

Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Hotel Valley Ho on the Scottsdale Historic Register

Hotel Valley Ho

6850 E. Main Street, Scottsdale, Arizona
Scottsdale Historic Register No. SHR –02-11
Zoning Case No. 7-ZN-2002

Background

An intensive survey of downtown Scottsdale was conducted by the City’s Preservation Division staff with assistance from Arizona State University interns, local historians and architects during the period 2000-2001. The goal of the survey was to identify those properties that might be eligible for listing on the Scottsdale Historic Register. Approximately 750 properties, built for commercial use, were studied with particular emphasis on those properties that related to Scottsdale historic development as an “Arts Colony and Tourist Destination.” The Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission and the members of the Commission’s Historic Register Committee periodically reviewed the research collected and conducted field studies of the survey properties. Their relative significance and integrity were analyzed and compared. As a result of this effort, approximately fourteen other individual properties and two collections of buildings were identified that merited further consideration for designation to the Scottsdale Historic Register for their association with important historic events and representation of the architectural influences that shaped Scottsdale development during the post World War II era. The Hotel Valley Ho was among those properties that were identified as having both historic and architectural significance and a high degree of integrity.

Description

The Hotel Valley Ho is a historic resort hotel complex located on 8.86 acres at the southeast corner of Indian School Road and 68th Street in Scottsdale, Arizona. The site is at the western edge of downtown Scottsdale’s 5th Avenue and Old Town shopping districts. The complex buildings are located on the north side of East Main Street, between 68th and 69th Streets. The three original buildings of the complex were constructed between 1956 and 1958. These are listed under Maricopa County Assessor parcel #130-11-089A. The buildings on a smaller parcel on the south side of East Main Street that are also part of the current hotel complex are not proposed for designation and were constructed later as a separate hotel.

The Modern style complex is characterized by a random arrangement of buildings across a relatively flat site. The property boundaries lack definition and the horizontal forms and use of concrete, brick, stone, and glass materials in the original buildings further reflect the organic quality of the complex. The Hotel Valley Ho has continually operated as a resort hotel since opening in 1956. Its largest building, with an entry off Main Street, contains the original lobby, bar, and restaurant. Guest rooms also open off single corridor wings and frame a landscaped interior area with patios and a pool. Two additional buildings in the same style and materials as the original structure were constructed to the northwest within two years of the resort’s opening, and contain additional guest rooms.

The complex is within walking distance of Scottsdale’s major downtown shopping areas. Grass expanses and traditional landscape features create a resort-like setting, which is further emphasized by the buildings’ setback from the roadways and open spaces with pathways between structures. Traditional resort amenities complement the setting and include tennis courts, pool, and an outdoor dining patio. Surface parking is adjacent to three of the property’s northern parcel boundaries, located between the roadways and resort buildings.

The original 1956 building is a free flowing, single and double story parabolic form with a strong horizontal emphasis. Its Main Street entry is marked by a vertical mass that contains an elevator shaft and extends over the porte cochere where guests arrive. A low ceiling entrance opens to a large volume interior lobby space, a feature used frequently by architect Frank Lloyd Wright to create a “sense of arrival” upon entering the building. The flat roof is made of heavy poured concrete with wide overhangs. Concrete pillars that extend to the basement provide decorative support for the building structure. The original exterior walls are constructed of masonry materials including desert stone and brick. The use of organic materials repeats inside where redwood ceilings and stone floor and wall patterns link the exterior entry area with the inside lobby space. Modern architectural features also include use of glass walls and glazing uniting indoor public spaces and guest rooms with the outdoors. Floating partition walls separate outside guest patios. Cantilevered balconies are another prominent design element. Special façade details include over one mile of precast geometric concrete panels designed in a motif described in newspaper accounts of the day as “Southwestern,” and “Indian”. Geometric metal forms also ornament the stair railings and roof eaves.

Two additional buildings with guest rooms were constructed in 1958 at the northwest corner of the property. These structures are two story, rectilinear forms sited parallel to each other, with double loaded rooms opening onto a central corridor. Like the original building, the concrete roofs are flat and their exterior walls use just a single material on any one surface, a tenant of modern design. These are constructed with the same brick, desert stone, and glass materials found on the main building. Precast concrete panels are also repeated on the balconies of the 1958 buildings.

History

The Hotel Valley Ho was built between 1956 and 1958 during the heyday of Scottsdale’s development as a major tourist destination. The decade after World War II had seen the expansion of a wide array of accommodations to lure vacationers and seasonal residents and by the mid fifties the area was well known as an arts colony with first-rate tourist amenities. These larger development patterns are fully described in a separate context statement.

The Hotel Valley Ho was built to be one of Scottsdale’s finest modern hotels, competing alongside the glitzy and well-known Safari and Mountain Shadows resorts. Scottsdale’s Safari Resort was demolished in the 1990s. When the Valley Ho opened for business in 1956 it was Scottsdale’s first European plan, year round hotel. The resort advertised large rooms and suites with private sun decks and individual snack-bar kitchens. It utilized distinctive masonry, concrete and expanses of glass that were features reflective of mid-twentieth century Modern architecture. In anticipation of future expansion, the original design of the structures included features such as an elevator shaft and a structural system that could support additional building mass. The design of the hotel’s grounds and its distinctive buildings was the work of Edward L. Varney and Associates, one of the most prominent local architectural firms of the period. The construction and operations of the complex were overseen by a well-known local hotelier, Bob Foehl and his wife, Evelyn.

A contest was announced in March of 1956 to find a name for the property that had a “westward flavor”, was easy to pronounce and had a relationship to the general area in which it was being erected.” The winning entry was selected because it typified Scottsdale’s location at the threshold of Paradise Valley, tied the new hotel to its parent, the Westward Ho Hotel in Phoenix, and had a melodious sound. Under the Foehl’s management, the Hotel Valley Ho attracted celebrities and other clientele that they had met through their resort operations in California. Becoming popular with the rich and famous almost immediately, Hollywood stars Natalie Wood and Robert Wagner held their wedding at the hotel in December 1957. Motorola also helped sustain early operations at the Hotel

Valley Ho by housing many of its new employees there while they looked for permanent homes. The resort soon gained a national reputation for its amenities and hospitality.

Significance

The Hotel Valley Ho is historically significant for its association with Scottsdale's development as a top rated arts colony and destination for tourists and for its modern, organic architectural style. It was the first year round resort to open up in the town and the first to employ "southwestern" architecture, bridging modern and western detailing, and expressing the cosmopolitan nature of Scottsdale. This is also the site where many celebrities and noteworthy guests stayed when vacationing in Scottsdale over the years.

The physical features of the three buildings that comprise the original complex north of Main Street are virtually unchanged from the fifties and continue to convey their historical associations. The single and double story structures have a strong, free flowing horizontal emphasis with flat, precast concrete roofs and wide overhangs. Cantilevered balconies and guest patios separated by floating walls open up through glass to outside spaces around the pool and resort grounds. The use of organic materials including desert stone and brick as well as precast concrete panels are very reminiscent of modern Frank Lloyd Wright inspired buildings and provide a distinctive identity.

The complex maintains a high level of integrity in all aspects of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The buildings are in their original location and retain their organization of space as a physical manifestation of their historic and long-standing use as a resort hotel. The organic design and materials are characteristic of mid-century modernism and are distinctive original building features. The Hotel Valley Ho's significance at both the local and national levels has been confirmed by Alan Hess, a well-known architectural critic, author and historian, who proposes that the complex might be the best remaining intact example of a modern fifties resort in the country.