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PRESENTS

# Bankers Hill Historic Home Tour



March 18, 2012

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Photography & Design by Sandé Lollis

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Financial support provided by San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture.

Cover photo Bankers Hill c. 1888 courtesy Coons collection

# Introduction

The area of Bankers Hill on which our tour is focused is within the subdivision of Horton's Addition. As the areas developed around this portion of *New Town*, as it was known, it became one of the city's most fashionable places to live for bankers and other professionals, hence its name.

The prominent architectural styles were Queen Anne, Italianate, and Eastlake. A few notable grand survivors designed by the master architects of the day representing some of the finest Victorian homes in California are the Timken (1888), the Long-Waterman House (1889), and the Britt-Scripps (1887). Many more modest Victorians were also built and a few can still be found throughout the community.

During the early 20th century it continued to be a prominent area with a Who's Who of San Diego as its residents. Because of this massing of wealth and community leaders, the neighborhood contains major and significant works by the leading architects, designers, and builders of the day.

The highest concentration of Irving Gill homes in the city can be found here along with significant works by William S. Hebbard, Louis Gill, Frank Mead, Richard Requa, Emmor Brooke Weaver, Hazel Wood Waterman, Quayle Brothers, William Templeton Johnson, and many lesser known, but very talented builders whose collective work make Bankers Hill a San Diego community whose identity still remains uniquely San Diego.

The topography, with its many canyons and steep hillsides, presented architects with some of the city's most challenging sites, resulting in creative designs from San Diego's leading horticulturalists. Kate Sessions was a dominant force here, so close to her Park Nursery and to her friends and clients. A wonderful way to view this is by crossing the Spruce Street suspension bridge that spans Kate Sessions canyon. Built in 1912 it is the only bridge of its type in San Diego County. The bridge floats among treetops, gracefully suspended from steel cables anchored to concrete piers at either end. Designed by Edwin Capps this unique span was engineered to hold over 2,000 people.

Bankers Hill is a community rich with architectural and landscape designs from some of the most prominent of these professionals in San Diego's history. It is because of communities like this that San Diego remains one of America's most beautiful cities.

# Harrison Gray Otis House, 1911

Gustave A. Hanssen

3255 Second Avenue

The impressive, and well-proportioned English Arts & Crafts cottage was named after its second owner, Harrison Gray Otis (1852-1928), a West Point Calvary Officer. Colonel Otis lived in this house until he died in 1928; the Otis family continued to live here until they sold it in 1975. It is designated No. 173 on the City of San Diego's Register of Historic Resources.

Gustave Hanssen (1861-1944) arrived in San Diego from Iowa in 1908; he designed residential and commercial buildings Downtown, in Golden Hill and in Bankers Hill. The home was built on speculation by Allen F. Hunt, an official for the Santa Fe Railroad and is a rare surviving example of master architect Hanssen's residential work. The Otis House is one of Hanssen's more elaborate residential designs and was the first built on the eastern side of this block, which was called the *Lawyers Block*. Featuring complex massing, cantilevered second story overhangs that visually extend the lines beyond the compact plan necessitated by the narrow city lot. Other architectural features include a steep pitched roof, beautifully patterned half-timbering on the second and third story and the use of stucco and shiplap siding on the exterior of the house. The rectilinear house features a side main entrance that promotes privacy.





## Details of Note

- The prominent chimney features a unique, deeply recessed vertical window in the chimney letting light into a second floor closet.
- The double flued stucco chimney is further highlighted with a decorative band of bricks.
- The house possesses strong horizontal emphasis with wood trim, overhanging rooflines and graceful curvilinear brackets.
- Three balconies with quatrefoil cutouts in the railing provide decorative detailing.
- The quatrefoil design is repeated on the gable fascia board.
- The main entrance faces the south side of the lot and features a covered gable entryway and off-set porch with highly stylized capped pillars.
- The stained glass motif set in the front door is echoed in the leaded glass doors in the built in sideboard
- Historically appropriate paint colors





## **Raymond P. & Edith D. Low House, 1920**

**William Templeton Johnson**  
**338 West Thorn Street**

This elegant and well-proportioned Classic Revival grand home designed by master architect William Templeton Johnson rests on a prestigious corner lot. The Low House is the first of three William Templeton Johnson designs that were built in the 1920s for this upscale neighborhood. While most will know Templeton Johnson for his Spanish Revival style work, he did do several major works in this Classic Revival style. The rectangular shaped residence is Georgian in



form with a highly formal classic design and symmetrical spacing that is harmoniously situated.

The first owners were Raymond and Edith Low; he was a WWI aviator and later a successful local businessman. As a descendent of General Israel Porter Putnam, an American army general who fought with distinction at the Battle of Bunker Hill during the American Revolutionary War, perhaps that background was part of the appeal for the Lows to commission this classic style.

