



SAVE OUR HERITAGE ORGANISATION PRESENTS

Clairemont[★]

*"The Village
Within a City"*

SELF-GUIDED DRIVING TOUR



3034
CLAIREMONT DR

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Thomas & Bros. Auto Center, 1960
A. E. Chase

Clairemont: The Village within a City

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1940s, real estate developers Lou Burgener and Carlos Tavares purchased and planned to develop 1,000 acres of former cattle grazing land on a wind-swept mesa overlooking east Mission Bay into a modern suburban housing tract.

Tavares' wife Claire suggested that the new subdivision's layout should match its terrain, with winding streets and cul-de-sacs for children to play. Tavares and Burgener named the new subdivision "*Claire-mont*" in her honor.

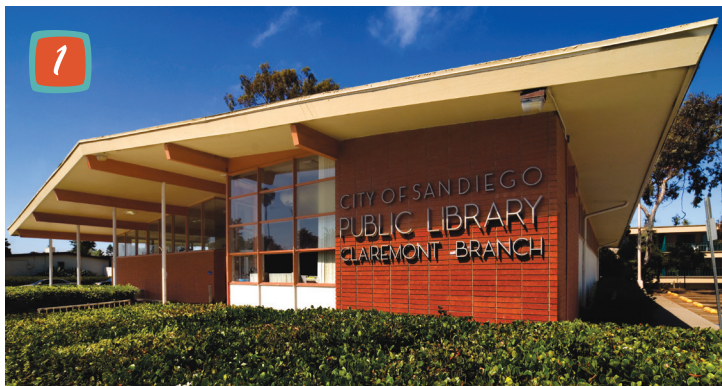
Recorded on October 16, 1950, Clairemont would become one of the largest postwar planned communities in the United States.

Clairemont's *Village within a City* suburban living concept would have far-reaching implications for San Diego as it stretched its city limits outward along new interstate freeways into outlying areas during the immediate postwar era.

Tavares and Burgener hired up and coming local architects Harold Abrams, Benson Eschenbach, and Richard George Wheeler to design Clairemont's first 500 new tract homes. Ranging in price from \$13,000 to \$20,000, they offered over 20 different floor plans, with large picture windows, brick fireplaces, ceramic tiled bathrooms, wood paneling, modern all-electric kitchens, and like most postwar suburban developments, two-car attached garages and large back yards.

Between 1953 and 1965 Clairemont Drive would become Clairemont's "Main Street," with the *Clairemont Quad* and the *Clairemont Square* retail centers at its southern and northern terminals. Commercial, educational, religious, and recreational buildings, as well as duplex homes and apartment complexes built during this time still line the three-mile-long thoroughfare.

While the majority of Clairemont's commercial and residential tract housing is relatively mundane and repetitive, the 62-year-old community contains some of the best surviving examples of Mid-century Modern architecture in San Diego. Designed by such noted Mid-Century Modern architects as Sim Bruce Richards, Robert J. Platt, Robert Des Lauriers, and Lloyd Pietrantonio Ruocco, they express optimism in a peaceful economically prosperous postwar America.



2920 Burgener Boulevard Clairemont Branch Public Library

Designed by Herluf Brydegaard in 1958, who also designed the three school buildings included in the tour, as well as the Clairemont High School.



3034 Clairemont Drive Thomas & Bros. Auto Center

Designed by A. E. Chase and constructed by S. W. Fabricating, Inc., of El Monte, California in 1960, this International/Industrial-influenced all-steel Type “J” 3-Bay Unit Service Station was originally the *South Clairemont Shell Service Station*. Often taken for granted, the neighborhood station played an important role in Clairemont’s automobile-oriented suburban lifestyle. Besides serving as a neon-lit sign tower, the garage’s abstract-shaped upright pylon separated the office and service bays.



3040 Clairemont Drive California Health & Fitness Center

Formerly known as the *Clairemont Health Center*, *Roman Spa*, and *Jack La Lane Health Spa*, this Richard Henry Wheeler-designed New Formalism-inspired health club opened in 1961. The son of noted San Diego architect William Henry Wheeler, Wheeler designed a number of Modern commercial buildings and residential homes in Clairemont between 1953 and 1970.



