

We ♥ Garden Apartments!



Top Left: Residents at Lincoln Place enjoy open green spaces and communal amenities like barbecue and picnic areas. Photos by Luke Gibson and courtesy of Aimco. * **Top Right:** Apartments at Chase Knolls retain their original floor plans and many of their historic features, including hardwood floors. Photo courtesy Waterton Residential.



Middle Left: The "Vernacular Modern" buildings at The Village Green have a simple style that harmonizes with the green space, allowing the focus to be on the layout and design of the whole site. Photo by Steven Keylon.



Bottom Left: This kitchen at Village Green has been restored to its 1941 condition by its owners. Photo by Steven Keylon. * **Bottom Right:** A recent exterior restoration at Chase Knolls brought the historic paint colors back to the property. Photo courtesy Waterton Residential.



LOS ANGELES
CONSERVANCY

This aerial photo of Village Green, circa 1948, shows how its site plan differs from the adjacent developments of single-family homes, with more green spaces and lower density. Photo courtesy Steven Keylon.



Garden apartments are special. Anyone who has lived in one will tell you this. They were designed around the needs of people, they offered a high quality of life for the average apartment dweller, and they prioritized nature and community. These kinds of places will likely never be built again. They were the product of a specific time and place in our history.

Sadly, part of what makes garden apartment communities special—vast amounts of open space—also puts them at increasing risk of demolition and redevelopment. The growing demand for higher density in urban Los Angeles makes properties like these ever more susceptible to destruction.

The Los Angeles Conservancy has worked for many years to preserve historic garden apartments. This tour features two preservation success stories, demonstrating that garden apartments are still special and viable places to live. However, threats to this type of property remain a growing concern in Greater Los Angeles. The latest threat involves a plan to destroy Wyvernwood Garden Apartments (1939) in Boyle Heights, the first large-scale garden apartment community built in Los Angeles.

The origins of garden apartments are based on urban planning and landscape concepts adapted from British ideas in the nineteenth century. Urban planner Ebenezer Howard from Britain, and later Clarence S. Stein and Henry Wright in America, fostered the Garden City Movement in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. Stein's vision of a "garden city" included buildings of low density, human scale, separation of people from cars, and acres of shared open space that fostered connection between people and nature.

These types of communities were perfect for Los Angeles. Their focus on nature complemented the local climate, they provided a much-needed alternative to slum housing that had emerged during the Great Depression, and they helped address the urgent demand for workforce housing after World War II.

Consequently, Los Angeles has one of the largest collections of garden apartments in the nation, with nearly forty projects built between the late 1930s and the mid-1950s.

What exactly is a garden apartment? While the three communities you visit today all have subtle variations, keep an eye out for these common characteristics that distinguish garden apartments from other types of multi-family housing:

- * Sites are developed as a "superblock," which is much larger than a city block
- * Cars and pedestrians are separated, with roads and garages often at the periphery
- * Buildings generally don't exceed two stories, and the number of units per acre is low
- * Building types have a standardized Vernacular Modern design
- * Site planning emphasizes open space and park-like landscaping

Today, fifty-two percent of Angelenos are renters, the highest rate in the nation. It is just as important now, as it was when these garden apartments were built, that renters have access to high-quality homes. Garden apartment communities are still great places to live. After visiting them, we know you'll agree that they are special, irreplaceable, and worth preserving for future generations.

Starting from the Wilshire Ebell Theatre, drive yourself to each of the three garden apartment communities in any order you'd like.



TOUR SITES

- * Chase Knolls
13401 Riverside Drive
Sherman Oaks
- * Lincoln Place
1050 Frederick Street
Venice
- * The Village Green
5300 Rodeo Road
Baldwin Hills

The Village Green (1942)

Originally Baldwin Hills Village

5300 Rodeo Road, Baldwin Hills
68 acres; 629 units in 95 buildings

Architects: Reginald D. Johnson,
Lewis E. Wilson, Edwin E. Merrill,
Robert E. Alexander

Consulting Architect: Clarence S. Stein

Landscape Architect: Fred Barlow, Jr.

