

Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments Statement of Historic Significance

The Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments, located on the south side of National Boulevard between Butler Avenue and Federal Avenue, consist of a row of 12 single-story, Ranch style, four-plex dwellings. They are the original one-story rental units of Westdale Village, a community developed by Paul W. Trousdale, a prominent developer in the history of Los Angeles. (See Trousdale Statement of Significance.)

These Courtyard Apartments were planned as an integral part of the planning and architectural quality of the original development. Their one-story scale, Ranch style architecture, and landscaping create, with the single-family homes adjacent, a unified urban landscape and community that would be damaged if they are allowed to be demolished. They also retain a high level of original condition.

Westdale Village represents an important part of the development of Mar Vista and is one of the better intact examples in Los Angeles of the large-scale developments built by merchant builders who greatly influenced the character of the post-World War II metropolis. They sold both a home and a lifestyle, and in the case of Westdale Village, the Southern California dream of “Outdoor Living.”

Nineteen forty-six was a building boom time for the city. Many World War II veterans who had passed through Los Angeles on their way to fight in Japan were returning in droves to live here. There simply was not enough housing to begin to meet the need. Paul W. Trousdale, had been unable to fight in the war because of a crushed foot. According to his daughter he wanted to do something important for the war. He met with Roosevelt and negotiated FHA loans for the soldiers who would be returning. He then shifted his considerable talent from building expensive homes for the rich and famous to building housing for these soldiers. At the end of the war he moved again from merely building housing to creating beautiful new communities for the returning veterans. The first of his new communities was Westdale Village.

Citrus orchards and celery and lima bean fields dominated the area known as Stevens Ranch when Trousdale purchased it. Allen Siple, A.I.A., and a leading designer of large estates in Bel Air and Holmby Hills designed the original single family Ranch homes between 1946 and 1947. He also was the designer of The Grove, the courtyard dwellings in Westwood previously declared a Historical-Cultural Monument by the City of Los Angeles.

Landscaping was key to the intended quality and the marketing of the development. Trees and plantings helped to establish and nurture the idea of outdoor living close to nature, a major reason people wanted to move to California.

Large park-like front lawns, setbacks and side yards are characteristic of the Westdale Village development as demonstrated by the Westdale Village Courtyard apartments.

Paul Howard, the noted and influential nurseryman, was attracted to the area in the 1930's. His famous nursery, California Flowerland, was located at National and Barrington in the neighborhood where Westdale Village would be developed. Howard was already known at the time for planting the magnificent gardens of Windsor Square. He was the natural choice to help develop the landscaping for Westdale Village.

Streets throughout the area were (and remain) lined with distinctive trees including liquidambar, maples and purple-blossomed jacarandas. Paul Howard even donated the Italian Stone Pine trees that are treasured by the community along National Boulevard and that are in the parkways that border the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments.

Paul Trousdale later recalled that the first phase of Westdale Village experienced a slow sales period initially, as the sales price of the homes was considerably higher than other areas. To stimulate sales and to overcome cost objections he said,

“we had a clever girl shop for used furniture, and showed the public that the model houses could be completely and attractively furnished for less than \$1,000. This idea and the newspaper ads attracted

citywide attention. House Beautiful did a national feature, and the balance of the houses sold right out.”¹

Westdale Village earned favorable attention for its design. Officials of the National Housing Administration selected Westdale Village as representative of the new “home settlements” in Southern California that collectively were attempting to add 40,000 new dwellings in Los Angeles for the returning veterans.²

However, Westdale Village was not a typical “tract” development. Trousdale imbued his newest project with a spiritual sense. These were not just houses, but homes that beckoned community involvement and included play yards, sidewalks, tree-lined streets and a market. The homes had three bedrooms, which was more than the typical tract homes and they had larger green spaces. They were built with innovations that would later become standard.

Returning veterans flocked to Westdale Village, as did engineers from Hughes and Douglas Aircraft companies, the Coach John Wooden and also movie studio employees, including the young star Lloyd Bridges and his family.³

In fact, Westdale Village proved to be so popular that the final homes were sold by lottery.

In 1948, during the building of tract 14318, the second of the three tracts within the Village, Trousdale conceived the development of the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments. They were to provide a wider economic and social base for the community as young families and retired individuals could thereby afford to live in the area.