3050 Clairemont Drive Clairemont Drive Commercial Building

An Irving J. Kahn-backed commercial property, designed by Alan Daun and Arthur C. Hoelck, the RIKA Construction Company built this New Formalism-inspired building in 1963. Besides housing the construction company offices, the 2-story building included the *Clairemont Mel-O-Dee Room* cocktail lounge, the *Clairemont Tavern*, a liquor store, and various other businesses.



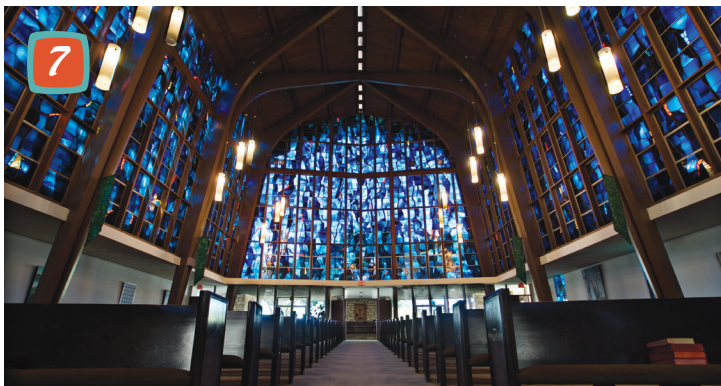
3103 Clairemont Drive Coral Bay Apartments

Constructed around 1958, the Buena Vista Garden Apartments offered 58-acres of Modern Tract Ranch-influenced garden apartment living amid semi-tropical landscaped courtyards. Many of its original renters were either active military or aerospace workers waiting to move into their new Clairemont homes as soon as they were built.



3401 Clairemont Drive Del Sol Academy

Herluf Brydegaard designed the former Whittier Elementary School in 1954. Clairemont's first elementary school, its Contemporary Modern design features angular massing, butterfly roof forms, industrial-type window openings, *brise soleil*, and open courtyards and playgrounds typical of San Diego's postwar elementary, middle, and high schools.



3502 Clairemont Drive
St. Mark's United Methodist Church

Situated on the site of the *Airport Café* (Clairemont Drive used to be private airfield), Hal Whittemore & Assoc. designed the church's towering Organic Geometric-style sanctuary in 1962. John Wallis of Pasadena installed the abstract-modern German-imported Art Glass Windows. Sculptor Peter Bolhuis did the intricate altar and pulpit carving, while David Frist carved the choir loft face and memorial columns in 1971 and 1997. The Administration and Classroom building was added in 1966.



3605 Clairemont Drive
(South) Clairemont Recreation Center

Sim Bruce Richards, AIA designed this Ranch-influenced Contemporary Modern style building in 1957.



3650-3670 Clairemont Drive
Clairemont Drive Medical Center

Built ca. 1955 as the Clairemont Medical-Pharmacy, by 1958 this Tract Ranch-influenced Modern professional medical complex contained 38 licensed physicians and dentists, as well as a pharmacy.



3799 Clairemont Drive

George W. Marston Junior High School

Another Herluf Brydegaard-design, this 1955-built Ranch-influenced Contemporary Modern Style school was named in honor of George Marston, San Diego pioneer, philanthropist, historic preservationist and environmentalist, although he had very little to do with Clairemont's historical development.



3904 Clairemont Drive

Tune Craft Auto Center

The Nigg Engineering Corporation of Covina erected this former *Esau Richfield Service & Gasoline Station* in 1958. An excellent surviving example of an International /Industrial style-influenced standard late-1950s Richfield Oil Company service station, it features cantilevered flat-roofed canopies projecting 90 degrees out from its central office/service bay over strategically located gas pump islands.



3219 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard

First Baptist Church of Clairemont

Whittier architect David L. Mitchell, AIA, designed the church's futuristic Abstract Modern "Google" style hyperbolic paraboloid sanctuary in 1967. It replaced a 1956 sanctuary that Mitchell also remodeled and converted in 1967 into part of the present Social Hall/Education Building.



4616 Clairemont Drive North Clairemont Branch Library

Noted San Diego architect Robert J. Platt designed this “Googie”-style library in 1960. The building’s dominant design feature is its plate roof, which seems to float above the reading room.