L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument #174; Listed in the California Register of Historical Resources and the National Register of Historic Places; National Historic Landmark

This large playground and several smaller "tot lots" were part of the original design. Photo courtesy Clarence Stein papers, #3600, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.



Sliding glass doors, connecting indoor and outdoor spaces, were installed as part of the repair work done after the 1963 flood.

Photo by John C. Florance, johnflorance.com.

The Village Green is recognized worldwide as a pivotal and progressive experiment in multi-family housing. It is also the only garden apartment community in California that is designated a National Historic Landmark, the highest level of historic designation in the U.S.

Completed in 1942, this community stands out as an ideal representation of the Garden City Movement. It was designed by an all-star team of L.A. architects, including Reginald D. Johnson, Lewis E. Wilson, Edwin E. Merrill, Robert E. Alexander, and most notably, pioneering urban planner Clarence S. Stein.

The 629 residential units occupy only fourteen percent of the sixty-eight-acre site, leaving a remarkable amount of green space for patios, recreation areas, and site-specific landscaping. The expanses of open space were planned in response to the oppressive crowding and inhumane conditions of the slums that garden apartments were intended to replace. Yet due to tenant restrictions that were widespread at the time, Baldwin Hills Village allowed only white, middle-class residents in its early years.

Residential buildings face central greens (the largest is about 800 feet wide), and many feature patio or balcony areas, blurring the line between outdoor and indoor living space. Automobiles are relegated to garage courts, and common laundry areas are situated between buildings, all of which facilitate resident interaction and the use of common areas for recreation and play.

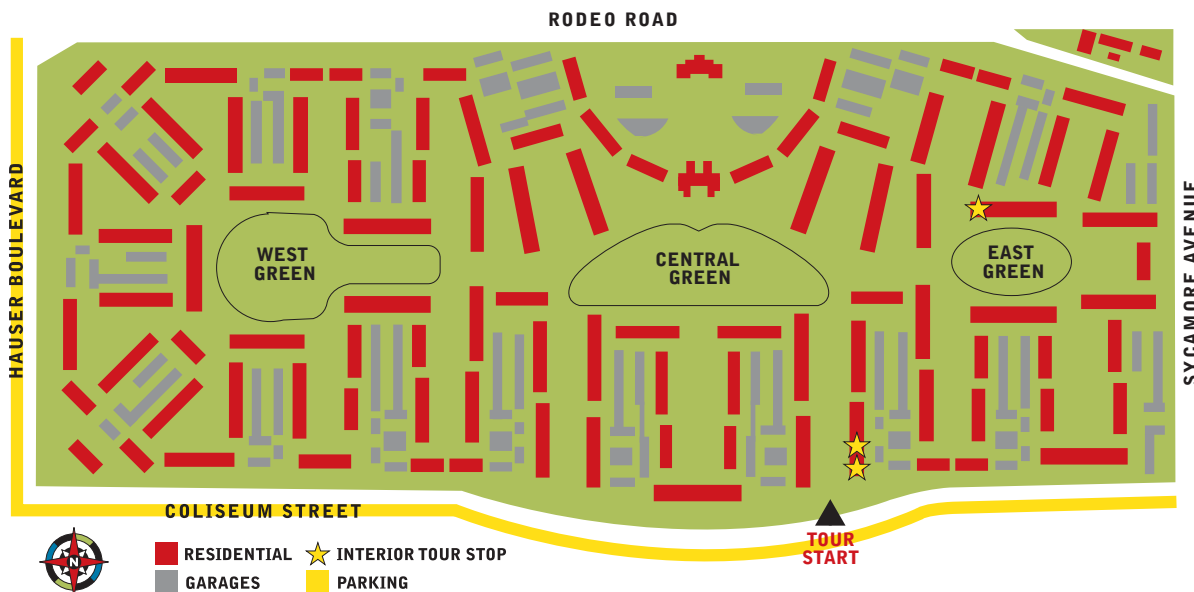
Spacious units are cleverly situated within outwardly simple but high-quality residential structures to make use of natural light and cross-ventilation, reducing the cost of construction and, later, utilities.

