dome is just visible through the foliage.

1616 Wabasso Way



An outstanding example of Prairie Style/Foursquare architecture, neither of which is common in Glendale, 1616 Wabasso Way was built in 1914 (corrected from 1912 in the Niodrara Dr. survey) by master architect and Glendale resident Alfred Priest. The house was used frequently to advertise Selvas de Verdugo. In addition, between 1924 – 1931 it was owned by the heavyweight boxing champion Jess Willard. It is a contributor to the Niodrara Dr. Historic District.

1360 San Luis Rey



This Mediterranean Revival was designed by master architect and Glendale resident Alfred Priest in 1924.

Dick House, 1639 Santa Barbara Ave.



This Spanish Colonial Revival residence was designed in 1926 by the famous, prolific theater architect S. Charles Lee, the year before he got his first theater commission, to

design the Tower Theatre in downtown LA for H. L. Gumbiner. This property was recently listed on the Glendale Register.

Willard House, 2312 Blanchard St.



Willard House is number 113 on the Glendale Register and built in 1929. An English Revival with storybook elements, it was the residence of boxer Jess Willard after he moved from 1616 Wabasso Way.

Joy House, 1539 El Rito Ave.



Joy House is number 125 on the Glendale Register. It is one of a handful of Monterey Colonial Revival properties in the Woodlands neighborhood, designed by noted architect Edward Mayberry in 1932.

Austin House, 1427 Andenes Dr.



Austin House is number 129 on the Glendale Register. It is an unusual Swiss chalet-style residence built in 1937.

Rodriguez House, 1845 Niodrara Dr.



Rodriguez House is number 24 on the Glendale Register. It is a modern wood frame, stucco, stone, and glass house designed by one of southern California's most important and innovative architects, Rudolf Schindler, an Austrian émigré. It is located within the Niodrara Dr. Historic District and individually eligible for the National Register.

1900 Niodrara Dr.



This 1950 Rustic Ranch was designed by notable southern California architect, Robert Byrd, whose other works include the ranch house on actor Robert Taylor's estate in Mandeville Canyon; a "tree house" on Laurel Canyon Blvd., where Frank Zappa lived; and the demolished Cielo House in Benedict Canyon, built for French actress Michele Morgan but best known as the house in which Sharon Tate and other victims of the Manson clan were murdered. Byrd, who was active from the 1930s through the 1960s, was known for working in an off-beat rustic style in which elements were combined somewhat higgeldy piggeldy: hence the nickname "Byrd House" for his works. It is a contributor to the Niodrara Dr. Historic District.

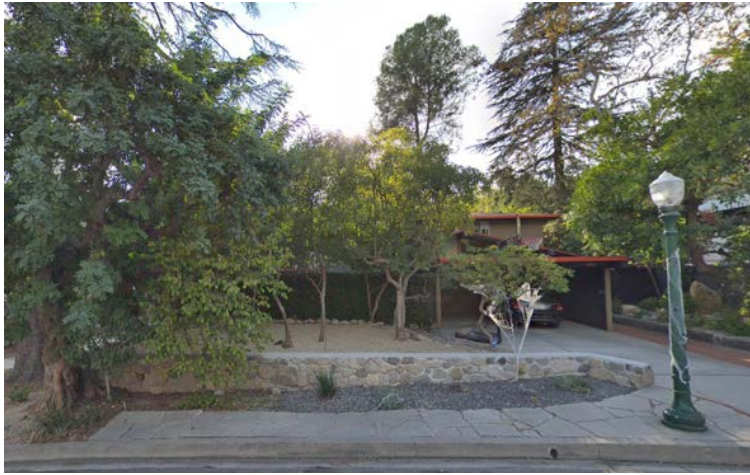
McKentley House, 2223 Bonita Dr.



Figure 20. McKentley House, 2223 Bonita Dr.

This 1951 Mid-century Modern was designed in 1951 by noted architect Boyd Georgi.

Markwith House, 1350 Andenes Dr.



This 1965 Mid-century Modern was designed by the husband/wife, USC-trained, architecture team Denver and Marjorie Markwith for their family.

Architectural Styles within the Proposed District

The following photographs are by no means a comprehensive survey of architectural styles but rather are designed to serve as an introduction to the range of styles.

American Colonial Revival

1555 Hillside Dr.



1627 Don Carlos Ave.



2300 Blanchard Dr.



Craftsman

1601 Hillside Dr.



1601 Hillside Dr. can be seen on the north-east corner of Bonita and Hillside in this undated historic photo.



1643 Wabasso Way



Dutch Colonial

1625 Opechee Way



1640 Santa Maria Ave.



English Revival

1601 Wabasso



1638 Capistrano Ave.



2401 Bonita Dr.



2407 Bonita Dr.

Foursquare

1648 Del Valle Ave.



French Revival

2301 Bonita Ave.



1347 San Luis Rey Dr.



Mediterranean Revival

1608 El Rito Ave.



1676 San Gabriel Ave.



2307 Blanchard Dr.



Mid-century Modern

1307 Opechee Way



1350 Capistrano Ave.



2400 Hermosita Ave.



Minimal Traditional

1400 Andenes Dr.



1615 Ramona Ave.



1664 Santa Barbara Ave.



Mission Revival

2511 Hermosita Dr.



2207 Canada Blvd.



Monterey Colonial Revival

1383 Opechee Way



1658 San Gabriel Ave.



1602 Santa Rosa Ave.



Ranch

1326 Opechee Way



1604 Hillside Dr.



2900 Hermosita Dr.



Spanish Colonial Revival

1533 Opechee Way



2313 Andenes Dr.



2410 Hermosita Dr.



Storybook

1632 Don Carlos



Tudor Revival

1614 Ramona Ave.



1626 Country Club Dr.



2411 Bonita Dr.



Historic Streetlamps





