

STEVEN KEYLON  
1141 S. CALLE MARCUS  
PALM SPRINGS, CA 92264

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Dear HSPB,

I watched the video of the June HSPB meeting and the discussion of the Villa Roma. I hope I can help fill out some of the context for why Villa Roma is significant. I was the co-author, with Katie Horak, of the Historic Context Statement (HCS) "The Garden Apartments of Los Angeles." Villa Roma is an excellent example of the second wave of garden apartment communities that began appearing in the late 1950s and remained a popular type of development through the 1970s.

When Katie and I wrote the HCS, we cut off our research at 1955. That was the end of the first era of garden apartments in Los Angeles. But we knew there was a second wave and that it deserved further scrutiny. The garden apartment communities of the Coachella Valley fit into this theme, and I believe a similar study should be done on this type of building. After the all-female tribal leadership lobbied Eisenhower for long leases to monetize their vast land holdings, there were several outstanding garden apartment communities built in the Valley, the majority of them as a new type of ownership, the condominium. Starting with Desert Braemar in Rancho Mirage, this became a very popular and innovative way for the middle class to afford the leisure life of the desert.

The gold standard for CV garden apartment communities are those developed by William Krisel. He was both architect and landscape architect. I saw similarities between Baldwin Hills Village, where I used to live, and Sandpiper in Palm Desert. I asked Krisel about it and asked if Baldwin Hills Village had influenced him. He answered, "most definitely," and told me that before World War II, when he was an architecture student at USC, he would drive to the university from his home in Beverly Hills. He often stopped at the construction site of Baldwin Hills Village, fascinated. He said that when the students were creating working drawings using existing architecture as an inspiration, he went to Baldwin Hills Village to study features and used that for his inspiration. His design of Canyon View Estates influenced many other developments by other good architects like Charles Du Bois and Donald Wexler. Clarence Stein considered Baldwin Hills Village the most successful example of his Radburn Plan concept of garden apartment communities.

The garden apartments of the CV do get their inspiration directly from Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's Radburn Plan of the 1920s. The Radburn Plan included:

- Separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- A Super Block, with no or few through streets. Automobile circulation kept to the perimeter.

- Houses grouped around garage courts or cul-de-sacs for storing automobiles.
- Houses turned around, so primary rooms of residence face garden courts
- Park or recreation as backbone of community

At Villa Roma, these are all evident. Automobiles leave the main road and pull into a garage court. The site is a superblock with no through streets. The main living rooms face garden courts, which alternate with the garage courts. The backbone of the community is the swimming pool and community building, in this case, rather than a large green park. However, a large green park dominates the northwest corner of the site. I have attached an aerial photo of Villa Roma, showing how garage courts in yellow alternate with garden courts in green. I've also attached an image of a section of Baldwin Hills Village (which, at 68 acres, is of a different scale). You can see that both have these same features. These communities shouldn't be judged for their architecture alone. Stein and Wright argued that the architecture should be simple and subordinate to the site plan and landscape. This is true of the garden apartments of the CV too. These were developments deliberately planned to foster community, and I think you can see after the large turnout of passionate owners from Villa Roma, it still works today.

The post-1955 garden apartment communities tended to be denser than the earlier versions, but land was at a premium by then. There are so many good examples like Sandpiper, Sagewood, Desert Braemar, Canyon View Estates, Racquet Club Garden Villas, Canyon Estates, etc. Not all condominium communities developed in this era qualify as garden apartment communities, but Villa Roma does.

Best regards,

Steven Keylon



Villa Roma



Baldwin Hills Village