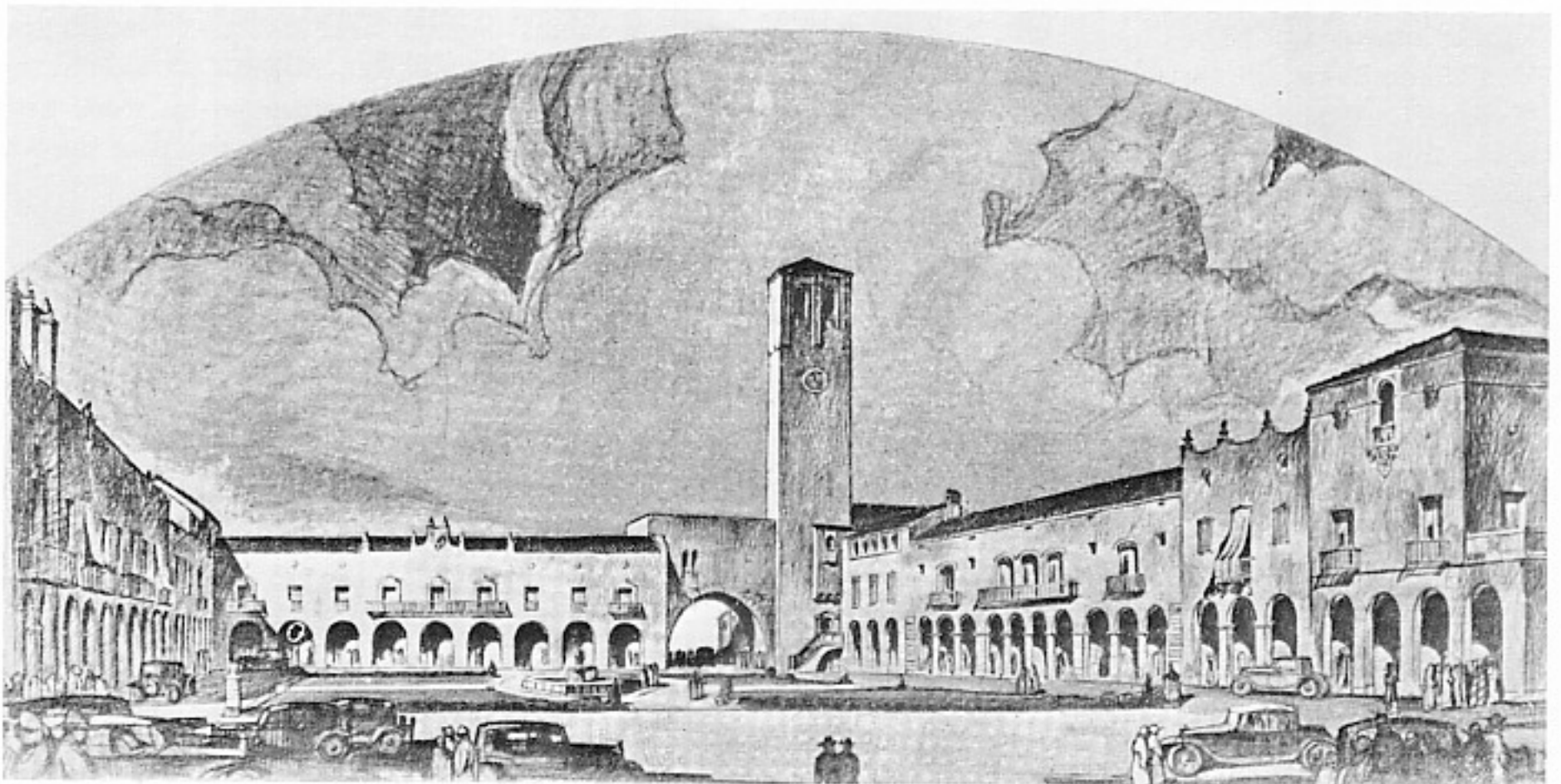


Thomas P. Gates

Palos Verdes Estates: The City Beautiful



Valmonte Plaza, perspective drawing. Source: The Architect and Engineer, January, 1930, Vol. 100, No. 1.

An advertisement for the February, 1926 issue of *California Southland* describes the natural beauty of the Palos Verdes Peninsula and its remarkable plan for development into a City Beautiful. The advertisement reads in part:

To begin with, Nature herself endowed Palos Verdes with some of California's finest ocean

views - of silver beaches stretching for miles into the purple distance.

