



Save Our Heritage Organisation  
PRESENTS

**CLIFF MAY'S**  
**First Houses**  
**1932-1936**

**Recreating an**  
**Ancient Mexican Hacienda**



**CLIFF MAY**  
**MIRACLE COMPANY**

R-1632

**BUILDING FINANCING-DESIGNING**

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*Facing page* O'Leary House, 1932, first house built by Cliff May. O.A. Tunnell, photographer for Cliff May. Courtesy Architecture and Design collection, University Art Museum, UCSB



# Cliff May-Miracle Company Haciendas Restore the Romance and Charm of Early California Design to Modern Living



**THE** established local popularity of true Early California Hacienda Homes is Credited to the inimitable designing by Cliff May and his ability to adapt this picturesque type to various surroundings.

Through a heritage which dates back to the days of the Don's, Cliff May, prominent young designer of true Haciendas, has captured for lovers of distinctive homes the primitive simplicity and structural features of the nineteenth century low rambling ranch homes which are so typical of California living—exhaustive study and strict specialization have served to establish Cliff May designed Haciendas as truly portraying to the most minute detail the architectural influence which is lacking in many homes of a somewhat similar nature. A visit to our Model Hacienda at 4365 Altamirano Way, in Presidio Hills, will reveal the "decided difference" in Cliff May-Miracle Company homes.

**Every Hacienda Built and Guaranteed for Permanence by the Miracle Company**

**A**DHERENCE to the glamorous Haciendas designs have in no way interfered with embodying in our homes the modern features of convenience and structural perfection which create living comfort and lasting value. Cliff May-Miracle Company homes are guaranteed.



■ La Sala (Living Room) of Hacienda built for Colonel and Mrs. Arthur J. O'Leary in Tarnadge Park. Showing unobscured Mexican Indian type friezes.

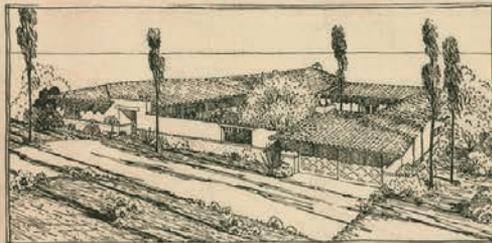
■ Top, Left: Glimpse of Inner Courtyard of Cliff May-Miracle Company model Hacienda, open for inspection daily, 2 to 4 p. m., at Presidio Hills.

■ Large Picture: Top: Hacienda now under construction for Mr. and Mrs. Alex Highland at corner of Marybelle Way and Presidio Drive in Presidio Hills.

■ Right: Dining Room Interior in Hacienda of Captain and Mrs. William Lindstrom in Tarnadge Park. Showing specially designed and built refractory table and benches.

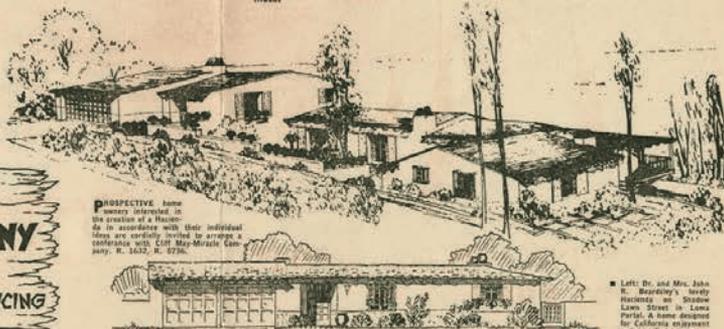


**Visit Our Model Hacienda at 4365 Altamirano Way in Presidio Hills!**



■ Above: Rambling Hacienda designed and now under construction for Mr. and Mrs. Wedo Langston at beautiful La Jolla Hermosa.

■ Below: Hacienda Ranch House designed for hillside setting in charming Presidio Hills, exclusive residential section.



PROSPECTIVE home owners interested in the construction of a Hacienda do in accordance with their individual ideas are cordially invited to arrange a conference with Cliff May-Miracle Company, R-3632, R-5275.

■ Left: Dr. and Mrs. John R. Bradley's lovely Hacienda on Sycamore Lawn Street in Loma Park. A home designed for California enjoyment and dignified beauty.

**CLIFF MAY  
MIRACLE COMPANY**

R-1632 and R-5736

DESIGNING • BUILDING • FINANCING

# The Quintessential California Home

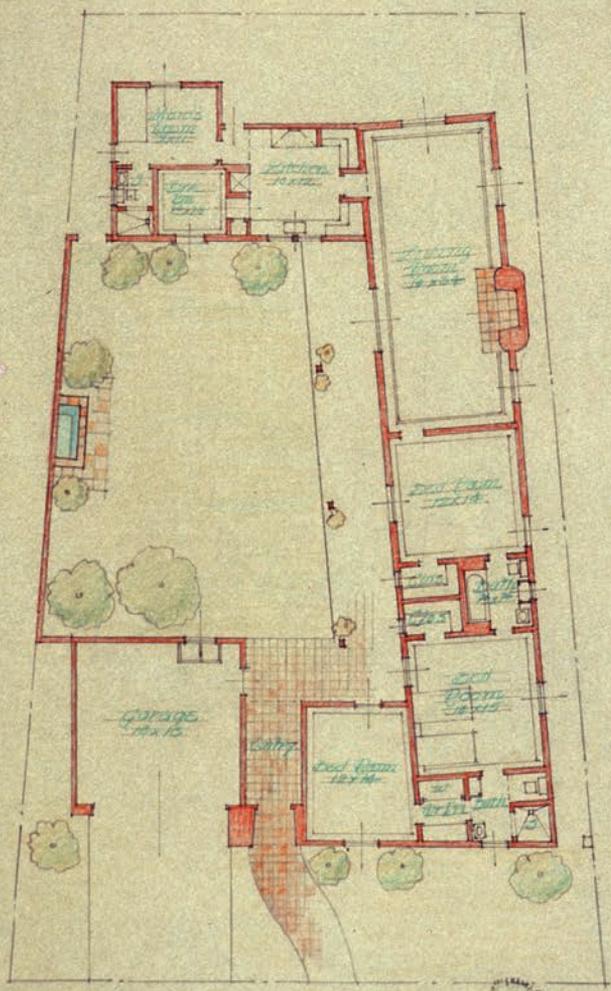
Welcome to SOHO's annual historic home tour. Cliff May probably built or influenced more architecture than any other designer to ever hail from San Diego. Assembled for viewing for the first time are the homes that represent the work of Cliff May's formative years during which, he developed his signature style. From May's *Californio* roots, his efforts to create the quintessential California house emerged the Ranch House craze. This engaged the imagination of the parents of the baby boom generation spread across the country.

This was during the dark days of the depression, when the longing for a more carefree lifestyle became so pervasive that whole new industries sprang up to support the desire for everything that represented a simpler time, in a sunny, romanticized Mexican-era California. These included the widely copied colorful Bauer pottery, Malibu, Catalina, Taylor, D&M, and other California tile companies, floral decorated Monterey and Coronado style furniture, textiles and more with literally hundreds of items now grouped into the broad category of Mexicana. These whimsical items, decorated invariably in the bright California colors of orange, cobalt blue, mustard yellow, and turquoise along with colorful Mexican folk art style decoration throughout the homes provided a much needed visual and psychological escape from the reality of the times. This longing was even celebrated in words and music with titles such as "In My Adobe Hacienda," "An Old Adobe," and later "My Little Ranch House."

