



**4804 Biona Drive
(Louise M. and Hilmer T. Severin Spec House #1)
Report No. HRB-26-021**

**City of San Diego
Historical Resources Board (HRB) Meeting
July 23, 2026
Item #1**

4804 Biona Drive

- **Spanish Colonial Revival style residence constructed in 1933 in the Kensington Park Extension subdivision**
- **Designed and built by San Diego Master Builder Louse M. Severin and Hilmer T. Severin**
- **Evaluated as eligible under City of San Diego HRB Criteria C and D**

SYNOPSIS

- **Heritage Preservation Staff incorrectly determined that the property is not eligible under Criteria C or D.**
 - Additionally, Staff erred in an initial finding that the building's original configuration only minimally represented the Spanish Colonial Style and was not the notable work of a Master Builder.
 - Staff further argued that the building does not retain integrity of design, materials, or workmanship.
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- **BFSA evaluated the residence as a distinct and stylistic example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style (Criterion C) that possesses four out of five defining characteristics of the style.**
 - **Subsequent modifications have not negatively impacted its historic integrity or removed any character defining features.**
 - **BFSA further concludes that the residence is the notable work of San Diego Master Builder Louise Severin (Criterion D) and retains several of her "signature" design elements.**

Criterion C – Spanish Colonial Revival



Character-Defining
Features of the
Spanish Colonial
Revival Style
(McAlester 2015)

- **Low-pitched roof, usually with little or no eave overhang**
- **Red tile roof covering**
- One or more prominent arches placed above door or principal window
- **Wall surface usually stucco**
- **Façade normally asymmetrical**



Other Character-Defining Features of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style

- **Relationship to outdoors through use of pergolas, French doors, and terraces**
- **Focal windows**
- **Wood-frame casement or double-hung windows, typically with divided lites**
- **Decorative detailing including battered stucco chimneys, projecting rafter tails, and attic vents**

Staff Report

Heritage Preservation Staff erroneously argued that the building's original configuration only "minimally" embodied the distinctive characteristics of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style.

- **This is incorrect**, as the building has always featured four of the five primary character-defining characteristics of the style defined by McAlester (2015).
- The building also exhibits numerous other features indicative of the style, including a focal window, a battered stucco chimney, and a focused relationship with the outdoors via a covered patio and a semi-enclosed courtyard accessed by French doors.



City of San Diego HRB

Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation

Criterion C states that a resource must embody the distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction; it does not state that the resource must be a unique or distinguished example of a style, type, period or method of construction.

4804 Biona Drive was found to embody the Spanish Colonial Revival Style and represents the 1933 period of construction.

Furthermore, the City approved 2005 addition was designed to compliment the original features of the style and did not negatively impact any character defining features.



Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation

HOW SIGNIFICANCE MAY BE ESTABLISHED

Style, Type, Period, or Method of Construction

The resource exterior and/or interior embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period of architecture, or method of construction.

INTEGRITY EVALUATION

The 4804 Biona Drive Building **retains all aspects of integrity:**

Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association

2005 Addition

- Carefully differentiated from original footprint to avoid false historicity
 - Windows
 - Stucco troweling
- Not a public facing façade
- City-approved addition that only impacted a 10-foot section of the original footprint
- **Did not impact any character-defining features**
- **Did not negatively impact the building's original design, materials, or workmanship**





Previously designated despite major modifications – 1817 Dale Street

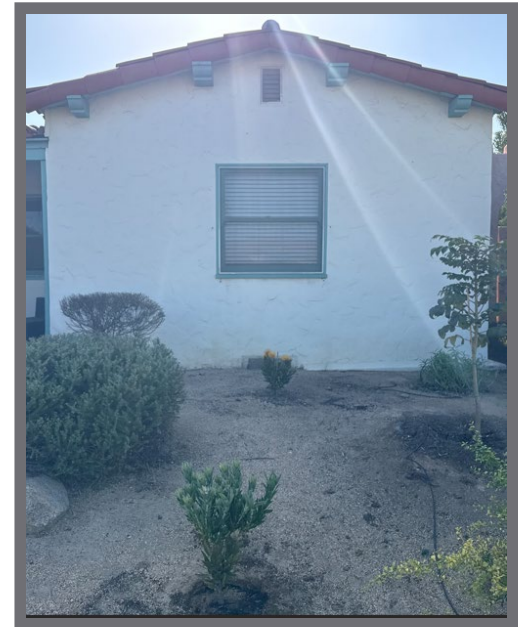


Integrity of Design, Materials & Workmanship

The residence **retains its character defining features**

A city approved addition in 2005 only altered a 10-foot section of the west façade and **did not negatively impact the building's original design, materials, or workmanship**

Additional alterations were minor, and did not detract from the building's overall character





Criterion D
-
Louise Severin
San Diego
Master Builder

According to the Notice of Completion and the *San Diego Union*, the 4804 Biona Drive property was designed and built by Master Builder Louise Severin and her husband, Hilmer Severin, in 1933.

