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To: Mr. and Mrs Bruce Jones.
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From: Portia Lee, Ph.D.
California Archives

Ashton Stewart has asked me to fax you a copy of the application for designation of the Villa Elaine which will be heard at the Cultural Heritage Commission meeting tomorrow. I hope you plan to attend and will ask any questions of the Commission about the designation at that time..



Portia Lee
Registered Professional Historian 547

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DESCRIPTION

8. ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

Architectural Style and Plan

The Villa Elaine's architectural style - following the pattern of vernacular business buildings in Los Angeles is eclectic, but generally incorporates the elements of the late Renaissance Revival. The structure's symmetrical massing, horizontal division of floors by belt courses, rusticated quoins, entry framed by pilasters and variation in window treatment on the top story are character-defining features of the style. The rhythm and formality of the composition revived elements taken from pattern books illustrating the architecture of 16th century Italy. Architect Smith substituted brick for the prototype material that would have been cut stone with a smooth finish.

The Courtyard Building in Los Angeles

The plan of the Villa Elaine is a variant of the double bar, or double wing, courtyard plan in which apartments face one another across the open courtyard. Since his client had commissioned a mixed-use structure on Vine Street, a major arterial through Hollywood, Architect Smith placed shops on the street frontage, then created a tunnel entrance opening onto the courtyard. This scheme allowed some apartments built above the stores, as well as those on the flanking wings, to overlook the courtyard. Others overlooked the street, or the less attractive side yards. By varying the size, style, and placement of apartments, Smith's plan enabled the owner to cater to tenants of smaller incomes, as well as those who could afford the more ample spaces and amenities of the ground floor maisonettes

Architect and Professor Stefanos Polyzoides in his book, Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles, offers an analysis of the courtyard housing type which he states, "encapsulates a highly desirable but quickly disappearing southern California flavor." He finds the different versions of the courtyard plan unique in the Los Angeles region because they represented idealistic as well as practical solutions to the problems of providing housing for a rapidly expanding population. In a city of continually arriving newcomers and no clearly defined cultural norms, Los Angeles builders were able to design housing "whose civilizing influences were immediate and whose effect on the city was visible."

The great beauty of the courtyard form was its ability to extend private interior space into exterior public space. Courtyard buildings offered residents the chance to enjoy more community than a single family home would offer, and at a more affordable cost. Courts offered an instant neighborhood, a place to feel at home until the means and opportunity to acquire a single family home could be gathered. In a fast-growing metropolis, the courtyard became protected space on a new frontier. Its landscaping ordered the natural

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environment, enabling residents to enjoy the flowers, shrubs and trees that flourished in the warm Mediterranean climate. Neighbor met neighbor in a uniquely California version of the French *place* or English "common."

9. STATE PRESENT PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE OR STRUCTURE

Property Description

The Villa Elaine, a U-shaped, four story courtyard apartment building containing 239 rooms divided into 63 single, 17 studio, 10 bachelor, 9 double and 2 triple apartments, is situated at 1241-1249 Vine Street between Fountain and Lexington Avenues in the Colegrove District of Hollywood, in the city of Los Angeles. Zoning in the immediate area is mixed use, predominately one and two-story commercial and retail establishments. Access to the apartments is through a wide entrance tunnel leading to the central courtyard; access to the rear of the property is by a narrow driveway on the south.

The original building permit for the Villa Elaine was issued on January 27, 1925 to Mrs. E[dna]. Henderson at the address of the building, which was proposed to be erected on a lot 290 feet by 109.93 feet; the size of the building was 246 feet by 109.92. The structure was to be wood frame, set on a concrete foundation with exterior walls of brick. The parapet roof was composition. Costs were projected at \$250,000.

Ownership

The owner named on the building permit, Mrs. E. Henderson appears in the City Directory of 1925 as Mrs. Edna Henderson. Her occupation is listed as artist.

Architectural Description

Exterior - Front facade

The front facade of the Villa Elaine presents an imposing four-story terra cotta centerpiece culminating in an attic above a banded arch with an incised tympanum. Bands of similar terra cotta frame the facade at the top and sides, and a terra cotta stringcourse runs below the second and fourth stories. Some terra cotta still remains at the ground story level. The entryway at ground level is wide and square, characterized by flanking structural piers capped by flat blocks. Engaged pilasters with modified Tuscan capitals separate the storefronts. Window treatments above the entry at the second, third and fourth-story levels have identical proportions. The tympanum of the arch, which features stylized carving around a central urn, surmounts the fourth-story window. Keyblocks at the top of the arch radiate from the center keystone which extends upward to lock into the square terra cotta attic which extends above the roof parapet.

The second, third and fourth stories on either side of the entry bay are faced with brick. There are two sets of corresponding fire escapes. Fenestration is arched at the fourth

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story level and square at the second and third stories that are quoined. Windows of retail shops at the ground story level vary in size and shape; they appear to have been built with transoms.