To protect the value and integrity of the neighborhood and in particular the single-story homes he had already built directly behind the apartments, Trousdale kept these apartment lots under the Westdale Village’s Covenants, Conditions and Reservations, requiring them, among other things, to be only single-story structures, to have certain set backs and side yards and to have ingress and egress only from the alley. These CC&R’s also stated:

¹ Letter to Joe Goodman, June 17, 1977

² Evening Vanguard, June 16, 1947; page 1

³ “Those Were the Days” by David Braverman, *Westdale Villager*, Fall, 1996

“No building, garage or other structure shall be erected, altered or placed on any of the Lots 1 to 229, both inclusive of Tract No. 14318, unless and until the building plans, specification and plot plan showing the location of such building, structure or garage has been approved in writing as to conformity and harmony of external design with existing structures in said Tract No 14318 and as to the location of such building, structure or garage with respect to topography and finished ground elevation by a committee composed of Paul W. Trousdale, Howard Burrell and Edwin A Tomlin, or by a representative designated by a majority of the members of said committee.”⁴

Trousdale then sold the lots with the CC&R’s attached to developer and builder Phil Yousem who conferred with Trousdale and this Architectural Review Committee and in 1949 built the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments to echo the homes comprising the rest of Westdale Village.

As part of Trousdale’s Westdale Village, the Courtyard Apartments remain under the Village’s CC&R’s to this day.

To continue the unified fabric of the Westdale development, the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments are single-story, Ranch-style buildings, and were specifically designed to blend in with Westdale’s other homes; in particular Plan A of Allen Siple’s Westdale Village home designs.

Like Westdale Village’s other homes, the Courtyard Apartments were also designed to bring the outdoors in with large windows and large green spaces that corresponded perfectly with the rest of Westdale Village.

The original quality of Trousdale’s planning and architecture at Westdale has proven lasting. Today the Westdale Village neighborhood prides itself on maintaining the area’s small-town atmosphere. Over the years this charm has inspired numerous articles in the Los Angeles Times including the most recent “Small-town Living on the Westside” published on September 26, 2004. Because of its charm, it attracts frequent use as a location site for television and movies. The neighborhood remains low-density and

⁴ Declaration of Establishment of Reservations, Easements, Conditions, Covenants and Reservations by Westdale Homes, Inc., Article 3, page 3

maintains its residential character, complete with frequent block parties and many other neighborhood functions.

Westdale Village is often described as a “pleasant refuge in an urban area.”⁵ This feeling is greatly enhanced by the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments’ open green spaces and single-story, house-like designs. Their designs inspired other developers to build single-story, single-family homes directly across the street from them, creating a distinctly harmonious and symmetrical feel to the block.

The Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments are remarkably intact and still retain the majority of features inside and out that make them representative of the 1949 boom, the Ranch style and the original Westdale dwellings. 1940’s tile, parquet wood floors and large multipane picture windows are only a few of those features. (See architectural significance for more.) Each set of two four-plexes features a slightly different variation of the design that keeps them looking more like homes than rental properties. Reversed L-shaped plans create large courtyards, sideyards and parkways that open to National Boulevard and are greatly enjoyed by the tenants and the rest of the neighborhood. Residents include senior citizens as well as children and grandchildren of the original Westdale Village homeowners.

Today, Westdale Village is better known as Westdale Trousdale. It is bordered by National Boulevard on the north, Palms Boulevard on the south, and Sawtelle and Inglewood Boulevards on the east and west.

The Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments are an integral part of what makes Westdale Village/Westdale Trousdale a beautiful, unique and very special part of the Mar Vista community. To allow them to be removed would irreparably damage the integrity of the neighborhood. Additionally, they represent the most intact 1949 structures in Westdale Village, and their social history should be preserved.

⁵ “Westdale.” *The Outlook*, (September 8, 1988)

Westdale Courtyard Apartments Statement of Architectural Significance

Ranch style was the most popular design for builders in California after World War II. Builders loved the Ranch style because it was very popular with the home buying public; representing qualities of a rustic informal lifestyle for families that was close to nature, and an All-American quality of rugged self-reliance. The Ranch style was also easily applied to the new mass-production methods of building large scale housing which helped to solve the housing crisis after World War II. Owners loved it because it functioned well to showcase the greatest advantage of Southern California, the beauty of the outdoors.