Six other residences built by Severin have been designated:

Rochester Road Residence (HRB #504)

Louise Severin Spec House #1 (HRB #623)

Carleton and Frances Bunce/ Louise Severin House (HRB #743)

Louise Severin Spec House #2 (HRB #1029)

Cecil and Dorothy Taylor/ Louise Severin House (HRB #1116)

Frank and Johanna Linder/ Louise Severin Spec House #1 (HRB #1223)

Staff Report

Heritage Preservation Staff incorrectly argued that the building is not an example of Severin's notable work due to its "minimal architectural expression."

- **The building is an example of Severin's notable work**, as it retains multiple "signature" design features present in other Severin-built homes.
- These include features previously described in nomination reports for designated Severin-built homes not listed in the current HRB staff report.
- The residence is a rare surviving example of an original, Severin-built home.



Other Examples of Severin Homes



Cecil and Dorothy Taylor/ Louise Severin House (HRB #1116)

Notable features described in
nomination report:

- French-style doors oriented towards garden space
- Small front patio
- Decorative attic vents and painted wood elaborations

Other Examples of Severin Homes



Frank and Johanna Linder/Louise Severin Spec House #1 (HRB #1223)

Notable features described in
nomination report:

- Tapered stucco chimney with inset panel
- Mission half barrel roof tiles
- Wide, double hung, wood-framed windows

Other Examples of Severin Homes



Louise Severin Spec House #2 (HRB #1029)

Notable features described in nomination report:

- Hand-trowelled stucco cladding
- Fascia board under low-pitch, gabled roof with tile raked over edge



Other Examples of Severin Homes



4394 North Talmadge Drive (Not Designated)

Notable features described in nomination report:

- Large focal windows underneath side-gabled porch cover



Notable Work of Master Builder Louise Severin

The residence **features many of the "signature" design features present in previously designated Severin-built homes:**

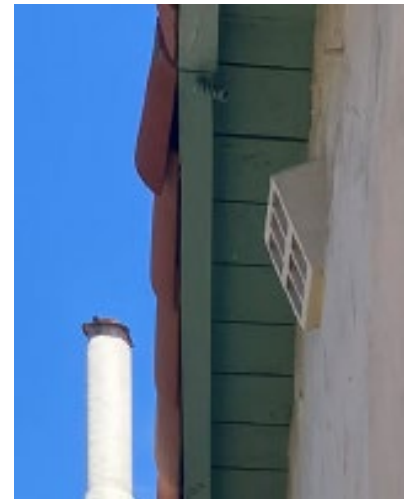
- French-style doors oriented towards garden space
- Small front patio
- Decorative attic vents and painted wood elaborations
- Tapered stucco chimney with inset panel
- Mission style, half barrel roof tiles
- Double hung, wood-framed windows
- Hand-trowelled stucco cladding
- Fascia board under low-pitch, gabled roof with tile raked over edge
- Large focal windows



French style doors oriented towards garden



Tapered stucco chimney with inset panel



Decorative attic vent and painted wood elaboration



Small front patio



Double hung, wood-framed
windows



Mission style, half barrel roof tiles



Hand-trowelled stucco
cladding



Fascia board under low-pitch,
gabled roof with tile raked
over edge



Focal windows

Severin-built homes represent rare contributions to San Diego's architectural development. **Although Louise Severin is known to have built over 90 homes in the San Diego area during her lifetime, only a small number are known to survive, and many of them have been heavily modified.**

Known surviving examples that have not been designated include the following:

- 4394 North Talmadge Dr (heavily modified)
- 4646 Oregon St (heavily modified)
- 1202 Upas St
- 4575 Hamilton St (heavily modified)
- 3420 Richmond St
- 3424 Richmond St
- 4770 Bancroft St (heavily modified)
- 2879 Copeley Ave (heavily modified)
- 4750 Hamilton St
- 4760 Hamilton St (heavily modified)
- **4804 Biona Drive**

The 4804 Biona Drive residence is a rare and notable example of Louise Severin's original work.



Louise Severin Bio:

- Born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1892
- Moved to San Diego in the 1910s
- Earned her general contractor's license in the early 1920s
- Married Hilmer Severin in the early 1920s. He later joined her in an assisting role in her construction business
- **Established herself as a highly skilled builder in a male-dominated field**
- Constructed dozens of stylish homes in the San Diego area, six of which have been designated as historical resources
- **Often did not receive proper credit for her work, and many of her buildings were incorrectly attributed to her husband**
- Died in Los Angeles in 1949



Conclusion

- The original configuration of the building at 4804 Biona Drive is an excellent example of the **Spanish Colonial Revival style**.
- Modifications made to the residence **did not remove or negatively impact any character-defining features or the representation of the historic period of construction**.
- The building is a **notable example of the work of Master Builder Louise Severin**.
- We therefore respectfully request that the Board **consider the property under City of San Diego HRB Criteria C and D**