

The Flonacher-Helis House
#27 Audubon Place

Architectural Rating: Blue
Construction Date: 1927-1928
Architect: Weiss, Dreyfous, and Seiferth, Inc.

Nomination Information

Date: April 19, 1979
Nominated by : Leah Thayer
Seconded by: Jane Ferguson, Renna Godchaux
Recommended by: Staff

Site Description: Square #1, Lot #27
6th M.D., 15th A.D.

Zoning: Rs-1, Lot Size: 188'9"2" x 95'0"5" x 189' 11" 7" x 100'

Owner: Mrs. William G. Helis, Sr. and Mr. William G. Helis, Jr.,

The nomination of this property was based upon its architectural significance and the fact that it was designed by a noted architectural firm. Each of the four areas of criteria used in determining landmark qualification, as outlined in City Ordinance #5992, MCS, will be examined on an individual basis in order to produce information upon which a final decision will be made whether or not to designate the property.

Architectural Significance

According to records in the Office of Conveyance, the land on which this building stands was acquired by Henry C. Flonacher in October 1926.¹ Real Estate Tax assessment books indicate that the house was built between 1927 and 1928.² The plans were drawn by Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth in November and December of 1926.

This Audubon Place house is probably the finest example of a Spanish Colonial Revival residence in the City. The beauty of its proportions and unique detailing is immediately evident, in fact, at the time it was built, its distinctiveness was recognized nationally by The American Architect. Photographs of the house were published in its August 20th, 1928 issue.⁴

The 1915 Panama-California Exposition in San Diego served to stimulate interest in Spanish derived architecture and ornamentation. By 1925 Spanish Colonial Revival architecture had spread nationwide, especially to areas of the country where the climate was suitable to its openness of plan. Spanish Colonial Revival architecture is characterized by the accentuation of ornament around the main entrance, assymetry, the juxtaposition of smooth with textured surfaces, and an orientation towards the outdoors.

The house in question presents a single story elevation to Audubon Place, however, the extreme rear section is two-and-a-half stories in height. The house is surfaced in smooth stucco, while the roof is covered by an overlapping double row of barrel tiles. The Audubon Place elevation is assymetrical with an arcaded porch to the left of the entrance. The arches of the arcade are slightly pointed and spring from columns with Corinthian capitals. The arcade is capped by an elaborate open work parapet. To the right of the entrance, two rectangular openings are placed on either side of a shouldered chimney. The wrought-iron grilles, or rejas, which completely cover these windows, alternate square with round bars and are topped with iron and copper scroll motifs. Terminating the right front elevation is an arcaded solarium set back a few feet from the rest of the house.

The focal point of the front elevation is the elaboratentrance portico which projects above the roofline of the house. Lavish ornamentation of cast stone composed of floral and animal motifs contrasts with the smooth plaster wall surfaces. The portico entrance is formed by a depressed arch which rises from compound column shafts. The space above this arched entrance is filled with cast-stone decoration which includes a pair of griffins set beneath a heraldic emblem surrounded by floral motifs. This wealth of ornament is enframed by a cast-stone moulding which begins at the height of the portico

column capitals and rises up to a cornice moulding set above the entrance arch. This cornice is topped by a pair of serpent-like creatures which support a shield with a crown placed above it. The upper section of the portico is formed by two Baroque inspired scrolls which rise up to a peak above the entrance. An urn surmounts the fanciful gable. The scrolls terminate at their bases in a large flower, from which garlands of flowers are hung. The decorative detail of this portico is derived from what is known in Spain and Mexico as the Plateresque style. This style was widely used on 16th and 17th Century structures, and drew its inspiration from the highly elaborate forms being used by silversmiths of the period.

The side elevation facing Freret Street reveals the complex asymmetry of plan and interior levels, as does the multiplicity of the roof planes. Window treatments are also varied and exquisitely detailed. The two rectangular openings in the far right hand sections are placed within blind arches. Within the arch and above the window is a decorative shield flanked by winged phoenixes. Below the four rectangular openings to the left of this pair of windows are Spanish tile window boxes supported by wrought iron scroll brackets. The remainder of the side elevation is composed of the service entrance, a garage and rear wing. Openings in this rear section are arched.

Spanish Colonial residential architecture is generally oriented to the outdoors, a feature particularly suited to our New Orleans climate. The Flonacher-Hellis house is essentially L-shaped in plan with the open space within the L elaborately landscaped with pools, patios, grottos, and gardens. A plan of the garden lists a total of 86 different plants, many of them rare and exotic, that were to be used in the original landscaping of the property. Rear balconies, windows and doors, and a colonaded loggia all connect the indoor with the outdoor living spaces. A high masonry wall surrounds the garden and ensures the privacy of the space.

Architect

The house at 27 Audubon Place is the work of the firm of Weiss, Dreyfous, and Seiferth, the most prominent architects in Louisiana in the 1920's and 30's. The firm was responsible for a large number of government buildings throughout the state, including Charity Hospital in New Orleans. Their most noted work is the present Louisiana State Capitol Building in Baton Rouge.⁵ The firm was especially adept at combining the simplicity of the then popular Art Moderne style with finely executed sculptural details, as evidenced by the State Capitol and the former Barnett's Furniture Store at 600 Carondelet Street. In terms of residential work, the firm designed houses in a range of historical styles, as well as in the Art Moderne style. The quality of their historicism is shown in this house and in Monteigne, an 1850's Italinatè house in Natchez which they transformed into a Federal Style house. The firm's work was prominently featured in an exhibition entitled "Louisiana Deco", held in the fall of 1975 at the Special Collections Division of the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.

Historic Personages - none

Social, Economic and Cultural History

This structure is an outstanding example of an early 20th century residence designed in an historic style. The use of various historical styles in residential architecture of this period enabled architects and clients to produce houses suited to many different tastes in design.

Footnotes

1. Conveyance Office Book 423, Folio 158
2. 15th Assessment District Books, 1926-1927, 1927-1928.
3. Plans are housed in the Special Collections Division, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.
4. American Architect. Vol. 134, pp. 279-280.
5. Vincent F. Kubly, The Louisiana Capitol, 1977.