Ranch design was intentionally unpretentious, “inspired by the early adobe houses of the ranchos and pueblos built during the Spanish and Mexican periods in California”⁶ It mixed well with Minimal Traditional and single-story contemporary styles, focusing on the outdoor features and minimizing the effect of the home on the landscape. With its fixed decorative shutters, its lines could easily be transformed to look like Monterey or Cape Cod style, introducing a useful element of visual variety in large-scale housing tracts.

Ranch’s single-story homes with large lawns and big picture windows became a common post-World War II feature in Los Angeles. As the nineteenth century Brownstone row houses of New York and the Victorian row houses of San Francisco defined those cities and provided housing for the masses, the Ranch House came to define Los Angeles in the mid twentieth century.

Unlike other apartments within Westdale Village that were more than one story, Trousdale and Phil Yousem chose to develop the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments as single-story, Ranch-style buildings, and to thus specifically design them to blend in with Westdale Village’s other single-family homes designed by Allen Siple, in particular Plan A. Both Plan A and the Courtyard Apartments' designs were typical L shaped Ranch with similar rooflines and varying exterior designs like fixed shutters.

⁶ “Ranch” *Architectural Styles* Draft Preservation Plan Workbook (June 12, 2003)

In fact it is this Ranch design that makes the Courtyard Apartments so unique and valuable to the neighborhood. Other courtyard apartments often feel like small houses but look like what they are, small apartment courts. The Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments feel like small houses to the occupants but each four-plex looks like a single-family Ranch house to anyone passing by. They are completely in keeping with the other homes on all sides of them. Thus they provide the maximum housing space with the minimum negative impact by intentionally creating a visually unified neighborhood and community

Also, like Westdale Village's other homes, the Courtyard Apartments were designed to bring the outdoors in with large windows and large green spaces that corresponded perfectly with the ideals of Ranch and the rest of Westdale Village.

Two mirror-image L-shaped four-plexes (typical of the Ranch movement) face each other and create large courtyards that are visible from the public street and significantly improve the public space. These courtyards are grass-covered, landscaped, and often contain mature trees. Large picture windows from all the apartments open up to these courtyards. These spaces along with accompanying side yards and parkways are perfect for Southern California life and are greatly enjoyed by the tenants and by the rest of the neighborhood.

Additionally, the Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments remain remarkably intact and still contain the majority of those features inside and out that make them representative of the 1949 building boom, Ranch style and the original Westdale Village dwellings.

In keeping with the original design intentions, each set of two four-plexes features a slightly different variation of the basic design. This keeps them similar but different enough to make them look more like homes than rental properties.

Decorative gables or mini gables placed in different ways decorate the exteriors, giving each mirrored pair unique design features on their roofs. Triangular vented features add to their charm.

A wood panel in the center of certain walls, characteristic of 1949 Ranch style, is one of the varying design features viewed on some exteriors. These

panels contain the original built-in shelves for plants; a design feature no longer used by new builders.

Shutters are another interesting and varying feature. Four different designs representative of Ranch and the time period are used. Each twin set of buildings retains the same shutter design in all but one case.

Most of the four-plexes have recessed doors, creating open verandas. Some have closed verandas containing louvered glass windows. These porches, are a major identifying element and living space of the Ranch style.

Most of the four-plexes contain three one-bedroom apartments and one two-bedroom apartment.

The layout of the units is typical Ranch as all rooms are centered off one main room, and large windows open up to outdoor space throughout.

The interiors include the simple walls devoid of crown molding that mark the Ranch style of the period. Clean lines and efficient use of space are seen throughout.

The majority of kitchens and some of the bathrooms retain original 1940's tile. Most living rooms, hallways and bedrooms contain the original parquet wood floors. All retain the original metal casement, multipane picture windows located throughout each apartment.

The Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments also contain the original built-ins in the kitchen, bathroom, hallway and bedrooms. The built-in closets of the bedrooms are particularly representative of the time period as they are sliding door closets with cupboards above and three drawers below.

