In 1936, the Los Angeles Investment Company (LAIC) published a brochure showcasing three of its new, conveniently located developments: Fairview Heights, View Heights, and View Park. The brochure’s photographs featured slim women in front of white picket fences surrounding modern homes. “Safeguarded by careful planning and sensible restrictions,” read the text, “[the neighborhoods] afford a real haven for the homeowner who wants something more than just a house.”

The brochure sought to appeal to middle-income and affluent professionals who wanted both easy access to the city and a haven from it. Nestled in the Baldwin Hills of unincorporated Los Angeles County, the neighborhood of View Park offered panoramic views of the mountains and downtown L.A., a mere nine miles away.

The area first came into the public eye as the site of the Olympic Village for the 1932 summer games. It was the first Village to house the entire men’s roster of Olympic athletes in just one location. This novelty, coupled with the neighborhood’s proximity to the Memorial Coliseum, brought thousands of visitors to the little-known hillside.

By 1936, the Village’s bungalows had been removed, and the LAIC had purchased the site and begun preparing it for more residential development. While the LAIC oversaw the neighborhood’s construction over a nearly forty-year period (1923 to 1958), several architects and builders were responsible for the homes themselves. As a result, View Park exhibits a diverse range of styles while maintaining consistency in size, scale, and layout. The LAIC brochure’s assertion that the development was “safeguarded by careful planning” assured would-be homeowners of the neighborhood’s homogeny, while its nod to the “sensible restrictions” in place reassured them of the homogeny of their neighbors.

As with many neighborhoods throughout L.A. County, View Park was created with private, racially restrictive covenants in place. These covenants were legally enforceable agreements integrated into the deed of a property that were imposed on the buyer. They prohibited an owner from selling or leasing the property to a certain group of people—and in the case of View Park, these people were specifically non-whites, with the notable exception of servants hired by white residents.

Racial covenants had come into practice following a 1917 court ruling that made racial zoning illegal for municipal residential properties. Yet private agreements fell outside of this mandate, and residential segregation continued to flourish. According to Understanding Fair Housing, a 1973 publication by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the use of restrictive racial covenants was so prominent by 1940 that eighty percent of the property in Los Angeles was barred to black families. Consequently, View Park’s first few decades exemplified the American Dream as branded by the LAIC brochure and other advertisements like it: the neighborhood was a quiet suburb for white, white-collar families.

Composed mainly of single-family homes with only a small number of multi-family residences, View Park attracted businessmen, lawyers, professors, and physicians. The houses, in their varied revival styles, including Italian, English, and Spanish, had large front yards, servants’ quarters, and pools: they were, as another advertisement purported, “of wondrous beauty—a home to suit every taste and requirement—their appointments are unexcelled.”
With the 1948 case Shelley v. Kraemer, the Supreme Court struck down the legality of racially restrictive covenants. By the late 1950s, with the closing of the racial covenant loopholes and the blossoming Civil Rights movement, black families had begun to move into View Park. Despite backlash from some white residents in the form of open hostility and vandalism, middle- and upper-class African Americans continued to relocate there, drawn by the same features that had made View Park appealing to its original buyers.

In the wake of the 1965 Watts Riots, which caused a flood of white families to leave the neighborhood, the racial demographic tipped. By the 1970s, there were three black residents to every white one. Ten years later the ratio would be nine to one, and View Park would be known not just as a black enclave but as a prestigious home to elite, affluent, and famous black residents. Its most well-known homeowners included athletes Curt Flood, Michael Cooper, and Dave Waymer; authors Bebe Moore Campbell and Earl Ofari Hutchinson; and entertainers Nancy Wilson, Ray Charles and Ike and Tina Turner. In its heyday, View Park became known to many as the "Black Beverly Hills."

Today, View Park is undergoing another shift. While it remains more than eighty percent African American, with a median income of $85,000 a year (versus the $54,510 average across Los Angeles County), the neighborhood is changing. A soon-to-be finished Metro station, new development, and flood of new homeowners to the area herald another chapter in View Park’s history.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that amidst these changes, on July 12, 2016 View Park was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The designation is thanks in large part to the View Park Conservancy, a grassroots advocacy group mentored by the Los Angeles Conservancy. The area’s roughly 1,800 homes make it the largest National Register Historic District in the U.S. with black ethnic heritage at its epicenter. The designation is an important tool in raising awareness about the architectural and cultural significance View Park plays in the county’s—and country’s—history. The neighborhood’s hard-won designation serves as a vital reminder that View Park’s built environment, and the history of its black community, are too important to risk losing.
This 1928 Spanish Colonial Revival home was among the first built when the area was originally developed in the 1920s. It is also the first home in unincorporated Los Angeles County to receive historic designation (Los Angeles County Historic Landmark #1).

