



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: June 10, 2021 REPORT NO. HRB-21-037

HEARING DATE: June 24, 2021

SUBJECT: **ITEM #3 – Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #8**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Roland and Christine Schwillinkski; represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 3956 Alameda Drive, Uptown Community, Council District 3  
APN 443-592-01-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House located at 3956 Alameda Drive as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #8 located at 3956 Alameda Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1916 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the highly modified 296-square-foot garage. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Prairie style with Mission Revival elements and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features the Prairie elements of a low, horizontal, asymmetrical massing; two-story mass contrasted with one-story partial-width front porch; low-pitched hipped roof with widely overhanging boxed eaves; large square porch supports; detailing which emphasizes horizontal lines; and a round turret topped with a flat parapet studded with leaded windows. The Mission Revival elements include asymmetrical façade clad in stucco; red tile roof with widely overhanging eaves; porch roof supported by large square piers; exposed wooden beams; and arched windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is an early example of Melhorn's work in the Prairie style as he moved away from the Craftsman style. Designed by his son, William B. Mehorn, the resource also expresses elements of the Mission Revival style that would be further explored in Martin V. Melhorn's later career.

## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The subject resource is a two-story single-family residence constructed in 1916 in the Prairie style with Mission Revival influence.

The property was identified in the 2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey. The property was noted as being "heavily altered" and given a Status Code of 5D3, meaning that the property "[a]ppears to be a contributor to a district that appears eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

The historic name of the resource, the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #8, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Alberta Security Company, who constructed the house as a speculation house and the name of Martin V. Melhorn, a Master Builder.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, LLC, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

*CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.*

The subject property is a two-story, single-family residence built in the Prairie style with Mission Revival influence which features an asymmetrical façade covered by a low-pitched hipped roof and clad in stucco. The roof exhibits widely overhanging eaves which emphasizes the horizontality of the Prairie style architecture. Fenestration includes large multi-lite wood windows that consist of a central fixed pane and two movable vertical sashes on either side and topped by transoms, also known as a Chicago-style window; double-hung wood windows; wooden fixed windows; fixed leaded diamond-pane windows; and wooden casement windows. Throughout the residence, the first story windows are squared while the second story windows are slightly arched on top.

The primary (front) façade faces northeast toward Alameda Drive. The two-story residence has an asymmetrical façade dominated on the right side by a partial-width one-story porch topped by a second-story balcony and supported by square stucco columns. The porch has a red tile-covered visor roof and features exposed wooden rafter beams. The visual pattern of the rafter beams is repeated around the home in the form of a bracketed cornice detail that divides the first story from the slightly cantilevered second story on all elevations. The main entrance to the residence is accessed from the porch. The wooden front door features multi-light glazing and is flanked on the right by a large Chicago window topped by square transoms. To the left of the door, a northwest-facing wall is pierced by a small vertical rectangular fixed window. The second story balcony is accessed by a wood door with single-light glazing which is flanked on the right by a large

Chicago window. Following the fenestration pattern seen through the residence, this window is topped by rounded arch transoms.

To the left of the porch and balcony is an off-center round turret which extends slightly above the roofline. Topped by a flat parapet extended from a rounded eave, the turret is studded with diamond-pane leaded windows in fixed frames of various shapes. From the top down, the leaded turret windows are arranged in three groups: a band of three fixed windows with rounded tops; one large fixed window consisting of a small rectangular transom window over a larger square window; and a band of three vertical rectangular windows on the first floor. To the left of the turret, the fenestration pattern seen on the patio and balcony – a Chicago window with a square transom on the first floor and a Chicago window with a rounded arch transom on the second floor – is repeated.

Continuing to the left, the raised bracketed cornice line continues around to the southeast (left) side of the residence. This elevation has an entrance at the first floor which consists of a multi-lite wooden door accessed by a small set of concrete steps. Fenestration includes square fixed windows on the first floor and rounded multi-lite fixed and casement windows on the second floor. To the left of the main façade, a concrete driveway runs to the residence's garage. Originally detached from the residence, the garage was extended sometime between 1921 and 1950 and is now attached to the main residence. Now featuring a wrought iron balustrade and a skylight, the garage has been highly modified since the 1916 period of significance and is thus excluded from the designation.