Interior courtyard

Apartments in the Villa Elaine are accessed through a tunnel with an arched entrance that leads into the ground story courtyard. A small management office is housed in the southeast corner of the courtyard. Ground story apartments open onto this courtyard. They feature 1-½ story flat arch casement windows with wood mullions. Entry doors to apartment and to stairs leading to upper stories have elaborated brick facing radiating around a keystone at the top of the arch. Fenestration above the ground story is varied, with both flat arched and square windows. There is a fire escape on the eastern wall above the entryway tunnel. A gate in the six-foot wall on the western end of the courtyard leads to a fenced swimming pool situated at the western boundary of the property. Landscaping consists of specimen trees and shrubbery placed in semi-circular beds in front of the tall windows of the ground floor maisonettes and in the center of the sidewalk pathway leading to the swimming pool.

10. CONSTRUCTION DATE: FACTUAL 1925

11. ARCHITECT

The architect of the Villa Elaine was L. A. Smith. Smith's earliest recorded building project in Los Angeles was a home for invalids. The Los Angeles Times of March 22, 1914 published a note on the plans for the project. After this beginning, Smith went on to a very active commercial practice for the next thirteen years as a theater architect and a builder of large scale buildings such as the Roosevelt Hospital, a market building at Vermont and Hollywood, an auto showroom at Figueroa and 23rd, a development of 7 residential structures in the West Adams, and two apartment buildings of similar style and scale, one the Villa Elaine, the other in Lincoln Heights. In 1925 he moved his offices from a building he had designed at 3rd Street and Western Avenue to the Film Exchange Building at Washington and Vermont. After that date, he concentrated his practice on theater building.

L.A. Smith has four monuments on the list of the Cultural Heritage Commission of the City of Los Angeles: #297, West Adams Gardens, 7 two-story, Tudor Revival residential buildings along West Adams Boulevard; #549, the Moorish Revival style Highland Theater Building at 5600 North Figueroa Street in Highland Park; #573, the El Portal Theater on Lankersheim Boulevard in North Hollywood, a Spanish Renaissance Revival retail, office and theater complex; and #648, the Withers Residence at 27831 Woodshire Drive, declared December 9, 1997

12. CONTRACTOR OR OTHER BULDER Arthur Bard and Company

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13. DATES OF ENCLOSED PHOTOGRAPHS 10/18/99

14. CONDITION EXCELLENT x

15. ALTERATIONS

The Villa Elaine has been seismically retrofitted, a process that has resulted in a loss of architectural integrity. On the front elevation, windows have been closed in and the opening covered with non-matching brick. The ground floor shopfronts have been braced with steel frames, and their transom windows replaced with non-original fabric.

A similar seismic retrofit technique on the interior courtyard walls has resulted in the closure of several of the 1-½ story windows on the interior courtyard's ground floor. Upper story walls have been retrofitted with anchors

16. THREATS TO SITE: NONE KNOWN x

17. IS THE STRUCTURE ON ITS ORIGINAL SITE Yes

SIGNIFICANCE

18. BRIEFLY STATE HISTORICAL AND / OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE;
INCLUDE DATES EVENTS AND PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE

The Villa Elaine and Man Ray

A painter, photographer and leading figure in the artistic avant-garde in France and the United States, Man Ray was born in Philadelphia in 1890 and died in Paris in 1976. He left France at the start of World War II. After a cross-country trip by auto, he took up residence in Los Angeles where he remained until 1951.

Ray studied at the National Academy of Design in New York City and held a one-man show of his painting in 1912. Along with Marcel Duchamp, he founded the New York City group of Dadaist artists in 1917. At about that time he began to experiment with materials and techniques, producing works such as the "ready-mades," which were constructed from ordinary manufactured objects. He also created kinetic works that featured moving parts. After settling in Paris in 1921, he began to do experimental photography, producing the "Rayographs," abstract images made by placing objects on light-sensitive surfaces. Ray, like his close friend Max Ernst, began to shift the focus of his art to emphasize the principles of Surrealism; becoming particularly interested in expressionistic photography, an art form in which he is considered a modern master.

Exhibitions of Ray's work appeared throughout his residence in Los Angeles. In 1941 the De Young Museum in San Francisco exhibited paintings, drawings and rayographs produced before 1930. An exhibition of rayographs and painting wash held in Santa

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Barbara in 1943 and works in various media from 1913 to his latest work appeared in 1944 at the Pasadena Art Museum. In 1946 and 1948 there were exhibitions in local galleries of "found objects," photographs and drawings. He taught photography in his years in Los Angeles and was influential in developing awareness in the city of modernist art. He returned to France in 1951 and remained there until his death.

Many accounts, recollections, pictures and references to Ray and his life in the Villa Elaine have appeared in biographies and critical works on his fellow avant-garde artists. Ray himself recalled the Villa Elaine in his autobiography, *Self Portrait*. In the work are illustrations of Ray in the Villa Elaine. One is a Surrealist self-portrait showing the artist in the studio surrounded by tart materials and furniture. He had found impossible to work in the cramped studio he first rented and made inquiries for a painter's studio. He heard about a place on Vine Street:

I hastened to the place, a four story brick building. All around were car-dealer's lots and markets, not very prepossessing surroundings. But going into the courtyard, I saw palm trees, ivy covered walls and hibiscus bushes in flower. I was taken to the end of the court and shown a beautiful apartment on the ground floor...I couldn't have imagined anything more perfect...I bought a roll of canvas in preparation for big things. This was the original heart of Hollywood...