The picture was complete with a robust revival of early California style entertaining with Mexican food, music and dancing on the *patio*, a Spanish word that we now introduced into the lexicon of American language.

In the 1934 advertisement shown here of his first homes, May extolled, "Restore the romance and charm of Early California design to Modern Living." Another describes the Lindstrom home, "In the design of this Hacienda, I have taken from the *casas* of the Dons their traditions of simplicity, lighthearted informality, hospitality and combined with these the convenience we need for the modern art of living."

Cliff May's rich architectural legacy of colorful gracious California indoor-outdoor living could have not have had more of an appropriate beginning than the city of San Diego, the "Birthplace of California."



# CLIFF MAY'S

## First Houses 1932-1936

### Recreating an Ancient Mexican Hacienda

by Ann Jarmusch

**D**esigner Cliff May made his name and fortune in Los Angeles, but it was his San Diego roots and upbringing that made the man. A sixth-generation San Diegan, May (1908-1989) was the son of Beatrice Magee and Charles Clifford May. His mother came from the Estudillo and de Pedrorreña families, who played a prominent role in California history under Spanish, Mexican and American rule. May spent boyhood summers at his aunt Jane Mcgee's home at the Los Flores adobe on Rancho Santa Margarita y Las Flores, now part of Camp Pendleton. He also roamed the Santa Margarita ranch house and Casa de Estudillo, two other important adobe haciendas.

May expressed a visceral understanding of what made these earthy, old haciendas with thick walls and low roofs so comfortable to live in when he reminisced about his youth: "The ranch house had everything a California house should be. It had cross ventilation, the floor was level with the ground, and with its courtyard and the exterior corridor, it was about sunshine and informal outdoor living."

May, who was not trained as an architect, started his design career by designing and fabricating rustic wood furniture. After he began placing this Monterey-style furniture in homes that were for sale, the properties sold fully furnished. The enterprising young man, who had dropped out of San Diego State College due to the Great Depression, soon realized that with partners he had the vision and

**Left** "In those days when we built a house it would be a \$10,000 house, which now would be a \$200,000 house, and I had two sheets of paper...and one was a little plot plan and one elevation, or maybe one or two principal elevations of the house (left). We went out to get the building permit...I came in with my drawing...and there were only two pages to look over. There wasn't big building in San Diego in the thirties. He (the inspector) looked it over, and he said, "This looks pretty good. Do you know how to build it?" I said, "I can build it." And he said, "OK." And stamp, stamp, and it was all done. - Cliff May, 1983, Marlene L. Laskey UCLA interviews

ability to design, furnish and landscape homes and provide a living for himself and his new bride, Jean Lichty.

His earliest house designs (1932-1936) represent a romantic version with modern conveniences of “an ancient Mexican hacienda,” in the words of *American Home* magazine. SOHO’s home tour includes five of the first homes built by May: his first and second homes, the fourth (his first commission), and sixth home. Also included are two slightly later homes that illustrate the important aspects of his developing style. The haciendas are designed in U- or L-shapes around a large, landscaped courtyard that May typically punctuated with an olive tree and a California Pepper with perhaps a fountain and outdoor fireplace. Inside, the rooms are all connected, and nearly every one opens onto a covered *corredor*.

May ensured that every home exhibited what he called “ground contact” through three essential design elements: a concrete slab foundation that hugged the site’s contours; heavy-looking, low exterior walls that seemed to press into the earth and low-pitched roofs with wide, sheltering eaves.

The highly creative May paid attention to every detail to support the illusion of domestic life in old California. He built thick, hollow walls that concealed closets and household equipment in imitation of deep adobe walls, covering them with uneven plaster and carving out niches and shelves. He designed beehive fireplaces for every living room and some dining rooms and bedrooms, and installed metal or wood rusticated hardware and lighting fixtures. He hired artisans to paint floral designs in the Mexicana folk-art style on wood beams, shutters and doors and selected rustic red-clay roof tiles for an irregular, vernacular look. The effect was so complete that the homes proved irresistible to buyers and the media.

The geographical spread of the homes on this tour attests to the popular appeal of May’s haciendas, which at one time numbered about 50 in the San Diego area. More than a lucrative enterprise, May’s love of casual California living entwined with nature was deeply authentic. It would soon lead to his becoming known as the “father of the American ranch house” throughout the world.

**Right** Photo of Cliff May, 1984 for UCLA, Oral History Program, *The California Ranch House*, Cliff May



**“I just built one kind of house ... I just had one style.” - Cliff May, 1983, from an interview by Marlene L. Laskey**

# One Kind of House

by Alana Coons

Until now, the first homes built by Cliff May and how they related to each other in the context of his career and the development of his style was unknown. This was complicated by May's own recollections later in life of when he built particular homes.

In preparing for this home tour, research done by Dale and Ron May (no relation to Cliff May) and Bruce Coons, brought to light some important new information on the sequence of his first homes that were built on speculation and his first commissions which drove his career from that point on. While much had been established in documenting his later homes, especially those of the mid century era after May left San Diego, the homes that were the progenitors of his signature style were not well documented.

Through construction and building completion notices, it is now known the following homes were finished as listed here in chronological order:

February 1932 . . . . .Col. Arthur J. & Francis O'Leary House  
February 1933 . . . . .Lindstrom House  
August 1933 . . . . .Sheldon Hodge House  
November 1933 . . . . .Dr. John R. & Florence Porterfield Beardsley House  
May 1934 . . . . .Langston House  
October 1934 . . . . .Alexander & Nancy Highland House  
November 1934 . . . . .Dittenhaver House  
December 1934 . . . . .Wood House

May was as unpretentious as his ranch style homes. There were other builders who were also experimenting with this design concept but none as influential or as successful as May would become in defining and perfecting the style. This is most likely due to his intimate knowledge of how a hacienda actually functioned, having lived in and around them his entire life.

Elements from Las Flores ranch house can be seen right up to his very last custom designed homes. Though it may appear in the mid fifties he diverged from these ideas with his mass produced ranch homes, May carried with him the memories of living at Las Flores his entire career. Easily recognizable signature elements of Las Flores are revealed in the undulation of plaster simulating adobe and thick walls, the impression of the home expanding over time as the family grew, the principle of the *saguán* or breezeway, heavy timbered ceilings, and window grilles, and in the addition of board and batten sections. His early homes came in two versions: the Hacienda and the *Ranchería*. These are recognized most readily by tile roofs on haciendas and wood shingle roofs on the *Rancherías*. *Rancherías* also included board and batten sections and lighter roof beams and porch columns. It was this house, the *Ranchería*, that became known as the American ranch house.

Another significant discovery was of May's preferred plant palette. These were the mission olive and California pepper trees as well as the prickly pear cactus, cordyline, flax, climbing roses, bougainvillea, grapes, bananas, and a profuse use of brightly colored flowers such as red and orange geraniums, and yellow and orange marigolds. He carefully chose plants whose shadows would show well against the exterior white plastered walls, plants that were architectural in themselves.

May considered himself a designer builder for his entire career. However, he did become a licensed architect one year before his death.

Cliff May left an outstanding architectural legacy that sprang literally from the California soil on which his first houses were erected and, in doing so, created a uniquely American house that captured the needs, aspirations and imagination of a growing nation.