Reminiscent of the California Missions as well as Spanish haciendas, the 3,117-square-foot house boasts sculptural qualities such as balconies, arched windows, a front courtyard, and a circular tower entrance. The stucco finish and sloped tile roof exemplify the Spanish Colonial Revival style that was ubiquitous in Los Angeles throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

Apart from the kitchen, which was remodeled in the late 1950s, the house maintains most of its original interior features. Light fixtures, stair railings, ornate carved doors, and hardwood floors remain, as well as wall niches, built-in closets, and colorfully tiled bathrooms.

The first owner of the home was Greek immigrant James Doumakes, who developed a patent for the mass production of marshmallows, helping to popularize them. He lived here with his wife and five children, who grew up in the house. The family lived here until 1960. The current owners, who are responsible for starting the process to have the house landmarked, have lived here since 2012.
3696 Aureola Boulevard

Built in 1947, this unique Colonial Revival-style home is set atop a corner knoll, with its elegant two-story entrance facing the apex of two intersecting boulevards. Clad in brick and accented by columns of intricate wrought iron, this grand façade is flanked by the wings of the house that feature more traditional wood siding. Ornamental shutters and pediments above the upper-story windows further evoke the Colonial theme.

The modern sensibility of 1940s design is evident in the understated interior architectural details. On the east side of the lofty entry foyer are the formal living room and wood-paneled library. The west wing includes the dining room, breakfast room, updated kitchen, and maid’s quarters. Glass-paneled doors in four rooms open onto a covered patio with steps extending into the backyard. The sweeping foyer staircase leads to the second-floor bedrooms and terrace. The house design is stylistically similar to works by the great African-American architect Paul R. Williams, although as yet no architect has been conclusively identified.

The home was built for the Lehman family, who often hosted political events there. Mrs. Edith Alban Lehman was a delegate to the 1952 and 1960 Republican National Conventions, along with Paul R. Williams. In 1962, the Lehmans moved out due to “white flight.” After remaining vacant for two years, the home was purchased by Dr. Leroy T. Barnes, the first African-American Chief of Radiology at Kaiser Hospital in Bellflower. Dr. Barnes lived here with his family for forty-four years. After an extensive renovation and loving restoration, the home was sold in 2009, making the current residents only the third owners in the home’s seventy-year history.
3660 Aureola Boulevard

Immediately identifiable to neighbors as “the house with the gazebo,” this grand home is one of the oldest in View Park. Built in 1928, it still spans its original double lot: one lot houses the home and backyard, and the other contains a wood-and-stucco gazebo built with the house, along with garages and open space.

Like the Doumakes house on Angeles Vista Boulevard (built in the same year), this Spanish Colonial Revival-style house has a turret, balconies, arched windows, and a tile roof. Yet this home features its own distinct interior arrangement and architectural decoration, with large, stenciled wooden beams in both the living room and a small, chapel-like study. Both rooms also have fireplaces, wall niches, and doors to the outside.

When the current owners purchased the house in 1998, it was in very poor condition, with light fixtures removed and no running water. Luckily, many of its original architectural features remained intact, including hardwood floors and casement windows. A fanciful multi-colored bathroom features a spectacular original tile mural of a Spanish Galleon under full sail. Restoring the home took nine months, as the owners worked to reverse the neglect and replace lost fixtures with other Spanish-style fixtures from the 1920s.
Spanning 5,300 square feet in three and a-half levels, this 1932 hilltop home is truly unique. The magnificent view of the L.A. basin (the view that gives View Park its name) is just one more amenity in a house full of unusual elements. While the exterior design is Spanish Colonial Revival with Mediterranean accents, the décor on the inside runs the gamut from Versailles to the Wild West, China to England.

Frank K. Colby, vice president of the Barker Bros. furniture company, commissioned architect C. E. Noerenberg to design the home for himself and his wife Bessie. Nearly all the original features of this idiosyncratic house survive intact. Each room is in a different style complete with hand-painted paneling; ceiling treatments; crystal, Art Deco, and other original light fixtures; hand-wrought iron work, and other custom decoration. Hand-carved doors between rooms have different designs on the front and back, so the side of the door facing the room matches that room’s décor.

Among the more unusual rooms is a den in the Wild West style, with pecky cypress paneling, a lava rock fireplace, and a half-bathroom custom built to resemble an outhouse. The kitchen has never been remodeled and retains original English tile on the walls and ceiling. The master bedroom takes up nearly 800 square feet of the upper floor. It features bas relief on the ceiling and over doorways à la Marie Antoinette, crystal wall scones, hand-painted oil-on-canvas paneling, and portraits on doors. The bedroom also has access to a circular tower room known as “the observatory,” as well as a large bathroom with two tile murals of bucolic scenes. The current owner cherishes this house – where she, as well as her sons, grew up – and which has been the home for up to three generations of her family since 1960.
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