Master builders, indeed are builders of Palos Verdes! Every foot of development, every individual dwelling, every piece of construction has been made to conform to surrounding beauty. Nothing that Nature gave has

been lost. Nothing unsightly or undesirable will ever have a place in Palos Verdes. It is in very truth the City Beautiful.

The history of Palos Verdes Estates as the City Beautiful began in 1913 when Frank E. Vanderlip, a New York banker, and head of a financial syndicate, purchased unseen 16,000 acres of the former Spanish land grant Rancho de los Palos Verdes. Vanderlip, speculating on the value of the undeveloped, geographically dramatic peninsula, and the rapid growth of Los Angeles area, envisioned Palos Verdes as a millionaire's colony with recreational and cultural interests favored by this income bracket - golf, polo and yacht clubs; art, performance and education centers. Without hesitation, Vanderlip had preliminary plans for Palos Verdes Estates drawn up by the Chicago architect Howard Van Doren Shaw, the eminent Los Angeles architect Myron Hunt, and the famed Massachusetts-based landscaping firm of Olmsted Brothers, headed by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., son of the foremost American park and city planner of the nineteenth century.

But for the next ten years the only evidence of Vanderlip's ambitious project was his 1916 vacation cottage. World War I halted the grandiose scheme and diminished the enthusiasm of the eastern financial backers.

In 1921, the Palos Verdes Ranch property was sold to Edward Gardner Lewis, a St. Louis real estate developer, who had previously planned a City Beautiful at Atascadero in San Luis Obispo County, California (1913-1918). Lewis created a complicated financial scheme for the Palos Verdes Project, offering trust indenture notes to the public by subscription. However, the Title Insurance and Trust Company of Los Angeles voted Lewis' financial proposal unsound and abruptly withdrew as trustee.

Vanderlip rushed to rescue the faltering Palos Verdes Project, refinancing it with Los Angeles bank capital and new eastern investments. By the end of 1923, twenty-five square miles of the Palos Verdes Peninsula were in the process of being developed into the City Beautiful. The Project's managers, from the onset, established strict administrative, financial, zoning and architectural controls.

The Art Jury was the most important and powerful structure of the Palos Verdes Project; and it controlled all aspects of environmental and architectural design, approving architectural plans, commissioning architects and city planners, awarding annual commendations for outstanding architecture, and drawing up the Protective Deed Restrictions - a contract between the purchaser of property and trustee of the project, containing specific zoning regulations.

Working with the Art Jury was the Palos Verdes Homes Association, a community organization which acted as sort of an ad hoc municipal government, drawing up and enforcing (along with the Art Jury) the Protective Deed Restrictions, collecting maintenance taxes, and overseeing community improvements.

Myron Hunt, whose Southern California architectural achievements include the Huntington Library, Flintridge and Rancho Golf Clubs, and the Pasadena Public Library, continued his work with the Palos Verdes Project as the president of the Art Jury. Also continuing on the Project was the Olmsted Brothers' firm.

The highly qualified members of the Art Jury were photographed in 1929 on an annual inspection; members shown (except for Myron Hunt) are: James F. Dawson, a member of the Olmsted Brothers' firm, and a planner, along with Olmsted and John Galen Howard, for St. Francis Wood, a 1912 City Beautiful project at San Francisco; Robert Farquhar, a Los Angeles architect, with Pasadena residences to his credit, as well as an invitation to compete in the Pasadena City Beautiful Plan, Jay Lawyer, a real estate entrepreneur and General Manager of the Palos Verdes Project; David C. Allison, vice-president of the Art Jury, whose formal training included the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and who, along with his brother James E., designed many Southern California schools; and Charles H. Cheney, a director of the National Conference on City Planning, with planning experience at Riverside, Santa Barbara, Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Berkeley, California.

In the Spring of 1923 the Olmsted Brothers' firm and Charles H. Cheney completed a masterplan for Palos Verdes Estates. Cheney explained the benefits of planning so large an area at one time in an arti-

cle for the April, 1927 *Pacific Coast Architect*:

It (Palos Verdes Estates) was conceived primarily as a suburban residential district for a metropolitan area which now contains close to two million people. The zoning done by restriction therefore reserves over 90 per cent of all lots for single-family dwellings. Local business centers consist of a few lots each, surrounded by a small group of apartment and house-court sites; necessary stores, garages, service stations and the like are being located in a few compact blocks. The number and kind of these buildings are strictly limited, and the community controls their architectural design.