The home retains much of its original features, including exquisite detailed woodwork throughout the house. The grounds are manicured in

a style matching the home's pedigree and designed with the professional expertise of one of the homeowners. The hardscape surrounding the pool and courtyard areas have been improved and the garage converted into a guest house. The second floor sleeping porch has been converted into an artist studio. The kitchen has recently been renovated and the subject of several magazine home and kitchen articles.

## Details of Note

- Architectural details include a symmetrical façade with a low-hipped roof.
- Horizontal banding or stringcourse accentuates the horizontal lines of the building, separating the first and second story.
- Palladian window design, with large first-story casement and smaller second-story double-hung windows
- Exterior walls are smooth stucco over hollow clay tile
- Entry way pergola with Tuscan columns
- Original Malibu tile fountain
- Horticulturist Kate Sessions has been credited with the garden and courtyard design
- Originally grass, this elegant courtyard is paved in terracotta tiles and enclosed with an ivy espalier trained in a diamond pattern on a six-foot wall.





## **Sweet Guest House, 1914**

**Mead & Requa**

**3141 Curlew Street**

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and No. 200 on the City of San Diego's Register of Historic Resources, the Sweet Guest House was designed in 1914 by the architectural firm of Frank Mead



and Richard Requa for Adelbert “Del” Hiram Sweet and Amy Sweet. Del Sweet was the San Diego County District Attorney, elected in 1894. The house was used for visiting friends and family until 1926 when the first permanent resident moved in - Raymond Spear, a physician at the nearby Naval Hospital.

The Sweet House and the Sweet Guest House were the most lavish and finely crafted residence that Mead & Requa designed during their partnership, which lasted from 1912 to 1920. Both houses remained the

property of the Sweet family until they were bequeathed to the San Diego Historical Society in 1985, who then split the property and sold them in 1987. However, they still retain an integrated design that reads as an undivided entity and remain one of San Diego's most important historic private homes.

## Details of Note

- The home has several architectural features reminiscent of Irving Gill, with whom Frank Mead and Richard Requa both worked, including the smooth stucco walls, cubistic design, an unornamented parapet roof, casement windows, and the use of an arched entryway.
- Mead and Requa created a series of massive retaining plaster walls that ascend the slope and create a fortress-like grandeur that also provides a sense of drama and privacy.
- Mead is credited as the draftsman on this project with Requa acting as the structural design and project architect.
- Continuity with the main house is maintained through the use of the same plaster color and texture, mission tile over the windows and arches at the entrance porch.
- The entrance establishes a mood of remoteness and separation from the street.
- The impressive original garage doors with hammered iron nails and strap hinges present the visitor's first view of the house at the foot of the stairs.
- The original terraced gardens were designed by Paul Thiene (1880-1971), who worked with Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr.





## Deborah Szekely House, c. 1910 & 1953

### 3232 Dove Street

The Szekely House is named after Deborah Szekely who bought a modest c. 1910 board and batten bungalow on a large city plot in the early 1950s and embarked upon a mid-century remodel project wherein Szekely herself designed every detail.



Pacific Style is first mentioned in a 1959 *House and Home Magazine*. It is characterized by elements that are Modern and Asian influenced. Because there are other considerations in this house—that the original structure is early Craftsman and that the home is adorned with design elements and decorations that vary from Indian, to Asian, to American, an array of other artists with their hand in the mix. Pacific Eclectic is the style that best describes this unique home.

The home clearly reflects the owner's personal awareness and

appreciation of various world religions, philosophies, arts, and architecture. The artwork inside and out plays a key role in the feel of this home.

Duke and Rose Lovell, artists, designers and teachers sold the bungalow to the current owner Deborah Szekely. She is the founder of the world famous Rancho La Puerta resort in Mexico and the Golden Door in Escondido. Szekely is a creative individual with a keen eye for world-class art and design as is seen throughout her incredible garden and home. The hillside property has been lovingly transformed into a series of Japanese and English garden spaces that reflect her love of gardening and nature. The home continues to evolve as an expression of its organic style and nature.

## Details of Note

- The integration of the home and its garden is achieved through doors opening to deck spaces and large windows that are nearly floor to ceiling: indoors opening out, outside coming in.
- Sarah Brightwood, the homeowner's daughter and landscape designer, is responsible for the remainder of the impressive gardens.
- Landscape Architect Takendo Ari designed the Asian north garden.
- Works of art throughout the home and garden are by such noted artists as James Hubbell, Rhoda LeBlanc Lopez, Albert de Matisse, and others.
- Eclectic Style is one of many revival styles that proliferated in the 20th century: the organic nature lends itself to additions and changes over time.