# GRILLES

DESIGNED BY CLIFF MAY

*Contributed by Eloise Roorbach*

SUCH obviously hand-made touches enhance the beauty of a small house by giving it distinction and a pleasing individuality—lifting it above the commonplace.

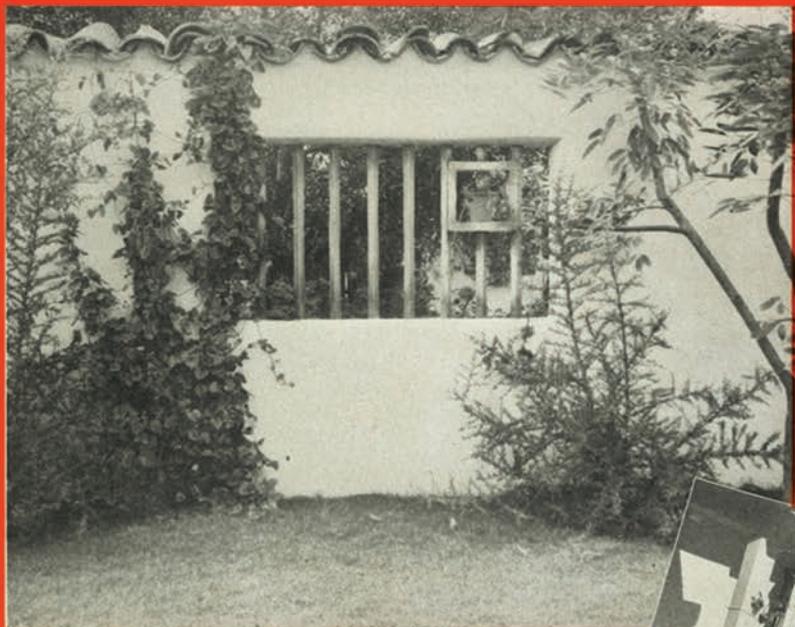
Decorative, as well as a practical protection for rooms on the ground floor, is the grille to the left. Of the simplest design, full ventilation is gained as well as a comforting sense of security. Vines can weave in and out, creepers can find foothold and flowers can thrust their gifts of color well into the room.

Below, the hand-hewn grille of wood and solid shutters gives interest to a house or garden wall. Whether painted in flat tones and decorated with conventional flower patterns, or left to weather in natural beauty, this permits privacy when desired and affords one more way of having pleasing color in a small home.

At the top of the opposite page is a simple grille for a garden wall with a special opening for a pot of flowers. It is a delightful way of breaking a long stretch of plain wall. Such a grille at a kitchen window makes a charming picture for a woman to enjoy while washing dishes. It does not shut out needed light, and by painting it in a color used in the kitchen it will complete the harmony.

Below it is an unusual gridded effect of rope for a seaside cottage. Wavelike scallops of wood painted blue complete the nautical picture.





Below, at the left, is a latticed garden door. Latticed doors intensify garden glamour, protect the garden from ever-curious passersby and give delightful finish to the picture of a home. This one has been indented to give shelter from the sun and rain.

Below, to the right, is a latticed door painted green to give the visitor a chance to enjoy the color of the garden while waiting to be admitted. The push bell of porcelain is shaped and colored like a flower.







**Col. Arthur J. & Francis  
O'Leary House  
Year built - 1932  
4725 Norma Drive**

**M**ay was only 23 years old when he sold this, the first hacienda he designed, to Arthur J. and Frances O'Leary. The \$9,500 price included all the furnishings, which May designed or selected. One of the earliest homes to be built in this part of Talmadge Park, it ranges over one and a half lots.

From the street, this house resembles a fortified hacienda, in keeping with the Spanish-Mexican rancho tradition, and it is the progenitor of the ranch house movement. May's exterior innovations include placing an attached garage at the front of the house, instead of at the rear of the lot, as was typical at the time. This massing allowed for the creation of a private inner courtyard. A traditional Spanish Colonial-style cornice caps the walls and conceals the rafter tails; this is the only one of May's early homes with this feature. A clay chimney pot hints at the five fireplaces



Circa 1932, Architecture and Design collection, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara



Every room in the house is entered by way of the patio, as in olden days to go outside...this is the popular way to retire for the night...to walk on the lawn...to see the stars marching above...to enjoy the perfume of the sweet after such beauty. - Eloise Roorbach, *Architectural Digest*, 1930

within. A round, decorative tile made by the California tile company D & M, encircles the door bell; May was to make this colorful element one of his hallmarks, using a different tile design for each hacienda. The current owners designed the wood fence to complement the original window grille design.

The house was built to appear to be the product of semi-skilled laborers and although irregular surfaces and measurements are everywhere, May was



ys; though not necessary  
cross the corridor...across  
ne garden...sleep should be  
5

mindful of arranging windows and doors to capture vistas. Behind the rough-hewn, double front doors lies a large courtyard with a fountain the owners added. The rectangular courtyard is bounded by the U-shaped house on three sides, the fourth side being a long connecting wall built on the property line and enclosing the courtyard. The *corredor*, or covered walkway, is furnished invitingly, with tables and chairs, as it would have been when May built it.



Three pairs of multilight doors with rustic lintels connect the courtyard to the house. The rooms are arranged in linear fashion, with living room, dining room, breakfast room and kitchen at one end. Three bedrooms, each with a beehive fireplace, are tucked on either side of the large living room, where a huge, stepped fireplace commands attention. When the house was new, the fireplaces provided the only source of heat.



The doors and iron hardware are all original. The pair of black sconces that flank the living room fireplace are original, and were moved from a bedroom, replacing identical ones that were missing. May constructed these and matching hanging lanterns elsewhere in the house from parts to get the look he wanted.

Built of lath and plaster, the interior walls simulate handworked adobe.



Archways three feet deep imitate thick adobe walls, add romance and allow for deep closets on either side. An arched alcove in the living room still serves as a phone “booth.” Douglas fir beams and lintels throughout the house (only the kitchen has a flat ceiling) have been sandblasted to remove multiple coats of paint, and then lightly stained.

The unevenness of the Mexican red-tile floor is due to the lack of a concrete slab. Instead, May experimented with a clay tile slab; he was one of the first builders to use slab on grade. He also designed a terracotta-tiled bathroom (accessible from two bedrooms) with innovations, such as a Pullman-style (built-in) sink, at a time while most other builders still used pedestal sinks.

Wilburn F. Hale was the chief carpenter and May worked alongside him to learn the skills of the trade. Being May’s first building, this house represents the germination of ideas that he would carry forward and refine for the rest of his career.





**Lindstrom House**  
**Year built - 1933**  
**4669 East Talmadge Road**

May's second hacienda, which is low-slung and very close to the street, presents an almost impenetrable façade. The rugged, wooden window grille provides protection and a distinctive decorative element. Upon opening the rustic front door, a picturesque, private world unfolds. It evidently captivated Captain and Mrs. William Lindstrom, who bought what was a fully furnished house from May (then a newlywed 24-year-old) for \$9,500 in cash.



Like most of May's haciendas, this rambling floor plan with spacious outdoor living areas evokes old Mexican ranch houses. The house follows the earth's contours, and in this instance steps down toward the canyon behind the house. The entry foyer was originally an open corridor and offers the highest vantage point for looking through the U-shaped house to the living room and canyon or across the courtyard toward the kitchen and dining wing. This courtyard is asymmetrical, making for dynamic views of house and garden as you move through the *corredor*.