4002 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard Bank of America

Richard George Wheeler designed the former Security Trust National Bank in 1958. Its design and construction incorporates both modern and primitive building materials: plate glass curtain windows; and irregular coursed stone rubble walls.



4271 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard Clairemont Lutheran Church

Robert Des Lauriers designed this Contemporary Modern style church’s sanctuary’s segmented roof and stained glass windows to resemble the pages of “an open bible.” Completed in 1965, the church is one of 67 that Des Lauriers designed throughout San Diego County between 1958 and 1986, the last being Clairemont’s *Abu Bakr Al Siddiq Mosque* on Balboa near the 163 freeway.



5064 Clairemont Drive
North Clairemont Fire Station No. 27

Built at a cost of \$51,400, this is the home of Fire Engine Company 27, which has protected all of West Clairemont and surrounding areas since 1959.



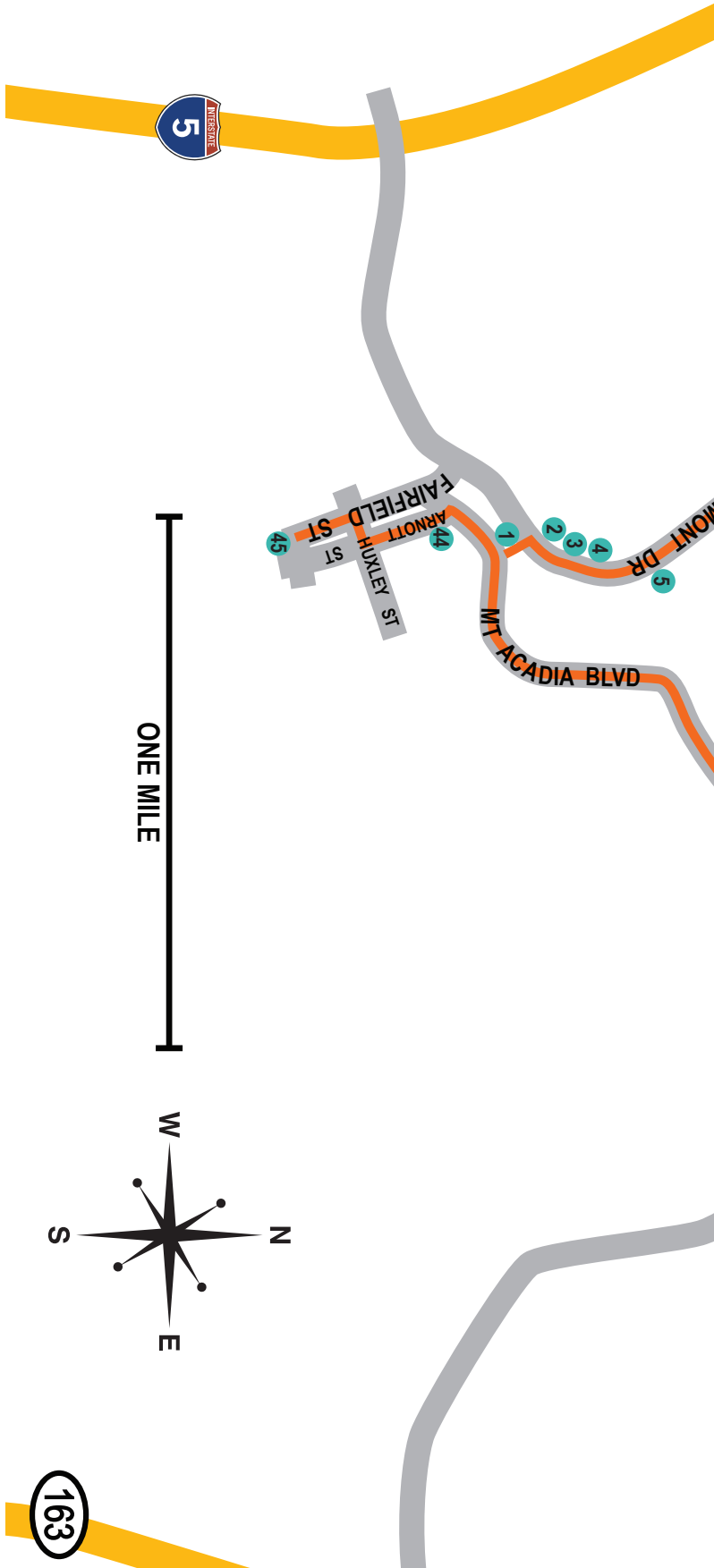
4324 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard
Northminster Presbyterian Church