Some units contain the original gas stoves of the time period. Most contain the original wall furnaces.

The doors between rooms are the three-panel solid core doors of the time. The front doors are the original six-panel doors, and the back doors include the two panels with windows that are common in many Westdale Village homes. Wood louvered doors cover the water heaters. Some units contain the original screen doors and all appear to have their original number markers. (Please see worksheets for more design features.)

Because of the apartments' slight variations in style, the city has the rare opportunity to save a variety of design elements representative from the time period in one block.

The Westdale Courtyard Apartments are an excellent example of the type of Ranch structures developed in Los Angeles in 1949. The row of 12 gives the neighborhood a rare feeling of harmony and symmetry. The block has a distinctive feel of the 1949/1950 time period that is pleasant to look at and is loved by its neighbors. In fact the Friends of the Westdale Courtyard Apartments have circulated a petition which has received over 1000 signatures of neighbors, business owners and people who work in the area, asking for their preservation. More signatures are coming in every day.

Two residents report on their architectural qualities:

“The real sense of just how nice these units are is only known by living in them. Again, with both a back and front door, lots of good light from large windows and the large open space, you get a real sense these are like little houses... not apartments.”⁷

“My home is small but so well designed that it seems larger. Although it's an apartment, it feels very much like a house. It adjoins only one of the other three units, so there are windows on three sides - ensuring ample light and airflow. Each unit has its own garden space, and the courtyard that unites them is a favorite gathering place. The landscaping is not only lovely, but it acts as a filter of traffic noise. Inside the units there are wonderful built-in cabinets that provide a great deal of storage space while at the same time maximizing the living area. The quality of the construction and materials is evident throughout the units – they feel solid as well as comfortable. The apartments are loved by everyone who's lived in them, as well as by the neighborhood at large.”⁸

The Westdale Village Courtyard Apartments are Southern California-inspired structures. They are not European or East Coast in form. So many of our preserved buildings have their design roots elsewhere or were designed with the rich in mind. The apartments were designed with the

⁷ Interview with tenant Ken Marsh, June 13, 2005

⁸ Interview with tenant Kristina Carlsson, June 13, 2005

average Joe, the returning veteran in mind. They were built to be part of Westdale Village, Mar Vista, Los Angeles, California. They tell a story of a time period of explosive growth for Los Angeles in a simpler world where symmetry and harmony with the surrounding neighborhood meant something important to the community – when these qualities meant more than bigger profits.

The pride of developing a community that will nurture its citizens with the beauty of a harmonious block is disappearing on the Westside. New development is demanding the most units on whatever space is available. Yards have ceased to be a design option as land values create the pressure to build on the entire lot. Ranch designs are considered too spread out according to some, but the qualities of spaciousness and the greenery they bring are those that improve and strengthen our neighborhoods. Once these snapshots of the late 1940's and their large green spaces are destroyed and made into multi-level condos unwanted by and incompatible with the neighborhood, that breath of a simpler time will disappear and can never return.

It behooves us to remind ourselves of that simpler time when community values were encouraged and expressed in the architecture and landscaping of a middle-income neighborhood. These have real value today.

Paul W. Trousdale Statement of Significance to Los Angeles

Paul W. Trousdale was a great American, a man of vision who served his country by developing communities for the veterans returning from World War II. In doing so he greatly shaped the landscape of post-war Los Angeles, a period in which Los Angeles experienced significant growth. Although there were many developers in the city in that time period, Trousdale is recognized as one of the most influential.

A graduate of Los Angeles High School and a student of USC, Paul W. Trousdale went on to develop more than 25,000 homes and numerous significant projects throughout Southern California, Hawaii and Nevada. The vast majority of them were in Los Angeles.

Trousdale and Walt Disney were friends and neighbors and began their careers together at a time in America when anything seemed possible. Trousdale began by building fancy homes for business executives and movie stars such as Deanna Durbin.

According to his daughter Mary Ann Dickie,

“He started his career by selling gum in San Diego. (He was an ad executive for Beech-Nut.) He decided he wanted to sell something bigger. He wanted to build. He came up to Los Angeles, which was largely undeveloped at the time. With his own hands, he and a couple of friends built the firehouse on the corner of Sunset and Barrington.