Like the O'Leary House, this hacienda was built to look and feel like part of old



California, with faux thick walls, rough plaster finishes and wood-beamed ceilings that still bear traces of the original decoration. It too has three bedrooms (and one delightful dressing room with well-preserved, original painted floral motifs,



and built-in closets and drawers), but the floor plan is somewhat different here. The bedrooms form a row, with two connecting baths, opposite the courtyard. The public rooms are also grouped together, in a row at the back of the house.



*Left* Circa 1933, published in *American Home* in Volume 9, Issue 1, 1934



The living room beckons from its pivotal corner spot, where the public and private wings meet. An intimate, dramatic room, its focal point is the sculpted fireplace (one of five in the house) with a curved front that organically merges into fireside and window seats (bancos). The iron band that forms a narrow mantle shelf was added later. Across the room, a deep corner cupboard, originally a phone booth, now holds stereo equipment.



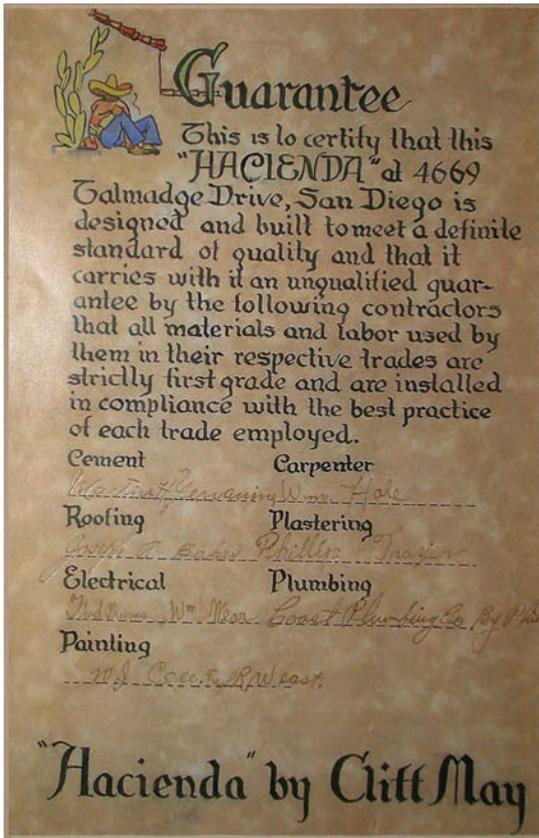
Each panel decorated with semiformal bouquet of flowers, the design for which was found in an old Mexican monastery, the colors are all ancient looking, a dull Apache red, serape blue, straw and saddle brown and faded olive green, these delicate faded flower colors echo the living colors in the patio. - Eloise Roorbach, *Architectural Digest*, 1935



The dining-kitchen wing is entered through a deep arch, as though May wanted residents to experience a sense of procession. The charming dining room is just big enough for a table and chairs to fit in front of the kiva fireplace, but it feels larger because its pair of casement windows swing open, dissolving the barrier between courtyard and room.

An even smaller, quainter breakfast nook and built-in butler's pantry are tucked into this sequence of rooms. These adjoin the kitchen, which retains the original tile floor and much of its cabinetry. Instead of using metal straps for the hinges on the wood cabinets, as he did in the O'Leary house, May had them fashioned

out of wood and painted black. Recent owners recreated the faux finishes and added decorative wall tiles. A small patio off the kitchen connects to the main courtyard and to the terraced gardens that disappear into the canyon.



One of the owner's special possessions is a signed and framed Certificate of Authenticity that May presented to his early clients. It listed key craftsmen and guaranteed the quality of workmanship. In 2001, the Lindstrom House became the first building designed by May to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.





## Sheldon Hodge House Year built - 1933 4365 Altamirano Way

This article serves to illustrate the third home built by Cliff May; it was lost in a gas explosion in the 1970s. It has been included because of its importance in



### Re-creating an ancient Mexican hacienda

*Eloise Roorbach*

THE word "hacienda," as rather carelessly used today, means a Mexican country house only, though originally the name included the entire estate, grazing lands, forests, and farming acres. With rooms arranged around a central courtyard or patio, it was in reality more than a dwelling house. Somewhat like a stockade as far as high walls and a single entrance are concerned, it was a sanctuary, a place of refuge in times of stress.

Literally the name means "things to be done," and certainly, many and various "things" were done in the early California haciendas, especially in that center of family life, the patio. At times the family burros and horses were sheltered in the patio, as in French courtyards, so an anvil might frequently be found in a corner near a forge. Within the shade of its arches the women ground corn in stone metates for the daily tortilla. Red peppers and strings of Indian corn hung from the rafters. Ollas were



Mr. Cliff May, a descendant of families who have played a distinguished part in California's history, has preserved in his modern hacienda the true spirit of the gay, secluded adobe buildings of old California. Low, roomy, its mellowed white walls enclose the patio, the heart of the house

strung from beams, or branches of a Lime or an Olive tree, where winds might keep the drinking water cool. A loom occupied a sheltered corner and clothing, rugs, and curtains were woven on it according to the fancy and skill of the weaver. Food and water jars, moulded of adobe, were set in sunny spaces to dry. There were benches against the wall where the men could idle happy hours away while twanging out the measures of a dance on their guitars. In the patio, the great outdoor room of the house, guests were received, meals served, siestas enjoyed, and flowers bloomed. It was a gay, lovable, and most important part of every true hacienda.

The hacienda, as being recreated today in southern California, is splendidly adapted to modern living and its patio is just such a lovable, romantic, and indispensable part of it. Cliff May, a young man of San Diego, has recently embodied his love of our old adobe haciendas in a

the evolution of his style and that it is one of the most descriptive articles detailing his work. The article which was printed in *American Home Magazine* in February 1935 shows just how enamored the public and the media was with the young May.



Photographs by Wayne Albee

Window and door frames are that lovely shade of green that the Olive tree puts forth in early spring. Window shutters are a time-dimmed mustard yellow decorated with delicately faded flower colors that draw house and garden closely together

The planting carries out the traditional use of ancient and twisted Olive trees, groups of Banana trees, and Oleanders beneath the bedroom windows. Wild Grape climbs one pillar; Castilian Roses another. Strings of red peppers hang from the rafters, ollas hang in cooling winds, and pots of blooming plants stand about in sociable groups or in prim little rows. There are deep-seated sun-seats in El Lugar de la Siesta (the place of the siesta) and a low, squat tea wagon copied after the style of the typical old ox carts

modern house that holds all the charm and poetic beauty of the past, yet leaves nothing to be desired in the way of luxurious comfort. A great-great grandson of that pioneer who built and lived in the historic adobe in Old Town, San Diego, known to everyone as Ramona's Marriage Place; a direct descendant of the distinguished Estudillo and de Pedrona families who played so vital a part in early California history; who spent much of his boyhood in the adobe house (built in 1812) on the famous Las Flores rancho—he, naturally, imbibed the spirit of those secluded buildings. So, loving and respecting them, feeling that they are eminently desirable for present-day living, he is devoting his life to re-creating them, preserving all that is most to be desired in them, but introducing, in an unobtrusive way, every modern device that adds to the comfort and ease of living.