Inspired by the romance of "Old California," the wholly modern landscapes were designed by Fred Barlow, Jr. Original pepper and eucalyptus trees mingled with drought-tolerant olive, sycamore, walnut, and oak, creating elegant, tree-lined *allees* (an alley in a formal garden bordered by trees or

bushes) paved in decomposed granite, which has since been removed.

A 1963 dam collapse in the Baldwin Hills seriously damaged the southern edge of the site. After the flood, missing or damaged units were repaired under the direction of Robert E. Alexander, one of the original architects.

From 1972 to 1978, Baldwin Hills Village was redeveloped into condominiums and renamed The Village Green. The ownership structure established a long-term stewardship maintenance model under which residents have carefully restored and maintained building exteriors, most recently with the help of the Mills Act. The high level of design and integrity of materials in this "oasis of pedestrian calm" ensure that residents will enjoy The Village Green for generations to come.





Chase Knolls (1948)

13401 Riverside Drive, Sherman Oaks
13 acres; 260 units in 19 buildings

Architects: Heth Wharton and Ralph Vaughn
Landscape Architect: Margaret Schoch

L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument #683

Buildings are designed to form enclosed courtyards, providing communal gathering spaces. Photo courtesy Waterton Residential.

Located on what was once part of Joseph Chase's dairy farm, Chase Knolls was built to address housing shortages during the rapid postwar development of the San Fernando Valley. Its architects, Heth Wharton and Ralph Vaughn, participated in many garden apartment projects in the Los Angeles region (including Lincoln Place, also on this tour). Their high quality designs were utilitarian, yet highly livable.

The modernist structures of Chase Knolls are thoughtfully placed around three central courtyards. Built of wood frame and stucco, the residential units share a unified style and pastel palette. They vary mainly in the entryways, whose detailing, portico work, and siding form interesting patterns and lend each building a unique identity.

One-story bungalow-type residences surround the taller two-story

Some of the original landscaping included forest pines, jacaranda, and magnolia trees, and the extant rolling hills were included in the site plan. Photo circa 1952, original source unknown, courtesy Waterton Residential.



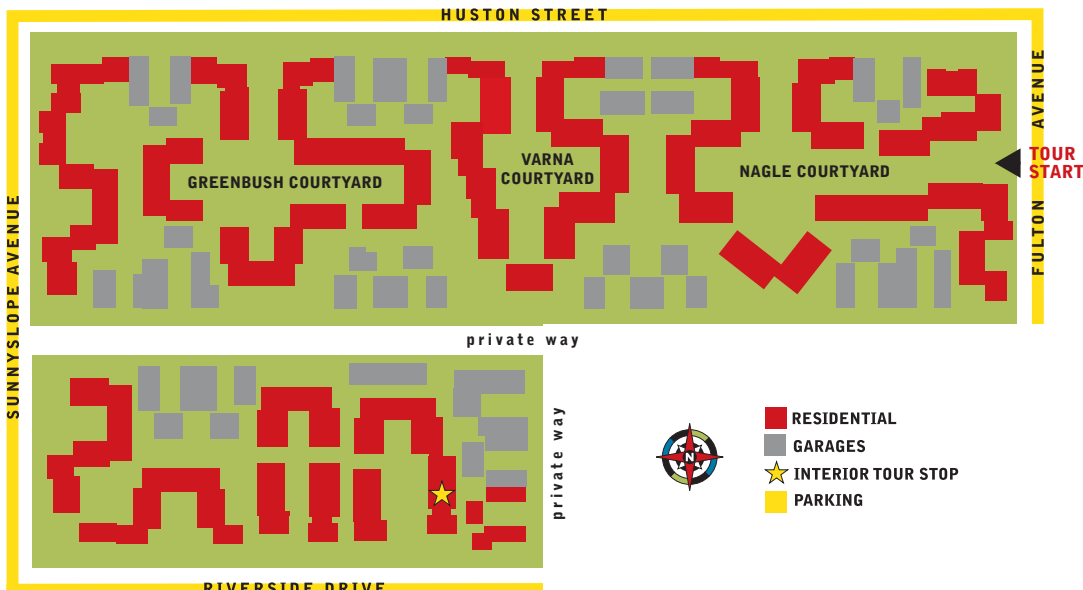
structures, breaking up the mass and contributing to Chase Knolls' welcoming, human scale. The courtyards are connected by pedestrian pathways, and each courtyard has its own landscaping theme and ambience. Public and private space meld together, with steel casement windows overlooking courtyards, patio areas, and green space. Garages and laundry facilities surround the site, forming a buffer from the outside environment.