When World War II came, my father wanted to go to war. He really wanted to go, but he had crushed his foot working in New York and wasn't eligible.

He wanted to do something important for it.

My father went to President Roosevelt and told him he wanted to build homes for the returning veterans and he wanted them to be able to receive FHA loans to finance them. Of course the President was all for it. So my father was the first to develop homes for the servicemen.

He went into partnership with architect Allen Siple and a contractor by the name of Holstein. Westdale Village was their first big project.”⁹

Los Angeles was soon recognized as being one of the leading places for development of new housing for veterans. In fact, after visiting many of the housing projects in the Southland officials of the National Housing Administration reported that,

“no other part of the United States is equaling southern California in providing homes for veterans.”¹⁰

This was in no small part due to Trousdale.

In 1946 A.P. Giannini, the founder of the Bank of Italy, which had already been renamed the Bank of America, visited Trousdale in Los Angeles to find out whether the businessman who had already borrowed \$30 million for construction deserved the \$50 million more that he was requesting. This was such an event that Time Magazine wrote an article on it. In that article it describes “The record that impressed Banker Giannini.”

“(D)uring the war the Paul W. Trousdale Construction Co. had built 3,025 small houses including seven big housing projects. Now it was hard at work on 2,000 houses for veterans and was turning them out at the rate of ten a day”¹¹

Trousdale’s Westdale Village was selected by the National Housing Administration as representative of the new “home settlements” in Southern California, which collectively were attempting to add 40,000 new dwellings in the metropolitan area for returning veterans.¹²

However, Westdale Village was not a typical “tract” development. Trousdale imbued his newest project with a sense of beauty. These were not just homes but a community including play yards, apartments and a shopping center. He chose to make the homes larger than the typical tract homes, with larger green spaces and tree-lined streets. For them he

⁹ Interview with Mary Dickie, Trousdale’s daughter, June 13, 2005

¹⁰ Evening Vanguard, June 16, 1947; page 1

¹¹ Time Magazine, December 2, 1966

¹² Evening Vanguard, June 16, 1947; page 1

instigated new and innovative elements such as allowing buyers to choose tile, door placement and other features usually only available to custom buyers. He offered decorating services for his homes and was famous for his “House of Hand Me Downs” which showed buyers how to beautifully furnish an entire home for under \$1,000.

Westdale Village’s homes and apartments turned out so beautifully they were featured in numerous newspaper articles and in the prestigious magazine House Beautiful.

Trousdale continued to build more communities complete with churches and shopping centers. Trousdale created the Baldwin Hills development and Valley Village. He built communities in Long Beach, Wilmington, Compton, many in the San Fernando Valley and many in minority areas. He developed the luxurious Trousdale Estates in Beverly Hills and Los Angeles’s first cooperative apartment building, the 22-story Beverly Towers, at 9220 Sunset Boulevard.

Additionally, he was a great philanthropist, generously donating to hospitals, schools, and the homeless. A street at USC is even named after him.

Trousdale also did significant work elsewhere. He developed communities in pricey Marin County, in Burlingame and in Novato across the Golden Gate Bridge. When Harold Castle was beginning to develop Waikiki he chose Trousdale to help him. Trousdale even conceived and created its International Market Place. He also built the beautiful Tahquitz River Estates in Palm Springs, and the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas.

But, Trousdale’s most important work was in Los Angeles where his Westdale Village and other communities set the standard for post-war housing. A lot of people were building homes for veterans but Trousdale’s projects were different. They were beautiful, unique and high quality.

“My father was a great American. Everything he ever did was for America. He gave to America a spiritual value in his beautiful developments that had community feeling for families, for churches and schools and businesses. He was completely hands-on with his developments, only wanting the best in materials, quality and in his

builders, architects and landscapers. He was a man of the Lord who had great vision.”¹³

The National Housing Administration and Time Magazine recognized these qualities in his developments. When they were looking for positive representative examples of the homes that would end up housing the “greatest generation” and that would change the face of America after World War II, they pointed to Trousdale’s Westdale Village.

Thus, Trousdale’s developments, especially Westdale Village, stand as important examples of the post-war growth in Los Angeles and in America.

¹³ Interview with Mary Dickie, Trousdale’s daughter, June 13, 2005

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