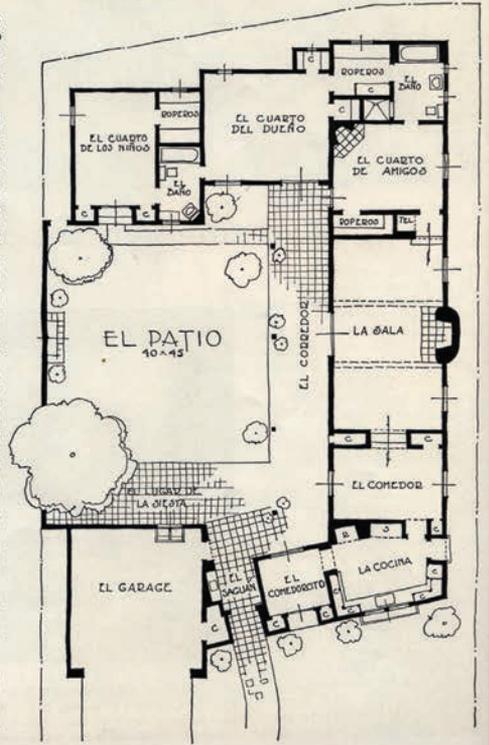
For instance, the walls are of hollow tile, instead of perishable adobe, but are made to look as though they were three feet thick, as were the old adobe walls. The space between is cleverly used for closets, cupboards, and books. There are modern heating plants, copper water pipes, and weather strips, ventilated niches for kitchen stove, convenient places for electric refrigerators, laundry tubs, and garage.

This home of Mr. May's, built in a restricted residential section of San Diego, is worth a detailed study for it has caught the fleeting beauty of the past, yet is so scientifically constructed that

every workman, from those who laid the foundation to those who fashioned the roof and fitted the plumbing, were required to give a written guarantee, a pledge of excellent workmanship.

Low, roomy, gayly over-run with blossoming vines, with the spirit of the past breathing from every detail, it attracts attention even before the patio, the heart of the house, is seen. The walls are a mellowed white, somewhat like an old ivory, but, being Mexican in type, a better word is "bone" white. The tiles of the roof have been carefully chosen and laid to simulate the sun-baked and sun-warped, rudely fashioned tile still to be seen in some of our old missions. The chimneys, squat, simple, intrude as little as possible. The rafters are weathered, hand hewn, and softened at the ends. Window and door frames are of that lovely shade of green that the olive tree puts forth in early spring. Window shutters are of a time-dimmed mustard yellow and each panel decorated with semi-formal bouquets of flowers, the design for which was found in an old Mexican monastery. The colors, all ancient looking, are a dull Apache red, serape blue, straw, and saddle brown and faded olive green. These delicately faded flower colors echo the living colors in the patio, drawing house and garden together in most charming manner. This same design of flowers has been used, modified somewhat, on furniture and in kitchen and dining room decoration.

The floor of the corridor is of



random-laid patio tile, square in shape like those in the old missions. As the house fits naturally into the gently sloping land, a problem of drainage was met in a satisfactory manner by tile cleverly placed at base of pillars and at corners so their presence is not noticed. Niches for saints or flowers break the wall here and there. In this corridor sunshine or shade may be had at all hours of the day.

All the rooms have been built in U form around the patio. The fourth side is a high wall of hollow tile, with hand-smoothed plastered surface to give tropical-leaved plants a chance to cast their shadows upon it in a succession of artistic decorations. The center of the patio is a green lawn, which gives sense of space and also furnishes a most desirable flat tone against which the vivid flower colors look their best. The planting, of course, carries out the traditional use of ancient and twisted Olive trees (transplanted), groups of Banana trees, Oleanders beneath bedroom windows where their color and fragrance may add to the beauty of the rooms. Wild Grape climbs one pillar; Castilian Roses another. There are Bougainvillias lifting sprays of intense color into the sky, flaming Aloes, Yuccas, and sword-leaved Dracenas, with such gay and jolly annuals as Marigolds and Zinnias to bring quick color. Strings of red peppers hang from the rafters as of old, ollas hang in cooling winds, pots of blooming plants stand about in soci-

able groups or prim little rows. There are deep-seated sun-seats in El Lugar de la Siesta (the place of the siesta) and a low, squat tea wagon with wheels made after the style of the old carretas or ox carts, of a single piece of wood, hand shaped.

This hacienda is entered by a grilled gate, through which the bright colors of the patio are seen while one is waiting to be admitted, after pushing the electric button set in a circular Mexican tile of flower design. Above this tiled button is a little Portezuela or "peep-window," painted to harmonize with the flowered tile. At the left of El Saguán (entrance hall) is an arched niche in which is a fountain and pool where flowers may be arranged conveniently. Beneath is a cupboard for extra flower pots and baskets.

At the right of this hall is El Comedorcito, or breakfast room, truly Mexican in color, with painted furniture and soft-toned rugs. As far as finished house is concerned, this small but exquisite room might serve



A most delightful feature of this room is a wide grilled window over the sink, so designed that there are three unevenly spaced openings where pots of flowers are set and changed as the seasons require. A row of potted plants stand on the sill and flowers from the garden outside have climbed high enough to twine themselves through the grille and offer color and add fragrance to the pleasant odors of a good meal in preparation. The floor is of linoleum in tile design, Indian rugs placed where needed. Between meals this room might be mistaken for a library, for all pots and pans are out of sight behind painted doors and the refined tone of the room with its rugs and flowers, lift it into a distinguished beauty.

The dining room, El Comedor, entered from the kitchen is quite as full of color. A refectory table, benches, and chairs are painted in soft yet rich colors, and with the modified bouquets of flowers on backs or legs. With peon liners and Mexican pottery, with double doors opening into the patio, and with a fireplace in the corner that almost pleads for a dull day that a fire may glow upon its hearth the room bestows beauty and charm to whomsoever enters it.

The living room, la Sala, is reached by three wide and low steps and through an archway gained by the simulated three-foot adobe walls. The depth of this archway helps to attain the solid substantial feeling of the old haciendas and to reproduce the spirit of the past when men con-

[Please turn to page 184]



The chief feature of la Sala (the living room) is its fireplace, looking as though it had been fashioned and smoothed by the loving hands of a Hopi potter. The furniture in El Cuarto del Dueño (the master's bedroom) was especially designed and made for Mr. May's own use

The dining room, El Comedor, is furnished with furniture painted in rich mellow colors, peon liners, and Mexican pottery gaily colorful

as reception room or perhaps den.

Then the kitchen, or la Cocina, with its time-mellowed bone-white walls that look somewhat like the whitewashed walls of olden days. All the walls, both inside and outside, have been smoothed by hand which gives them the quality of an old vase. The woodwork is of that dull shade of white which might be termed "straw" color and each panel is painted with some lovely variation of the same design found throughout the whole house.



**Facing page top** Advertisement for Cliff May - Miracle Builders, *Architectural Digest*, Volume 9, Issue 1, 1934; **bottom** Promotional card for an open house at Sheldon Hodge home, Architecture and Design collection, University Art Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara

sidered their family and built for future generations. This hacienda gives the impression that the builder intended to live in it with pleasure and comfort and to leave it as an ideal of his generation to those who may follow. The chief feature of this room is the fireplace. Indian in influence, it looks as though it had been fashioned and smoothed by the loving hand of a Hopi potter. Irregular shelves where decorative jars and baskets of flowers may be set, flowing in line, fitting into the wall as though mounded into it (as it really is), it gives dignity and does much to re-create the historic spirit of the past.