## **Hirte Haus, 1923**

**Ray Alderson**

**2465 Curlew Street**

The 1923 Hans Hirte Haus is an excellent example of Mission Revival architecture, an asymmetrical house uniquely designed for a busy street with the main entry facing south for privacy, as well as for its commanding views of Downtown San Diego and the bay.



Hans Hirte worked for and later became president of the Wheeler J. Bailey Company, a prominent wholesale and retail building material company, located in downtown San Diego. This explains the high quality and variety of lighting fixtures, tile, and ironwork displayed in this home. The family owned the house for most of the 20th century, and remarkably it has retained nearly all its original historic features.

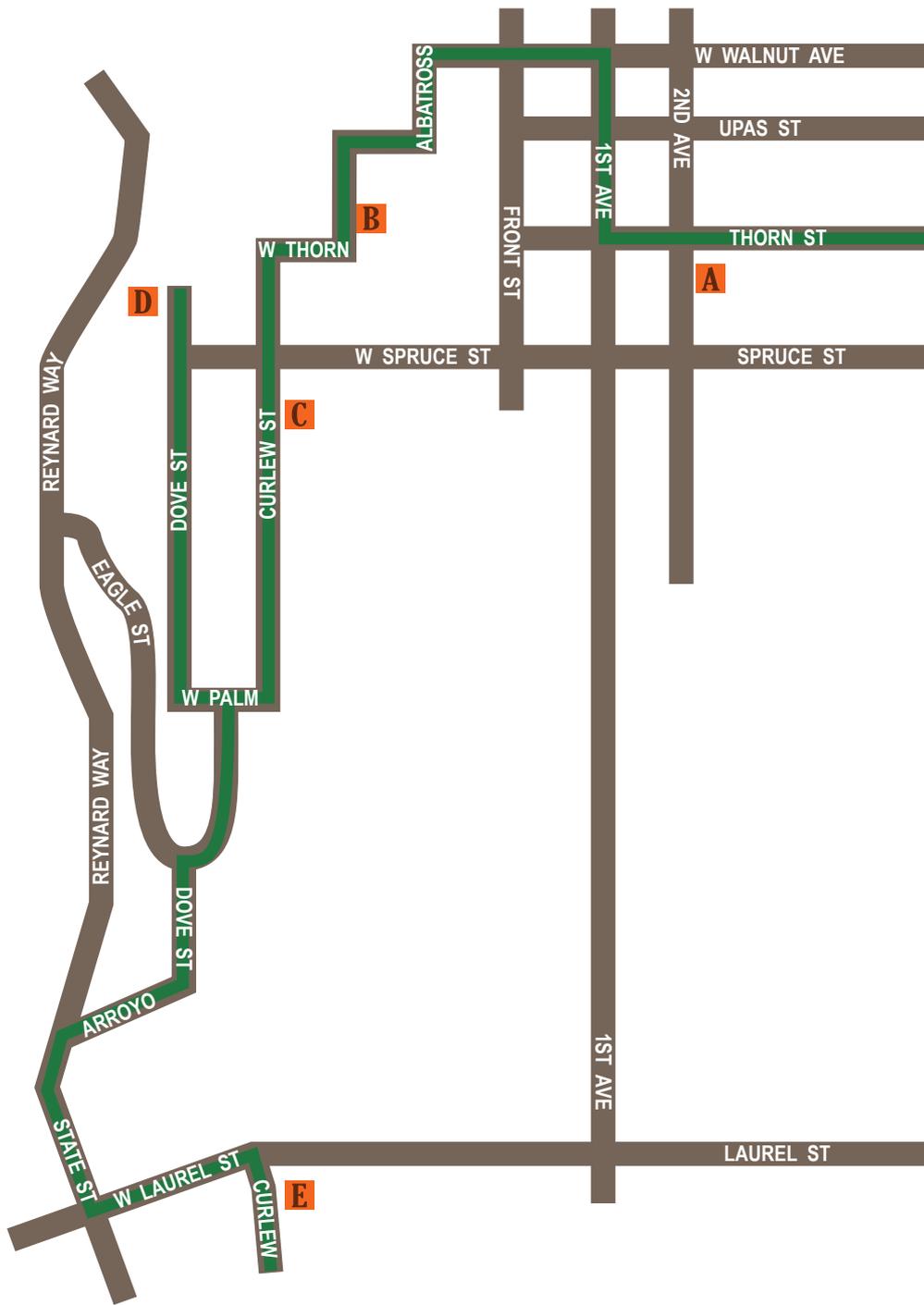
The house is also significant for its association with artist Charles A. Fries (1854-1940). Fries, a family friend, created an impressive

and perhaps the only known plaster relief mural in the history of the renowned artist's work. The mural depicts several atmospheric desert scenes. Fries, who was called the *Dean of San Diego Painters*, moved west from Cincinnati and his paintings of San Diego desert scenery are among the most sought after. Five Fries paintings originally adorned the walls; the current homeowners were fortunate to be able to retain one, which is displayed over the living room fireplace mantle that boasts the same Batchelder tile work of the exterior fountain.

