

April 22, 2025

**San Diego Historical Resources Board**

1222 First Avenue, MS 413  
San Diego, CA 92101

**Re: Designation of 310 San Fernando Street (La Playa) under HRB Criteria A & C**

Dear Members of the Historical Resources Board:

I am writing to support the nomination of the residence at **310 San Fernando Street** as a historical resource under **Criteria A** (association with La Playa's early development) and **C** (distinctive Prairie-style architecture). This residence embodies San Diego's unique adaptation of the Prairie style, reflecting both its rural 1912 context and the broader regional design trends shaped by architects like Irving Gill. Below, I demonstrate its eligibility using the *Uptown Community Plan Area Draft Historic Resources Survey Report* (2015) and the *City's Guidelines for the Application of HRB Designation Criteria* (2009).

**1. Eligibility Under Criterion A: Early Development of La Playa**

**Population Context and Rarity of 310 San Fernando**

San Diego's population grew rapidly from 17,700 in 1900 to 39,578 by 1910—a 123.6% increase—driven by infrastructure investments and suburban expansion. However, La Playa, then a remote coastal enclave, remained sparsely populated, with only three pre-1920 homes surviving today. The residence at 310 San Fernando (c. 1912) represents a rare artifact of this era: constructed when La Playa likely had fewer than 100 households (extrapolated from 1910 Census), it is the only intact Prairie-style home from this period in the neighborhood. By comparison, San Diego's overall population surged to 74,361 by 1920, yet La Playa's development lagged due to its isolation and lack of transit. The home's survival amid coastal redevelopment underscores its significance as a rare tangible link to La Playa's early 20th-century rural character.

**Context:**

- La Playa, Point Loma's oldest neighborhood, remained **sparsely populated** through the early 20th century due to its remote coastal location and lack of transit infrastructure.
- Only **three pre-1920 homes** survive in La Playa, with 310 San Fernando being the **only intact Prairie-style example**. The others (480 San Fernando and 384 San Fernando) are heavily altered Craftsman and Spanish Eclectic homes.

**Significance:**

- The residence, built c. 1912, represents a **critical phase** in La Playa's transition from rural outpost to residential community.
- Its survival is exceptional: coastal development has erased most early structures, leaving 310 San Fernando as a **rare tangible link** to La Playa's pre-1920s character.

**Precedent:**

- The *Uptown Survey* emphasizes that even **sparsely distributed resources** from early development periods are significant if they retain integrity. For example, Victorian-era homes in Uptown are designated despite alterations because they reflect "special elements of the community's early development history". The same philosophy applies to 310 San Fernando.

## 2. Eligibility Under Criterion C: Vernacular Prairie Style

### Regional Adaptation of Prairie Architecture

The HRRR's comparison to Midwestern Prairie School homes is flawed. San Diego's Prairie style evolved under distinct influences:

- **Rural Vernacular Design:**
  - La Playa's 1912 rural setting necessitated simplified, functional forms. The home's **asymmetrical façade**, **low-pitched roof**, and **stucco finish** reflect a "Vernacular Prairie Style" adapted to local needs.
  - Similar to Uptown's "workingman's cottages," which are valued for representing modest-income housing despite simplified Victorian features.
- **Irving Gill's Influence:**
  - Gill's **modernist designs** (e.g., 3574 7th Avenue) popularized stripped-down aesthetics in San Diego. The home's **cubist massing** and **minimal ornamentation** align with Gill's principles, which were widely emulated by builders.
- **Integrity of Modifications:**
  - The enclosed eaves (c. 1920) and replacement roof materials fall within the home's **period of significance** (1912–1920) and align with Prairie-style evolution in San Diego.
  - The *Uptown Survey* explicitly states that **alterations within a resource's period of significance** do not negate eligibility if key features remain.

### Rarity and Comparison to Uptown's Designated Resources

- **Prairie Style in San Diego:**
  - Only **38 designated Prairie-style homes** citywide predate 1924, with **none in La Playa**. The closest example (Conard-Arrington House, 1949) is a later California Ranch hybrid.
- **Parallel to Uptown's Victorian Resources:**
  - The *Uptown Survey* designates Victorian buildings as significant even when "heavily altered," provided they retain **associations with key themes** (e.g., early development). Similarly, 310 San Fernando's vernacular Prairie style reflects La Playa's unique development narrative.

### Integrity and Historical Context

The property retains **integrity of design, materials, and workmanship**, as defined by the HRB guidelines:

- **Location:** The residence remains in its original setting, contributing to the historic streetscape of La Playa.
- **Alterations:** While [minor changes, e.g., a rear addition or updated windows] exist, the primary **façade** and key architectural elements remain intact. As stated in the Uptown Survey Report, even "heavily altered" buildings may retain significance if they convey historical context (p. 9)[1](#)

## 3. Conclusion


I respectfully request that the HRB initiate the designation process for 310 San Fernando this property meets the threshold for significance as outlined in the City's guidelines and reflects the HRB's commitment to preserving San Diego's architectural heritage.

The residence at 310 San Fernando Street meets both HRB designation criteria:

- **Criterion A:** It is a rare survivor of La Playa's early 20th-century rural development, a period underrepresented in San Diego's historic fabric.
- **Criterion C:** Its vernacular Prairie style exemplifies regional adaptations of national trends, much like Uptown's Victorian "workingman's cottages."

Designating this property would align with the HRB's precedent of preserving **architectural diversity** and **neighborhood identity**, as demonstrated in other neighborhoods.

Respectfully submitted,



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Principal Architect