The southwest (rear) elevation is not visible from the public right-of-way. This elevation has an entrance at the first floor which consists of a single-light wooden door accessed by a small set of concrete steps. Above this entrance is a second story balcony accessed by a wooden door with single-light glazing. Fenestration on the rear elevation includes wooden double-hung, fixed, and casement windows. Two fixed windows also feature the diamond leaded glass matching the design on the turret. As expressed on other elevations, the first story windows are squared while the second story windows are topped with rounded arch transoms. The residence's broad two-story stucco chimney is visible on the left side of the rear elevation.

The northwest (right side) elevation faces onto Alameda Place. This elevation is accessed on the north (left) end from a raised concrete porch by a double set of French doors that were installed into a modified window opening. This window modification is minimally visible as it is obscured by a solid stucco balustrade, as well as a six-foot high privacy fence on the north façade. Fenestration on the upper level consists of a dual square casement windows topped by a rounded transom set between two large Chicago-style windows. The first story features two large square fixed windows topped with transoms. The fenestration pattern again repeats on this elevation with the squared first story windows and the rounded second story windows.

The property was heavily altered between the 1920s the 1960s. Alterations include enclosures of both the front porch and upper balcony; extension and attachment of the one-car garage to the southeast elevation; addition of a shed-roof carport extending from the southeast elevation; replacement of the red tile roof with historically inappropriate shingle; and topping of the turret with a conical metal roof, metal flashing, and a weathervane.

The residence underwent an extensive rehabilitation in 2016 to restore the property to its original condition as based on historic photographic documentation. The porch and balcony have been

unenclosed, the carport has been removed, and all metal elements have been removed from the turret. The restoration project also included the restoration or replacement in-kind of all wood windows and the replacement of the red tile roof. While this restoration project appears to have been done in a manner generally consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, it was not approved by staff.

Modifications to the property include the highly modified garage, which is excluded from the designation, the addition of non-original site walls, and the installation of a pair of French doors on the northwest (right side) elevation in a window opening. Additionally, a stucco railing on the front balcony was added during the restoration project which appears to be approximately 6-8 inches higher than what was originally present. Overall, cumulative impact of the balcony railing height and French door installation on the historical significance of this property are minimal. These modifications do not significantly impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship, or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

The Prairie style was popular between 1900 and 1920 and was primarily used for domestic architecture. The style originated in Chicago and is closely associated with Frank Lloyd Wright. It spread nationwide due to being featured in magazines and pattern books. Its primary character defining features are a low-pitched roof, deep eaves, two-story construction with one-story wings or porches, and detailing that emphasizes horizontal lines. Examples of features used to create a horizontal emphasis include the deep eaves at both the main roof and lower roofs, contrasting trim between stories, contrasting colors on cornices and eaves, horizontal siding, and horizontal rows of windows. Roofs are typically hipped. Massive porch piers are also common, especially on high-style examples. High-style examples also typically have a one-story wing, porch or carport on one side of the house. Windows typically have multi-paned upper sections and are either casements or double-hung.

The Mission Revival style originated in California, drawing inspiration from Hispanic heritage and occupation through the use of decorative Mission-shaped dormers and parapets, smooth stucco cladding, decorative arches, and red tile roof coverings. Many architects began to promote the style in the late 1880s and early 1890s with the large California Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition being built in a Mission-style design. Further popularity of the style occurred when the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railways adopted the use of Mission Revival designs for stations and hotels throughout the West. As the style continued to spread, the construction of Mission Revival style designed buildings began to blend and borrow elements from Prairie, Craftsman, and International style. Construction in the Mission Revival style quickly lost momentum after World War I as architectural designs began to favor simplified and adaptations of earlier styles, resulting in the beginnings of the Spanish Eclectic and Spanish Revival styles.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Prairie style with Mission Revival elements by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style. Prairie style elements include a low, horizontal, asymmetrical massing; two-story mass contrasted with one-story partial-width front porch; low-pitched hipped roof with widely overhanging boxed eaves; large square porch supports; detailing which emphasizes horizontal lines; and a round turret topped with a flat parapet studded with leaded windows. The Mission Revival influence is exhibited by the resource's asymmetrical façade clad in stucco; red tile roof with widely overhanging eaves;

porch roof supported by large square piers; exposed wooden beams; and arched windows. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

*CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.*

The subject resource was constructed by Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn in 1916 in the Prairie style with Mission Revival elements. The residence is an example of Melhorn's work in the Prairie style as he moved away from the popular Craftsman style. Designed by his son, William B. Melhorn, the resource also expresses elements of the Mission Revival style that would be further explored in Martin V. Melhorn's later career.