By planning so large a tract at a time, it was possible not only to group residence and shopping districts into convenient community

units - the store centers being approximately two miles apart - but to make exceptional provision for open space and recreation.

The year 1923 marked the beginning of building in Palos Verdes Estates - with the La Venta Inn, designed by Pierpont and Davis to entertain and accommodate prospective land purchasers. The general public attended Sunday real estate sales days on a bluff overlooking Malaga Cove. Roads were dynamited and cut, traversing the irregular contours of the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Six districts of Palos Verdes Estates were mapped: Valmonte, inland on high ground overlooking Los Angeles, the mountains and the sea; Malaga Cove, Montemalaga, Margate and Lunada Bay, stretching southward along the coast; and Miraleste, inland to the southeastern hills overlooking San Pedro and the Los Angeles Harbor.

La Casa del Portal, historic photo. Source: The Architect and Engineer, January, 1930, Vol. 100, No. 1.



Malaga Cove, Lunada Bay and Valmonte were designated as the three major business centers of Palos Verdes Estates. The Art Jury commissioned noted Southern California architects to plan arcaded Spanish-style palzas forming the nucleus for nearby business lots and multiple dwellings. Architects' renderings show large open plazas: Marston and Mayberry's Valmonte Plaza; Kirtland Cutter's Lunada Bay Plaza; and Webber and Spaulding's Malaga Cove Plaza, the only one ever realized.

Margate, Montemalaga and Miraleste were projected as three minor business areas. The Olmsted Brothers laid out plans for the Margate district, with the business square commission given by the Art Jury to Los Angeles architect Gordon B. Kaufman in 1926.

Malaga Cove Plaza, the first and only business district developed in Palos Verdes Estates exemplifies town planning at its best. The first building at Malaga Cove Plaza, erected in 1925, was Webber and Spaulding's Gardner Building (later renamed La Casa Primera). The shopping structure evokes the architecture of an imagined Latin California past with white stucco exterior and arcaded portico. Running along the second story are plain windows accentuated below with wrought iron balconies. The required Palos Verdes terra-cotta tiles cover the roof.

By contrast, the red brick Alpha Syndicate building (renamed La Casa del Portal) expresses a livelier configuration of red brick criss cross

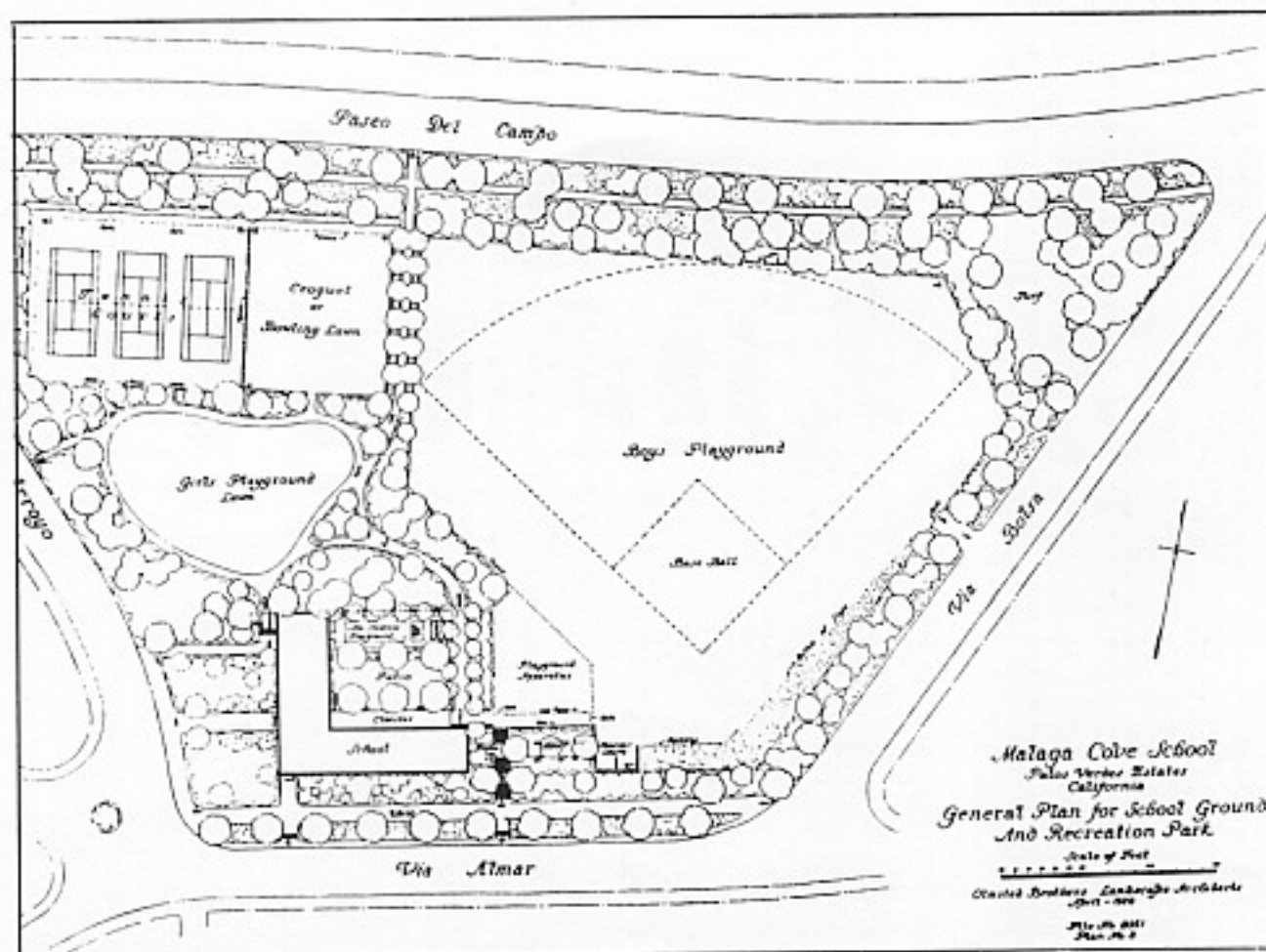
patterns on the sallyport and coursework along the upper walls.