Two groups of double doors into the patio make it almost an integral part of the outdoors. The floor of this room and, in fact, of every room in the house is plank, hand pegged as in olden days. Every piece of furniture

here and throughout the house, every lamp and lighting fixture, has been designed and made by Mr. May, for he is a craftsman who loves to use his hand as well as a designer of vision. The lamps were copied from one found in the old Estudillo hacienda, when coal oil must be used. These have been wired of course, but in an inconspicuous way. Some are on standards, some set around a crudely carved circle of wood, hand hewn, for central lighting. Spanish iron-bound chests take the place of wood boxes, mirrors are hung with rope, bedspreads and curtains are of hand-woven linen, or burlap, laced with leather thongs.

The master's bedroom, El Cuarto del Dueño, is reached from the Sala by two wide and low steps and through a three-foot wide arch utilized as a telephone nook. With specially de-

signed and individually made furniture, with the most modern of bathrooms in the mellowed white tile that keeps it in fitting touch with the time-hallowed past, with large dressing room amply supplied with closets and drawers so necessary to immaculate and easy housekeeping, this room holds romantic beauty and gives perfect comfort.

There are two other bedrooms with a bath between, finished with old blue tile. Each room carries out some harmonious tone as background for brighter touches of color. Latticed windows with brilliant vines twisting in and out, with color from the patio uniting them with the sunny world outside, with double doors opening onto the tiled corridor, these two rooms complete the spacious and romantic spirit of the whole house. Every room in the house is entered by way of the

patio, as in olden days, though, naturally, it is not necessary to go outside. But this is the popular way to retire for the night: to walk beneath the corridor, or across the lawn, to see the stars marching overhead, to enjoy the perfume of the garden. Sleep should be sweet after such beauty.

It has been said that the Princes of Italy used to call in the poets and painters to "dream" a house for them. This home has been designed by a musician, for Mr. May is the conductor of a local orchestra, and his knowledge of music no doubt accounts for much of the harmony of color, rhythmic flowing of line, restrained yet easy spirit throughout, and the tranquility and peace which hover over it all.

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**Dr. John R. & Florence Porterfield  
Beardsley House  
Year built - 1933  
3130 Shadowlawn Street**

**T**he Beardsley home is significant in that it is May's first commissioned house and his fourth hacienda, representing an important step in May's design and career development. Dr. Beardsley hired May to design a custom home after visiting the Lindstrom House and the home being built on speculation at 4365 Altamirano Way.

This U-shaped courtyard house displays the classic early May exterior with

The garden gate is the front door - you feel that you are in the house as soon as the garden gate closes behind you. - *Sunset Western Ranch House*



decorative grille and shutters, with a recessed front door/garden gate that simulates a portal through a six-foot adobe wall. Distinctive details include a small portezuela (peep door) near the front door that would have been painted with floral motifs to harmonize with the glazed doorbell tile.

Brightly colored Bauer flowerpots hang again in the original ferrous rings and also sit in the window grille as May intended. Because May's plant palette was also part of his signature, the owners have begun recreating the original landscaping using offspring from the O'Leary home.

The original plan as rendered was similar to the O'Leary and Lindstrom houses,



**Right** Circa 1940, the Wetherill family were the second owners and resided in the home for thirty years. Courtesy Wetherill family, (Coons Collection)

with bedrooms at the front of the house and the kitchen and dining room in back. It is believed that after visiting the Sheldon Hodge house while it was under construction, the Beardsleys asked May to flip the floor plan, thereby moving the bedrooms to the back of the house.

To the right of the *saguán*, or entrance, is the breakfast room and kitchen, both rooms still claim the original cabinetry, California cooler and built-in tin-lined flour bins.

The living room connects rooms at both ends of the house and is the largest living





room of the homes on tour. It originally included a dining area within the living room space, whereas the others have arched walls dividing them into private dining rooms.

At the rear of the house, the back wing is connected at a slight angle, with the ceiling in the master bedroom built as if a hip roof existed at that point. This was to emulate the original adobe rancho homes that were expanded over time as families grew.



Two wood benches are rare surviving examples of May's furniture and still remain in the *corredor*. Using original plans, a fountain and fireplace will be added along the wall and the brick pavers will be replaced.

This hacienda has more chamfered wood grilles (a total of four) than the two earlier houses, but just one artistic fireplace, though two other false chimneys



suggest more. May frequently used false chimneys to soften the transition between different roof elevations.

Maid's quarters are attached to the garage, its colorful Mexican window grille facing the courtyard. The original doors have their white porcelain doorknobs, 19th-century antiques that May used beginning with his third home to recall



the ones used at Las Flores, his boyhood summer home and they became a common feature of his San Diego homes from then on.

The home was recently purchased and a full period restoration, including decorative painted finishes, weathered ceilings, tiles, and landscape is in process.



**Alexander & Nancy Highland House**  
**Year built - 1934**  
**2400 Presidio Drive**

George W. Marston, a prominent civic leader, philanthropist and the developer of Mission Hills, spotted May's talent early on. He gave May several residential lots to build on in the Presidio Hills section of Mission Hills. "He sold and I built four or five houses in the subdivision as a result of his generosity," May recalled in the early 1980s. Among these was the home of Alexander and Nancy Highland on a prominent, gently curving corner.



Built close to the street, this hacienda rambles along its curved lot, slowly unfolding picturesque architectural features – windows behind grilles, wooden doors with a raised zigzag pattern, a shapely chimney – to anyone passing by. It is an especially good example of making the most of a site and the quality that May called “ground contact.” In other words, the house seems to grow directly out of the earth, but to a limited height due to the visual weight of the heavily rusticated tile roof.

Closer inspection reveals a two-story rear section of the house with a romantic balcony overlooking the courtyard. This home is the first home in which May utilized a second story, he only built a small number of Monterey style homes.



Alexander Highland, May recalled, “looked at houses around town, and then he hired me to build a house in Presidio Hills. ... He built the biggest house I had ever built up to that point. ... The building permit was taken out for \$10,000,” May said, adding that he thought it was the most expensive permit issued in San Diego at the time.



Inside the hacienda, connected rooms follow angled wings that fan out and flow into each other through archways and doorways, with an occasional step up or down. This lineup is reinforced and the rooms are expanded by the furnished breezeway, which was enclosed by a previous owner. Original oak floors with decorative pegs alternate with newer tiled floors; the exposed wood beams and ceilings have been painted white.



Low rambling walls, quaint tiled roof, weathered beams, hanging ollas and peppers, tile paved patio, trees and flowers in profusion complete a perfect setting of the Mexican dwellings of long ago. - *Southern California Pictorial Life*, 1934





The brick paved *corredor* embraces the courtyard, where previous owners added a pool and additional paving replaced lawn. A variety of succulents and other plants selected by the owners cast dramatic shadows against the undulating stucco walls and are in perfect harmony with the architecture.



In 1998, the Highland House became the first home designed by May to be listed on the city of San Diego's Historic Register.

"I've gone by and looked at it," May recalled, referring to his habit of visiting former clients and their homes. "It really has stood up beautifully."