Martin V. Melhorn was born in Indiana in 1866. He lived and worked in Falls City, Nebraska and Denver, Colorado before moving to San Diego in 1911 with his wife, Alberta, and their son William. Melhorn established the Alberta Security Company in 1913 which focused primarily on the financial aspects of building construction. The Alberta Security Company and Melhorn purchased and built the subject property in 1916. Melhorn and his affiliates were prolific builders in the City of San Diego – particularly in the areas of Mission Hills, Hillcrest, University Heights, North Park and South Park – and numerous Melhorn-built homes have been listed on the San Diego Register. Melhorn's status as a Master Builder was established in 2003 with the designation of the Neil Brown/Martin V. Melhorn House at 4195 Palmetto Way (HRB Site #583).

The subject property was constructed in 1916 during a period of transition for Melhorn in which he began to move away from the building of Craftsman styled homes in favor of the Prairie, Colonial Revival, and Spanish Eclectic styles. 3956 Alameda Drive is an early example of Martin V. Melhorn's collaboration with his son William. In 1922, Melhorn began working with William in an official capacity as M.V. Melhorn & Son. Following Martin's death in 1925, William continued in home design and construction as William B. Melhorn Company. The subject property exhibits both Prairie and Mission Revival influences illustrating a transitional phase in Melhorn's career, as well as his skill for elegant design and quality constructions.

While staff recognizes the significance of William B. Melhorn on this property's design, the applicant's request for designation for the property located at 3956 Alameda Drive did not include information to support a determination of William B. Melhorn's significance as a master architect under HRB Criterion D; therefore, staff has not made a determination regarding eligibility for William B. Melhorn's significance under Criterion D at this time. Eligibility under this criterion may can be reevaluated at a future date pending submittal of additional information and analysis.

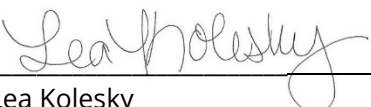
Significance Statement: The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect William B. Melhorn's original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is notable as an example of Martin V. Melhorn's building work in the Prairie style with Mission Revival elements during a period when he began to move away from the familiar Craftsman house and experiment stylistically. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #8 located at 3956 Alameda Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1916 under HRB Criterion C, as the resource specifically embodies the characteristics of the Prairie style with Mission Revival elements, and HRB Criterion D, for its association with Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn. The designation excludes the highly modified 296-square-foot garage.

  
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Lea Kolesky  
Junior Planner

  
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Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
Development Services Department

lk/ss

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 6/24/2021

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 6/24/2021, to consider the historical designation of the Alberta Security Company/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #8 (owned by Roland and Christine Schwillinksi, 3956 Alameda Drive, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **3956 Alameda Drive, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **443-592-01-00**, further described as LOT 1 BLK 4 in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Prairie style with Mission Revival elements and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features the Prairie elements of a low, horizontal, asymmetrical massing; two-story mass contrasted with one-story partial-width front porch; low-pitched hipped roof with widely overhanging boxed eaves; large square porch supports; detailing which emphasizes horizontal lines; and a round turret topped with a flat parapet studded with leaded windows. The Mission Revival elements include asymmetrical façade clad in stucco; red tile roof with widely overhanging eaves; porch roof supported by large square piers; exposed wooden beams; and arched windows. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is an early example of Melhorn's work in the Prairie style as he moved away from the Craftsman style. Designed by his son, William B. Mehorn, the resource also expresses elements of the Mission Revival style that would be further explored in Martin V. Melhorn's later career. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the 296-square-foot garage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,  
Deputy City Attorney

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