In 1930, the Neptune Fountain, a nineteenth century Italian marble replica of a sixteenth century Bolognese bronze, was installed, amidst much civic pomp, in the center of Malaga Cove Plaza.

Southeast of Malaga Cove Plaza, the Olmsted Brothers' firm designed Farnham Martin's Park and fountain, completed in 1928. Adjacent to the park, the planes created by the roof of Myron Hunt's and H. C. Chamber's Palos Verdes Library and Art Gallery (1930), seem to hover over the incline on which it is situated.

West of Malaga Cove Plaza, down the steep terrain to the ocean bluff overlooking Malaga Cove Bay, Allison and Allison designed in 1926, perhaps the most idyllic elementary school ever. Malaga Cove School resembles a Spanish *convento*, with white stucco walls, orange tile roof, crowned with an octagonal gothic tower. Seven acres of grounds were landscaped by Olmsted Brothers' firm, and included tennis courts, a ball diamond, and playing areas for girls and small children. The Olmsted Brothers screened the playing areas with acacia, eucalyptus, pine and cypress trees, covered the school grounds with flowers, and lined the sidewalks with California live oaks, interspersed with native and Australian flowering shrubs and plants. Playing on the grass and picking flowers at Malaga Cove School was strictly encouraged.

Plan for Malaga Cove School. Source: *The Architect and Engineer*, January, 1930, Vol. 100, No. 1.



Protecting the environment and meeting the recreational needs of the Palos Verdes community were major concerns of Charles H. Cheney and Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. More specific recreational needs were satisfied on the 213 acre Golf Club and Park, designed by Clarence E. Howard and Olmsted Brothers; and at the salt water Bathing Pool and Bathhouse, opened in 1930 at Malaga Cove. The Pacific Coast Yacht Club designed by Edgar H. Cline in 1927 for the coast of Margate was never constructed.

The Palos Verdes Home Association held in trust 700 acres, reserved for parks, beaches, bridle trails, school and community recreation areas. Scrubby hillsides and canyons, such as the north slope of the hillside behind Malaga Cove Plaza, were heavily landscaped with cypress, eucalyptus, acacia, live oak, and native sycamore trees provided by the Olmsted Brothers' ten acre Palos Verdes Nursery established in 1923.

The Olmsted Brothers' plan for Palos Verdes left no area without landscaping. An article by Frances Duncan in the *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1928, describes Palos Verdes roads and landscapes.

At Palos Verdes, the roads are especially interesting. In the first place, they are unobtrusive - they follow the lines of the hills so skilfully that they seem to have "just happened," also, they are arranged so that in driving, one has a constantly varied view; the planting is anything but monotonous, as if it had been but a fortunate happening.