## Details of Note

- The original exterior stucco floats above a tapestry brick foundation. The second-story with its low-hipped roof still has its original tiles.
- Wrought iron gates and doors custom made with the family name detail of an “H” as part of the intricate design
- A rare large Batchelder wall fountain welcomes visitors to the front entry.
- Original skylight was part of an innovative air circulation system.
- Expansive windows permit ample natural light into a largely Arts & Crafts interior.
- Note the two one-story homes across the street, Mr. Hirte built them repeating the same tile detail. These he sold with covenants to protect his view and the homes' integrity.
- Wheeler Bailey is best known today for having commissioned Irving Gill to build his La Jolla oceanfront home, as well as design and build its furnishings. These pieces can be seen at the Marston House Museum today.





**HQ** Marston House

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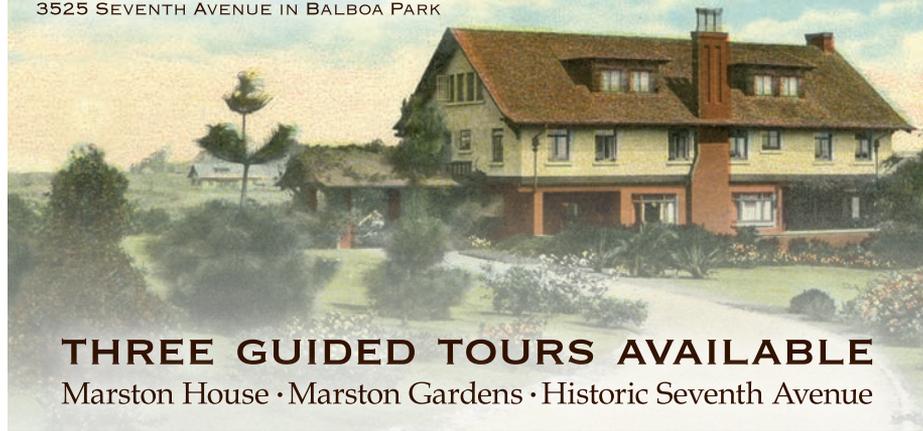
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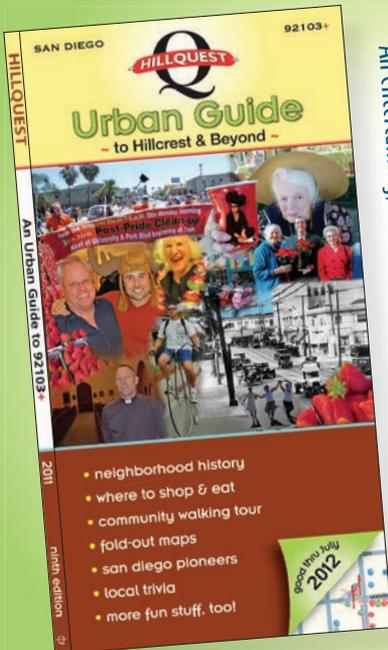
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO [SOHOSANDIEGO.ORG](http://SOHOSANDIEGO.ORG)**

# Who SOHO is and why what we do matters

SOHO was established in 1969 by a group of dedicated San Diegans in order to save one single house, but quickly found the need more pressing and began advocating to protect all San Diego's historic resources for future generations.

Today SOHO is one of the nation's largest and most successful preservation groups, and is recognized as a leader in finding real solutions for an ever-expanding region to allow growth while maintaining our unique community identities, and preserving the best of our architectural and cultural landscape past.

As a regional organization, we have played a pivotal role for over four decades in restoring, revitalizing, and protecting the historic sites of San Diego City and County.

SOHO manages and operates multiple historic sites including the Marston House & Gardens, Whaley House, Warner-Carrillo Ranch House, and our newly purchased Santa Ysabel General Store. As an institution we strive to show how preservation fuels the economy like no other by being part of the business community, serving the cultural heritage tourists and locals alike.

We know you love the historic sites and places that make up San Diego; isn't it time that you join SOHO and help us do the work that is important to you, your family, and generations to come?

Join SOHO today and help us protect the places that matter to you.



Through education, advocacy, and stewardship SOHO's mission is to preserve, promote and support preservation of the architectural, cultural and historical links and landmarks that contribute to the community identity, depth and character of our region.

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