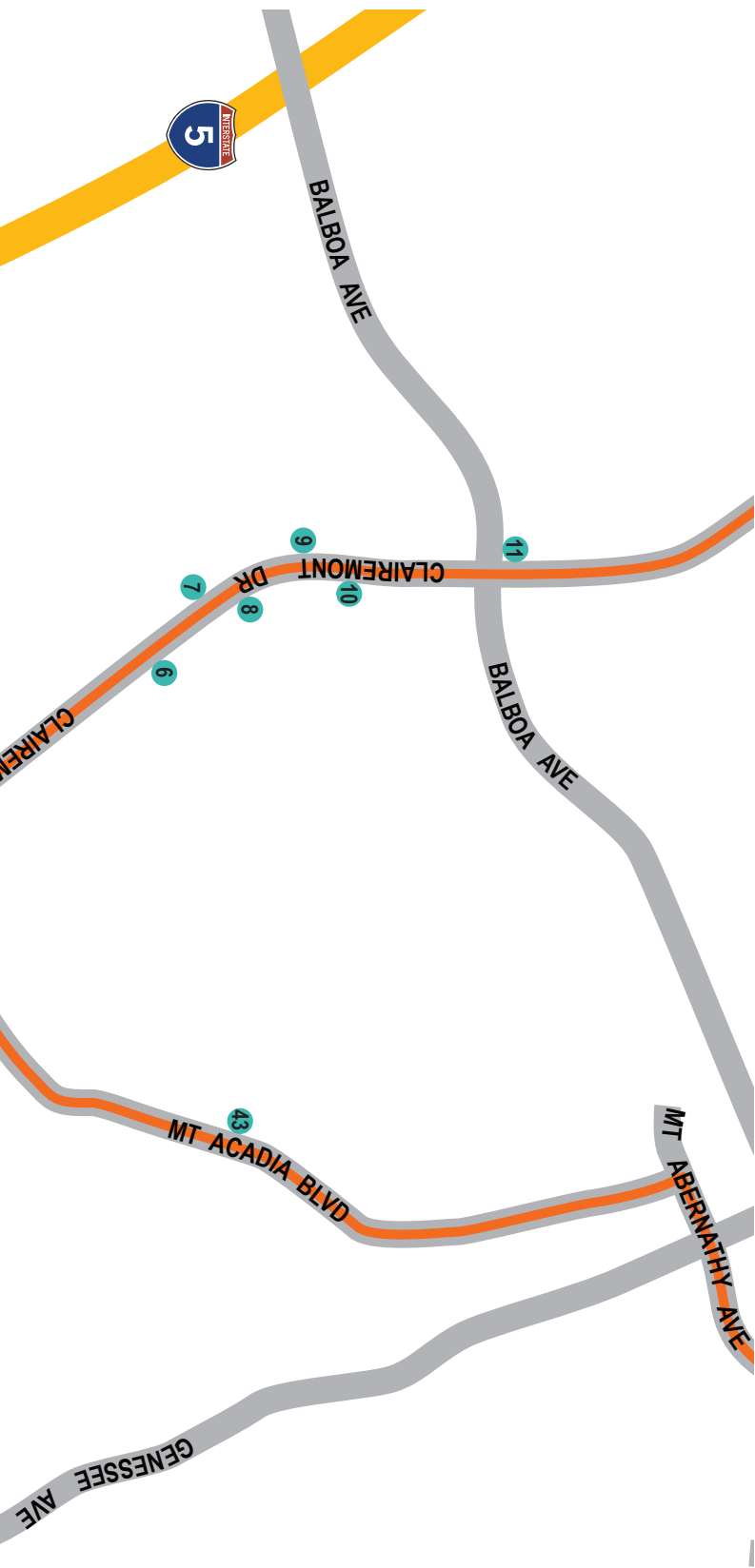
Another fine example of a 1965 Robert Des Lauriers-designed church, it features modern and traditional building materials and construction techniques mixed into a cohesive Modernistic Abstract Expressionistic form.