**Lorraine & Harold Tucker House**  
**Year built - 1936**  
**4366 Altamirano Way**

**B**y the time May got the commission to design the Tucker House on a challenging, pie-shaped lot, he was fully confident in his ability to transform any site into a special home for indoor-outdoor living. With its winding brick paths and six-foot perimeter walls capped with terracotta roof tiles, this romantic,

The early fathers of California had the right ideas; they built for the seclusion and comfort of thier families, for the enjoyment of relaxing in their homes. We want to perpetuate those ideals of home building. - Cliff May, interview, *San Diego Union*, January 1936



Monterey-style house exudes vernacular charm. This home and the nearby Highland House are rare examples of May's use of the Monterey style, which apparently occurred only during his tenure of building in San Diego.

May's brilliant site plan has the perimeter wall following the curve of the street and pushes the house to the back of the lot. This created a gracious courtyard and maximum open space between the two wings, and ensured the inhabitants of privacy. The original olive tree was planted as a fully mature specimen to create



the impression of antiquity, a common early practice of May's to accentuate his "historic" haciendas. The wooden double gate in May's trademark rustic style hints at the beautiful courtyard that lies beyond.

The two-story, splayed U-shaped house has larger, wider first-floor windows than the casement windows May used in earlier haciendas and they lack shutters. A porch roof shades some of these windows, a balcony off the master suite shades the others. Each wing culminates in a one- car garage with



character-defining wood carved doors and tile roof, adding to the look May was emulating of a ranch house that grew over time.

One enters the house in the center, through a door that lies at the foot of the tiled staircase and at one end of the living room. A large kiva-style fireplace made of hand-smoothed plaster is tucked into the corner of the stairway, facing into the living room. Two angled wings extend off the living room. One contains a formal dining room, kitchen and maid's quarters, where the original ceiling



finish and floors can still be seen. A new modular kitchen interior was also installed in the 1950s. The other wing houses a library and guest room with bath still boasting its original patinated tile that May recalls having purchased from the Batchelder Tile Company that May used after purchasing the Batchelder Tile Company and its entire stock.

Upstairs, the master bedroom is endowed with the warmth of another kiva-style corner fireplace, which shows the artistry of hand plastering, and sheltered by an open-beam ceiling. The original French doors admit ocean breezes and sunlight, and lead to a rare (for May) balcony that enhances the residents' enjoyment of the courtyard.

The hand smoothed plaster walls, which stretch from floor to ceiling without molding or baseboards, give the appearance of plaster over adobe bricks. Gone are doors that resemble planks; instead, May used mid nineteenth century style





four-panel doors with white porcelain knobs. The floors are paved in square or hexagonal terracotta tiles or oak planks with decorative pegs.

This house has had just two owners in 74 years. The second owner hired May's friend, San Diego master architect Samuel Hamill, to add two rooms to the second floor in 1957, honoring May's style.



Pictured in the garden in full bloom is Elizabeth M. Miller, she and husband Willis H. Miller, PhD were the second owners of the Tucker home and longest residents. He was the first San Diego County Planning Director from 1949 until the mid-60's. Photo c1960s, courtesy Mark Jackson





**Original homeowner unknown**  
**Year built - 1936**  
**3625 Dupont Street**

A plain wooden gate set in an arched stucco wall capped with terracotta tiles signals the way into this large, lush property and its hacienda. A small lantern with wrought-iron filigree hangs above the gate to light the path for visitors; a



low bench (*banco*) sculpted into the wall offers all a place to rest. Even before the gate opens on this property, where historical research has just begun, May has created a strong sense of place.

Once inside the gate, May had lots of room to establish a romantic stage set plucked from another time. Following the winding path through a shady garden





and up a few stone steps, we catch glimpses of the tile-roofed, four-bedroom hacienda. It gently embraces a large patio bordered by a free-standing garden wall with gurgling fountain.

Unlike May's earlier haciendas, this U-shaped home has two splayed wings, with the ends reserved for bedrooms and an attached garage. This design maximizes the courtyard space and is characteristic of May's approach to larger lots; he used variations of this concept throughout his career. The house is too large and too complex to be seen or understood from any one angle. Instead, we're encouraged to ramble along with it, across square Mexican tile pavers or wood flooring.

On the patio side, the house was originally buffered by a roofed *corredor*, now enclosed. The large, multilight windows installed during that renovation are compatible with but different from the house's largest original windows, which frame 16 glass panels and almost run floor to ceiling. Both window designs emphasize horizontality and pierce the house's white stucco walls, flooding the interior with sunlight. Windows, some of them framed by May's characteristically rustic wooden shutters, alternate with many glass doors, which offer outdoor access to most of the rooms.

Ornate, wrought-iron lanterns flank the pair of doors the current owner uses as the primary entrance (and painted a dark terracotta color to distinguish them from all the others). Across the *corredor*, in the area that was the breezeway, the hacienda's original front door now opens onto a newly designed spa and barbeque area. This double door exhibits a wonderful design that May favored, though this is the only example on this tour. It was a feature on his third (lost home) and on many of his other early San Diego homes. When its twin solid panels are open, an exterior wood door with an open worked, wide chevron-patterned grille casts long, exotic shadows.

The interior architecture, like all the homes on SOHO's tour, contrasts smooth, soft archways between rooms with the strong, linear patterns



of exposed Douglas fir beams. Here, the beams have been painted to match the walls.

The living room, with its sculptural fireplace on a long wall opposite a 16-light window, forms the hacienda's cozy centerpiece. An intimate dining room adjoins the living room and it too is flooded with natural light and has multiple doors.



Every room, in fact, looks out on mature landscaping, terraced patios or lawn, connecting the house to the lush outdoors.

This floor plan is nearly identical to a Ranchería-style home May built the same year in Bonita. According to a newspaper account at the time, he was once contemplating this design for his own home.