Olmsted favored depressed roadways separated by landscaped center strips, exemplified by the plantings on North and West Palos Verdes Drives. Trees, flowering shrubs and flowers bordered secondary roads and sidewalks. The north entrance to Palos Verdes Estates, Plaza del Norte, was lavishly planted with acacias, magnolias and oleanders, in bloom by Christmas of 1925.

New Palos Verdes Estates residents quickly acquired green thumbs, planting their lots, grounds and patios with every available type of growth. Other residents hired the Olmsted Brothers' firm, as did H. LeMondt Schmidt, whose 1926 Art Jury award house, by Winchton L. Risley, was trans-



Schmidt House, Winchton L. Risley, architect. Source: The Architect and Engineer, January, 1930, Vol. 100, No. 1.

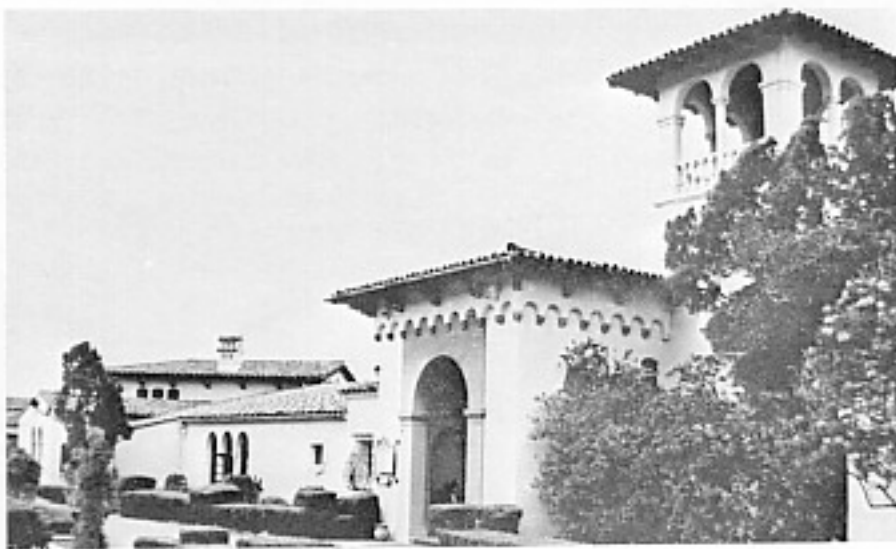
formed over two and a half years into an image worthy of appearing on the pages of the July, 1930 *Architect and Engineer*.

The Art Jury enforced consistent architectural design for Palos Verdes Estates, related to the three specific districts outlined in the Protective Deed Restrictions. Over the years, the Art Jury amended the Restrictions, creating detailed specifications regarding architectural styles or "types," as they preferred architecture to be termed.

The three Palos Verdes Estates residential building districts, *Ocean Slopes*, *Mesas Crownning the Hills*, and the *Northern Slopes of the Palos Verdes Hills*, were determined by the irregular topography of the peninsula, which also influenced the placement of roads, organization of subdivisions, design and location of homesites.

Ocean Slopes found along the coast, was the first district specified; and because the environment was similar to the Mediterranean, "Latin type" dwellings were favored - with flat or 30 to 35 degree angle roofs, preferably of tile. Frederick Law Olmsted's sprawling residence, designed by Myron Hunt and H. C. Chambers on a promontory contour, epitomizes the Mediterranean "type" for the Ocean Slopes District.

However, another acceptable example of Palos Verdes Estates District I architecture was the Italian Mediterranean Villa style. The Haggarty House (now the Neighborhood Church) was designed by Armand Monaco and completed in 1928 for the Los Angeles garment manufacturer J. J. Haggarty. The house occupies three lots on a cliff overlooking Malaga



J. J. Haggarty House. Photo: Thomas P. Gates.

Cove. The Olmsted Brothers' firm planned the landscaping; the interiors of the twenty room mansion were sumptuously decorated with Italian Renaissance motifs and furnishings; the villa's grand portico, laid with Navajo rugs, faced the family boat landing and Malaga Cove.

The second district identified, was *Mesas Crowning the Hills*. While dwellings favored here were still modified Mediterranean types, English (Colonial and Georgian), Spanish, Southern French and Italian types were also permitted. Regulations stated that houses on the hill mesas have a maximum forty degree roof pitch. Architect Kirtland Cutter designed the Gard and Sutherland residences so that the Gard residence did not interfere with the view from the Sutherland house, situated on a hill directly above.