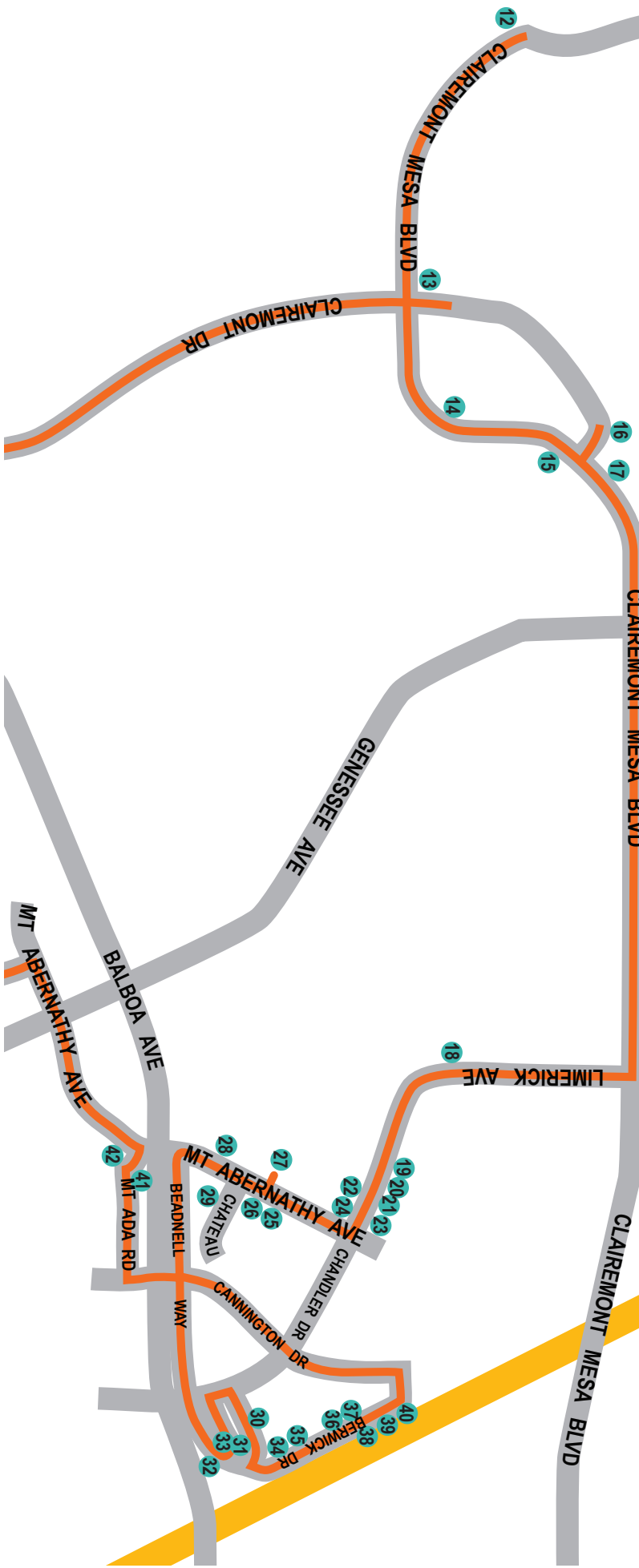


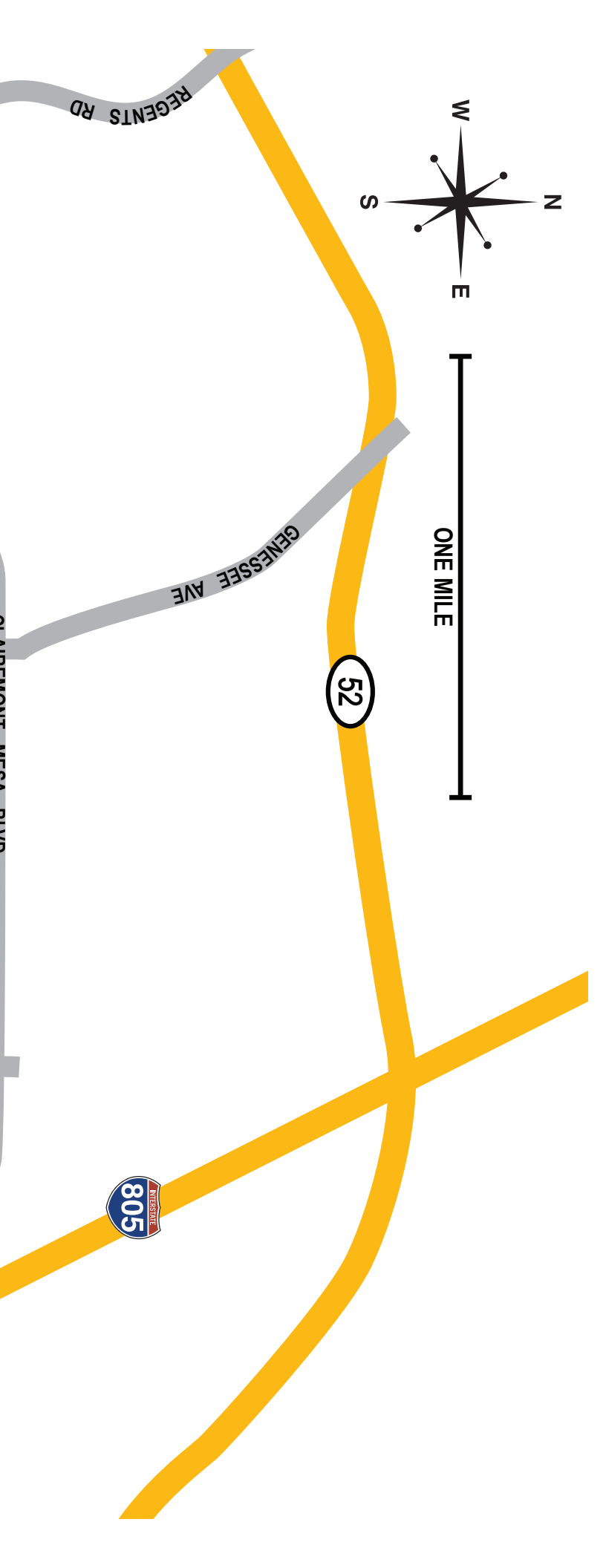
4690 Limerick Avenue
Sequoia Elementary School

Named after the famous Cherokee who invented an alphabet for his people, this is another of Clairemont's Contemporary Modern public schools. Thomas Erchul, AIA designed the school in 1960. The southeast-facing rafters of inverted chevron roof form a *brise soleil*.









American Housing Guild Pacific Style Homes I

Attributed to architect Henry Hester, this is one of two groupings of 1965-built Japanese-inspired Pacific Style Modern Tract Ranch homes. (#19-26)

19 5534 Chandler Drive



5554 Chandler Drive

21 5626 Chandler Drive

22 5755 Chandler Drive

23 5756 Chandler Drive

24 5815 Chandler Drive

25 4379 Mt. Abernathy Drive



4373 Mt. Abernathy Drive



5708 Abernathy Way

First Horizon Homes Contest Winner

This 1962-built 1,639 sq. ft., home's unique design features include a thin-shell concrete hyperbolic paraboloid roof, and the first use of mortar-less grout lock masonry. Completed at a cost of \$20,000, the 4-bedroom 2-1/2 bath house also has or had a hyperbolic paraboloid tree house in the backyard.



4266 Mt. Abernathy Avenue

Clairemont Mortuary and Crematorium

In 1963 Victor L. Wulff designed this Abstract Expressionistic style mortuary and crematorium for Charles and Gloria Robins. Erected by the Tavares and Nielsen Construction Companies, the building's design is another example of the juxtaposition of primitive building materials like cement-mortared stone rubble and rough-surfaced tongue-and-groove wood siding into Modern abstract forms. The mortuary chapel's towering roof resembles that of a Malayan temple.