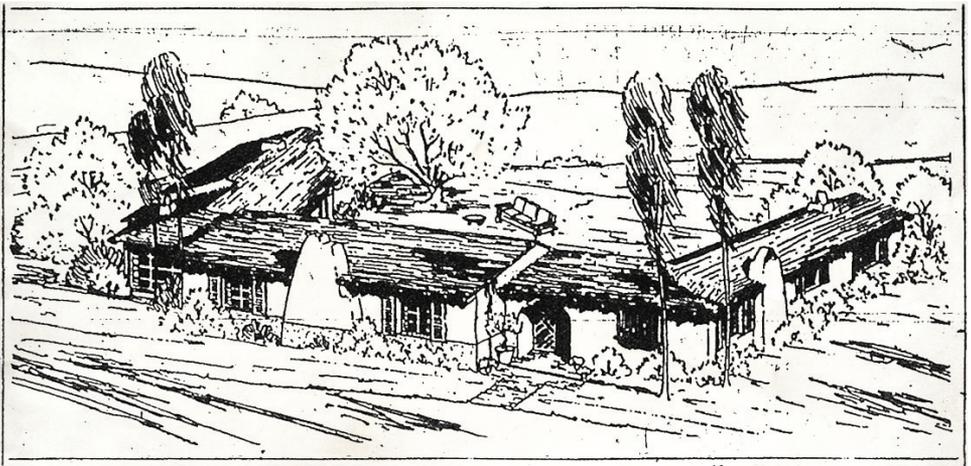
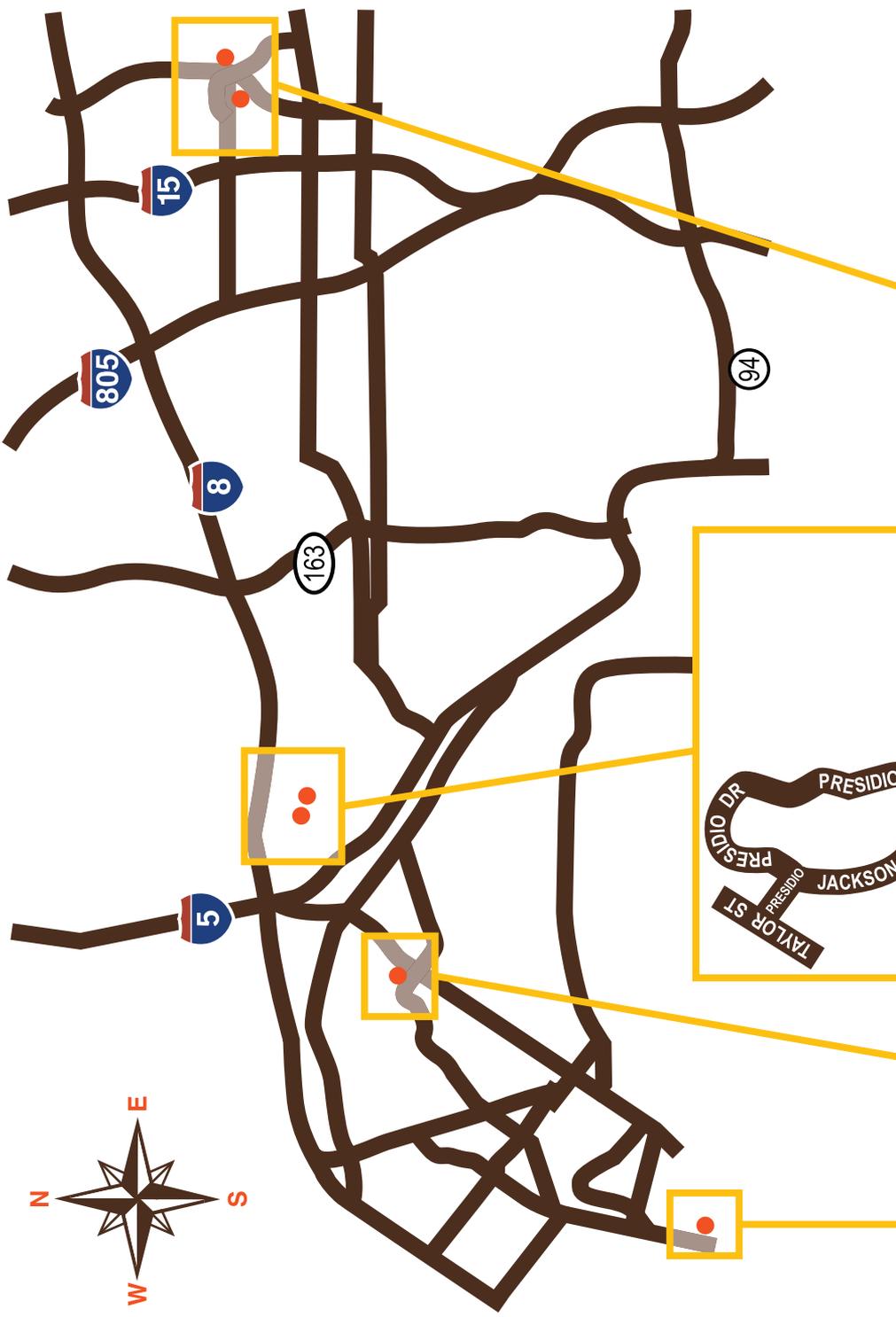
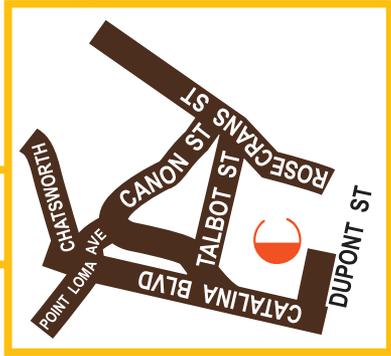
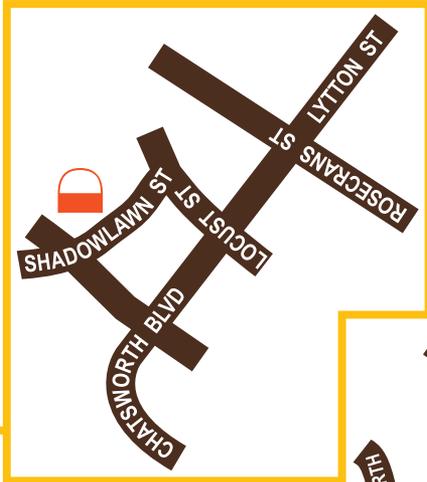
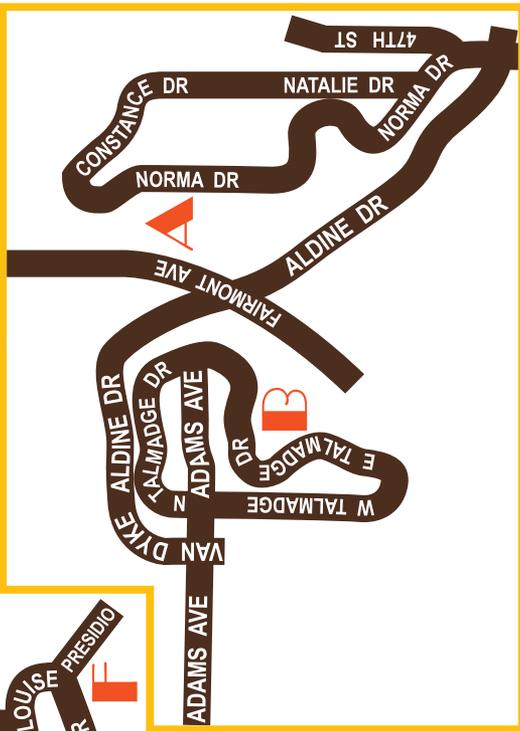
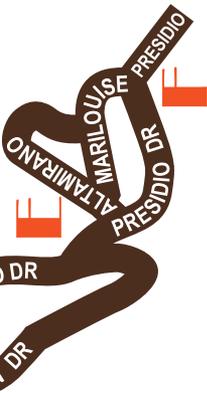


Illustration showing a nearly identical home May designed in Bonita for the Whalen family, 1935, *San Diego Union*

The courtyard in our type of house which I took a fancy to in my experience living on the Las Flores and the Santa Margarita ranches and visiting the Estudillo house and others, and being in those types of houses, I just inherently realized how much better the living was than in the typical house. So we keep making progress, but the ranch house has outlived them all. - 1983 from an interview by Marlene L. Laskey







- A** - 4725 Norma Drive
- B** - 4669 East Talmadge Road
- C** - 3625 Dupont Street
- D** - 3130 Shadowlawn Street
- E** - 2400 Presidio Drive
- F** - 4366 Altamirano Way

**TROLLEY PICK UP** at SOHO offices  
4015 Harney Street in Old Town

**“Preserving for California the  
architecture of its people.” Cliff May**



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