The *Northern Slopes of the Palos Verdes Hills* was the third identifiable residential building district and permitted houses darker in color with steeper roofs, up to sixty degrees. English, that is Elizabethan, and French, specifically Norman, and Flemish were constructed in this area. The residence of Mr. and Mrs. Don Gilmore, English in expression, and the residence of George C. Kincaid are steeper roofed examples found in the hillier areas of Palos Verdes Estates.

Despite the allowances of various architectural styles in the three Palos Verdes Estates districts, the Art Jury preferred houses related to Mediterranean, Mission, Early California, Monterey or Spanish types.

In October, 1928, the Art Jury, encouraged by its president Myron Hunt, and vice-president David

C. Allison, voted to eliminate the terms Mission, Spanish and Mediterranean, describing the architecture of Palos Verdes Estates. Concomitantly, they launched a statewide campaign to officially establish usage of the term "Californian Architecture." The Art Jury's resolution appeared in the October, 1928 issue of the *Palos Verdes Bulletin*:

Californian architecture is defined as that distinctive style which for several decades has been successfully developing in this State, deriving its chief inspiration directly or indirectly from Latin types which developed under similar climatic conditions along the Mediterranean, or at points in California, such as Monterey.

Color is generally light in tone.

Materials used are plaster, adobe or stucco exterior wall surfaces, of a durable construction, or of concrete, stone or artificial stone.

Roofs are low-pitched, seldom steeper than thirty degrees with thirty-five degrees maximum, usually of tile laid random, but sometimes in the galleried Monterey types, using shakes or shingles, often with thick butts.

This rather general description of "California Architecture," might well apply to various "types," regardless of their origins; but the term gave a sense of cohesiveness to Palos Verdes Estates architecture and established a legal description, necessary for the Protective Deed Restrictions.

Frederick Law Olmsted Jr.'s all-encompassing view of the city as a total community unit is evident in the plan and execution of Palos Verdes Estates. As one of the mentors of City Planning in America, Olmsted described in 1916 the new profession:

The new and significant fact for which this new term *city planning* stands is a growing appreciation of a city's organic unity, of the interdependence of its diverse elements, and

of the profound and inexorable manner in which the future of this great organic unit is controlled by the actions and omissions of today.

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2. Augusta Fink, *Time and the Terraced Land*, (Berkeley: Howell North Books, 1966), p. 109.
3. IBID.
4. IBID., pp. 110-111.
5. David C. Allison, "Seven Years of Architectural Control," *The Architect and Engineer*, Vol. 100, No. 1, (January, 1930), pp. 53-56.
6. J. C. Low, "Community Association Control," *The Architect and Engineer*, Vol. 100, No. 1, (January, 1930), pp. 43-46.
7. Chas. H. Cheney, "Palos Verdes Estates - A Model Residential Suburb," *Pacific Coast Architect*, Vol. 31, No. 4, (April, 1927), p. 21.
8. Anon., "The Palos Verdes Protective Restrictions," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (January, 1928), p. 4.
9. Anon., "Art Jury Notes, Margate Square Design," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (April, 1926), pp 7-8.
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11. Anon., "The Playground Plantings," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 6, (June, 1928), pp. 7-8.
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13. Anon., "Extensive Park Plantings," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 5, (March, 1927), pp. 7-8.
14. Francis Duncan, "The Landscaping at Palos Verdes," article from *The Los Angeles Times*, (23, September, 1928), reprinted in *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 12, (December, 1928), p. 1, p. 6.
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16. Mary Eva Thacker, *A History of Los Palos Verdes Rancho, 1542-1923*, unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Southern California, (1, May, 1923), p. 70.
17. Anon., "The Palos Verdes Protective Restrictions, 6 Types of Architecture," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (February, 1928), pp. 4-5.
18. Anon., "The New Haggarty Home," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 9, (September, 1928), p. 1, p. 5.
19. Anon., "The Palos Verdes Protective Restrictions, 6 Types of Architecture," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (September, 1928), pp. 4-5.
20. IBID.
21. Anon., "Californian Architecture," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 10, (October, 1928), pp. 2-4.
22. Anon., "Californian Architecture," *Palos Verdes Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (March, 1929), p. 2.
23. IBID.
24. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., "Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. On City Planning," in *Landscape Architect*, Vol. 48, No. 3, (April, 1958), p. 155, quoted from Olmsted's introduction to *City Planning* edited by John Nolen, (New York: D. Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1916).