Wharton and Vaughn worked with landscape architect Margaret Schoch to sensitively position buildings within the existing topography. The landscape design features open gardens, meandering walkways, and a beautiful tree canopy. In 2000, Chase Knolls was designated a Historic-Cultural Monument.

By 2013, the owners had rehabilitated the residential building exteriors, including new roofs, period-appropriate paint colors, and the restoration of key landscape features, many of which had fallen into disrepair. Now owned and managed by Waterton Residential, which continues to make improvements to the site, Chase Knolls remains a great asset to Sherman Oaks and a unique piece of its history.



Kitchens at Chase Knolls retain their original stainless steel countertops and cabinetry. Photo courtesy Waterton Residential.



Lincoln Place (1951)

1050 Frederick Street, Venice
38 acres; 696 historic units in 45 buildings;
99 new units in 13 buildings

Architects: Heth Wharton and Ralph Vaughn
Landscape Architect: Unknown

L.A. Historic-Cultural Monument #1008; Listed in the California Register of Historical Resources and the National Register of Historic Places

Completed in 1951 and located blocks from the beach in Venice, Lincoln Place is one of Heth Wharton and Ralph Vaughn's finest projects. As with many of the later garden apartments in Los Angeles (including Chase Knolls, which they also designed), Lincoln Place was built to address the housing shortages following the return of servicemen after World War II.

The development was incentivized by the Federal Housing Authority's (FHA) mortgage insurance program. FHA-insured communities typically include very high-quality building materials and thoughtful modern design, making Lincoln Place an important historic resource.

Lincoln Place's location fueled the development of Lincoln Boulevard as a commercial hub on the Westside. When it opened, publications lauded Lincoln Place for its family-friendly design and proximity to schools, playgrounds, and stores.

The pastel-colored, stuccoed residential buildings of Lincoln Place overlook gently curved city streets, meandering footpaths, and picturesque, drought-tolerant landscaping (including 350 mature trees). The residential structures don't exceed two stories, and the buildings are arranged to provide scenic views.

Each building has distinct detailing on the façade, with apartment entrances oriented inward. Many units have front patios. Behind the units, garages, laundry facilities, and clotheslines encourage conversation between neighbors.

Despite these qualities, the previous owner of Lincoln Place announced plans in 2001 to redevelop the site as market-rate condominiums, and seven buildings were lost to illegal demolition.

After ten years of litigation, listing on the California Register of Historical Resources, extensive negotiations, and a change in perspective by the owners about the value of preservation, owner Aimco has completely rehabilitated the site. Project details included restoring original hardwood floors and more than 5,000 wood windows. The project also augmented the original

The Korsbaek Family, immigrants from Denmark, lived at Lincoln Place from 1954 to 1959. Here they enjoy their modern kitchen and built-in breakfast nook. Photo courtesy The Korsbaek Family.



landscaping by adding citrus trees and replanting St. Augustine grass. Aimco built 99 new apartment homes on vacant parcels in a more contemporary style and added a fitness center and pool. The project demonstrates that if done correctly, old and new construction can co-exist harmoniously in garden apartment communities.

Aimco has become a proponent of preservation and has taken a similar approach with other historic properties around the country. At Lincoln Place, they're using incentives such as the Mills Act and federal historic tax credits to make rehabilitation a viable option for this irreplaceable historic resource.



As part of the complete rehabilitation of the property, original pastel paint colors were brought back. Photo by Luke Gibson, courtesy Aimco.