5855 Chateau Drive

Fire Station No. 36

Built at a cost of \$101,000, Station 36 has served East Clairemont and the surrounding area since 1969. It is also responsible for repairing and maintaining approximately 450 Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) and approximately 1,400 Air Cylinders used by City of San Diego and Poway firefighters. These portable air units supply breathable air for when firefighters enter oxygen-deprived environments contaminated by smoke, toxic gases or other air-borne hazardous materials.

American Housing Guild Pacific Style Homes II

This second scattered grouping of ten 1962-64-built Pacific Style Modern Tract homes is also attributed to Henry Hester. (#30-40)

30

6846 Boxford Drive

32

4421 Berwick Drive

34

4560 Berwick Drive

36

4670 Berwick Drive

31

6968 Bettyhill Drive

33

4424 Berwick Drive

35

4614 Berwick Drive

37

4676 Berwick Drive



4695 Berwick Drive



4737 Berwick Drive



4747 Berwick Drive



6135 Balboa Avenue

International House of Pancakes (IHOP)

Along with the Bob's Big Boy (now Coco's) Clairemont's IHOP was (and still is) the place to go, particularly after church on Sundays, first dates, and after the prom. Designed by North Hollywood architect Bert R. Levine in 1969, this may be the only surviving A-frame IHOP in San Diego County.



4124 Mt. Abraham Avenue

St. Catherine Labouré Roman Catholic Church

Alfonso Macy, AIA designed the original Abstract Expressionistic style Sanctuary and Parish Office buildings in 1965 and 1967, respectively. Artist James T. Hubbell designed the original Baptismal Font and iconic images inside the sanctuary in 1965. Hendrick & Mock and Tony Garczynski remodeled the Sanctuary in 1985-86. Joe Gomulka designed and installed the Art Glass Windows in 1985.



3520 Mt. Acadia Boulevard

The Potter's House Christian Fellowship Church

Formerly the Clairemont Family Reformed Church, Fullerton architect Norman S. Johnson designed this linear Abstract Expressionistic/Geometric style church complex in 1960. Its pastor, the Reverend Syd Sybrandy of Buena Park oversaw its construction.



2847 Arnott Street

Alvin E. & Maxine Green

Constructed ca. 1952 for National Register salesman Alvin E. Green and his wife Maxine, this Contemporary Modern style home is one of the Clairemont's oldest. Its inverted chevron roof appears to float above the plate glass windows and concrete brick walls. An integrated *porte cochere* extends out over the north concrete driveway.



2550 Fairfield Street

Pioneer Ocean View United Church of Christ

Lloyd Pietrantonio Ruocco, the "Father of San Diego's Postwar Modern Architecture," designed Clairemont's first church in 1954. Fred Meyer, Ruocco's on-site supervisor (and still-active church member) and members of the then Pioneer Community Congregational Church, reportedly hand-carried and set the sanctuary and reflective garden's uniquely laid Brick Expressionistic style walls. Situated along a narrow promontory, the church grounds offer a spectacular ocean view of San Diego and Mission Bays, as well as the Pacific Ocean.

Thank you

Clairemont Lutheran Church
First Baptist Church of Clairemont
Northminster Presbyterian Church
Pioneer Ocean View United Church of Christ
St. Catherine Labouré Roman Catholic Church
St. Mark's United Methodist Church
The Potter's House Christian Fellowship Church

City of San Diego Libraries -
Clairemont and North Clairemont branches

Clairemont Mortuary and Crematorium

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SOHO's ModCom

Save Our Heritage Organisation's Modernism Committee focuses on and promotes the appreciation and preservation of local historic 20th-century architecture and related cultural resources.

We produce architectural tours, exhibitions and lectures; research and nominate buildings for landmark designation; and we serve as advocates for Modern architecture, which often comes under threat by the pressures of development and insensitive remodeling.

ModCom meets monthly. Interested? Go to SOHOsandiego.org and join our Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/SOHOsDModCom>

Join SOHO today!

Since 1969, Save Our Heritage Organisation has led the community as a powerful catalyst for preservation by raising awareness and appreciation of our region's architectural and cultural heritage. All donations to SOHO support our mission of preservation.





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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