Once ensconced happily in the Villa, he found it inconvenient not having a car:

I decided to get a car. It should be a new one...I did some window-shopping. Then I saw my car, discreetly advertised. It was a low, closed body, four-seater, completely streamlined without any excess chrome trimmings, the finish metallic blue, the interior blue...The sign in the window gave technical details saying something about a supercharger.

Ray put a down payment on the 1941 Graham Page, noting that it was streamlined "like a submarine." His biographer Neil Baldwin states that the artist took delights in the fact that he could travel 100 miles an hour thanks to the super-charger. Ray's 1945 Christmas card sent from the Villa Elaine included the keys to his car as one of the objects in the collage.

Ray's continued to make photographs and converted the apartment's dining room into a darkroom. Apparently his fame had preceded him to Los Angeles. In the autobiography Ray notes that "opportunities to speak and to write presented themselves during my prolonged stay in Hollywood. Once I was invited to explain and defend modern art before an audience of teachers, students and others interested in the subject." However, he turned his attention to drawing and painting and did not want to take up the art of portrait photography at which he had been so successful in Paris.

Cultural-Historical Significance

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For a building to qualify as a Cultural Historic Monument of the City of Los Angeles, it must meet one or more of the criteria set out in Section 22.130 of the Los Angeles Administrative Code. The Section defines a cultural or historical monument as: "any site (including significant trees or other plant life location thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national state or local history, or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type-specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction."

The Villa Elaine appears to meet the following criteria:

1) It is a site that reflects the broad cultural and social history of the City through its association with Man Ray, an artist significant in the City's past. A famous avant-garde creator in his own right before he came to Los Angeles, Ray continued his work in the Villa Elaine studio where he received other artists and literary figures, both American and European. Film historians describe the period from the late 1930s to the 1950s in Los Angeles as the golden age of Hollywood, yet Los Angeles was still a somewhat provincial "company" town whose claim to fame was the movies. The exiles and émigrés fleeing the horrors of Nazism and World War II found refuge in the city. Artists like Ray succumbed to the cultural charms the city did offer: courtyard housing with its emphasis on landscaping, the sense of community offered by the planning scheme of the courtyard building, the ability to entertain colleagues and friends - also strangers in a strange land - around a swimming pool.

In turn the contributions of the European sojourners to the intellectual and artistic life of the city became a part of Los Angeles cultural history. The influence of Ray's exhibitions, teaching, writing, and continuing innovation in the modernist idiom he had pioneered remains and is memorialized in the many books, exhibition catalogs, newspaper reviews and memoirs that mention Man Ray and his wife at home and at work in the Villa Elaine.

2) The Villa Elaine is a site that embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type-specimen, the courtyard building. It is an unusual example of the adaptation of the courtyard plan in that it is sited on a main Hollywood thoroughfare and provides commercial as well as residential space. Architect L.A. Smith was extremely well known and a prominent practitioner of theater and commercial mixed-use building. His skill is evident in the Villa Elaine.

Ostensibly addressing the street as solid mixed use structure providing shops on the ground floor and apartments on the upper floors, the Villa's plan turns inward to provide the patio courtyard, garden space, swimming pool and maisonettes, one of which, by his own account, greatly enriched the life and creativity of Man Ray, exiled from his beloved Paris. Given the Hollywood location of the Villa and Man Ray's statement that he found

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artists and musicians living in the Villa when he arrived, it may be conjectured that owner Henderson, herself an artist, may have envisioned the ground floor maisonettes as artists studios.

Architect Stefanos Polyzoides sums up his view of the courtyard building as an indigenous Los Angeles structural form by stating, "Landmarks are physical evidence of memory and tradition. They communicate to us the ideals and values of the society that inhabited them. These protected courts will challenge us to define new buildings that match their qualities of place, their high standards of construction, their suggestion of the possibility of a full and serene life in the city." That serenity can still be found at the Villa Elaine in the courtyard that Ray found so delightful.

While the Villa Elaine has suffered a substantial loss of integrity due to the seismic retrofitting that was undertaken, it appears that professional techniques can be employed to reverse the alterations, particularly where windows have been closed in. Despite these seismic alterations and changes in the neighborhood and on the street, the Villa still retains its character and much of its character-defining features: the monumental terra cotta centerpiece of the front facade which reflects the prominent role the material had come to play as a decorative feature in entryways, street level facades and lobbies; the elaborate brick patterning around doors and windows; the courtyard organization plan with landscaping; and finally the gracious maisonette apartments.

A Cultural-Heritage Monument designation of the Villa Elaine would memorialize the contribution of indigenous architecture to the culture of the group of European "Exiles in Paradise," and particularly the life and work of Man Ray in Los Angeles.

19. SOURCES

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