Wyvernwood (1939)

Not a tour stop, but threatened with demolition

**2901 East Olympic Boulevard, Boyle Heights
Nearly 70 acres; 1,187 units in 153 buildings**

Architects: David J. Witmer & Loyall F. Watson
Landscape Architect: Hammond Sadler

Listed in the California Register of Historical Resources; eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places

Though not a tour stop, Wyvernwood merits discussion as it is currently threatened with demolition. The first large-scale garden apartment community in Los Angeles, Wyvernwood opened in 1939.

When it opened, it was widely hailed as a major achievement. It was open for public "inspection" every evening and appeared in the seminal 1941 urban planning exhibit, "And Now We Plan," at the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art. Wyvernwood was widely published in magazines including *Architect and Engineer*, *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record*, and *California Arts and Architecture*.

Not immune to the prejudices of the day, Wyvernwood experienced systemic exclusionary practices for its first two decades. Racially restrictive policies were common throughout Los Angeles at the time, enforced even in neighborhoods as historically diverse as Boyle Heights. As a result, the original Wyvernwood population was almost entirely white.

Since the 1960s, Wyvernwood has evolved into a majority Latina/o working-class community of Mexican, Mexican-American, Central American, and Quiché residents. The 6,000 residents have made Wyvernwood their own, adding new layers of history and meaning through their own cultural heritage and traditions.

In 2007, Wyvernwood's owner, Fifteen Group Land and Development LLC, a Miami company, announced plans to replace the entire complex with a \$2 billion new mixed-use development of over 4,000 units. This plan would destroy a thriving community and an important



Opening in 1939, Wyvernwood is the first large-scale garden apartment community in Los Angeles, and thousands of people still call it home today.
Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.

part of Los Angeles history.

Many Wyvernwood residents have strongly opposed the demolition of their home. Long-term tenants attest to the close-knit community and family ties spanning generations, cultivated by the complex's innovative design.

The Conservancy is part of a coalition working to prevent Wyvernwood's demolition. Wyvernwood is a highly significant place in Los Angeles heritage, it has fostered a strong sense of community throughout its long history, and its groundbreaking design remains highly relevant today. We agree with the residents who believe that Wyvernwood can and should be preserved and rehabilitated, rather than destroyed.

For more information about Wyvernwood, and to learn how you can help, please visit laconservancy.org/issues/wyvernwood-garden-apartments.



Above: This early sales brochure from 1940 offers apartments that "turn their backs to the outside world." Courtesy Nathan Marsak.

Left: Community members gather at a 2011 rally in support of saving Wyvernwood from demolition. Photo by Adrian Scott Fine/L.A. Conservancy.



Special Thanks

Tour sponsors:



This booklet was produced in conjunction with a tour held on November 1, 2014.

Tour curated by the Los Angeles Conservancy, with special thanks to Maria Romano.

Many thanks to the garden apartment advisory group: Robert Chattel, Katie Horak, Holly Kane, Steven Keyton, Jesse Lattig, Portia Lee, and Amanda Seward.

Booklet design by Future Studio Los Angeles.

Special thanks to Patti Schwayder and everyone at Aimco; Chris Kiley, Yael Suneson, and everyone at The Kor Group; The Village Green Owners Association; Naya Bloom and Drew Furedi; John De La Rosa; John C. Florence; Peyton Hall and Robby Aranguren, Historic Resources Group; Steve Lehne, KC Restoration; Jose A. Fernandez, Leonardo Lopez; Luis Salinas; and Maya Santos.

Major funding for the Los Angeles Conservancy's educational programs is provided by The La Fetra Foundation and by the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation



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About the Los Angeles Conservancy
The Los Angeles Conservancy is a membership-based nonprofit organization that works through advocacy and education to recognize, preserve, and revitalize the historic architectural and cultural resources of Los Angeles County. The Conservancy was formed in 1978 as part of the community-based effort to prevent demolition of the Los Angeles Central Library. It is now the largest local historic preservation organization in the U.S., with over 6,000 members and hundreds of volunteers. For more information, visit laconservancy.org.