

## VRG – CPF Submission 2023

### Overview Summary of the Project (40 words maximum) \*

This Class I HALS Report for the Virginia Robinson Gardens was prepared by a dedicated team of professionals, working largely on a pro bono basis. The project includes large-format photographs, 44 sheets of drawings, and a 163-page written report.

### Project Narrative (150 word maximum) \*

- The Virginia Robinson Gardens is a 6.2-acre botanical garden, historic landscape, and residence. The property is owned by Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation and jointly managed with the Friends of Robinson Gardens.
- This HALS documentation represents a comprehensive survey of the development of the Virginia Robinson Gardens and includes historical hardscape plans and planting plans, site sections, fountain details, site furnishings, and site analysis. The project also includes an inventory of the site's existing hardscape, planting, and site amenities. Large-format photographs document important aspects of the site. A written history provides comprehensive scholarly documentation.
- Professional landscape architects, designers, photographers, historians, and many others contributed thousands of pro bono hours to complete this project.

### Why is the project important to the community? (250 words or less) \*

- This HALS report is important to the Virginia Robinson Gardens operating staff and Friends as the basis for ongoing efforts to preserve, rehabilitate, and restore a significant cultural resource.
- The report provides carefully-researched historical information that will be used in docent training for educational and interpretive programs. These are important resources to schoolchildren, and the general public community, which are made available throughout the year.
- The Southern California landscape preservation community, consisting of academics and professionals, and the preservation community in general, has access to the report's documentation through the Library of Congress, which is important for use in preservation and design research.
- The report will provide foundational material in the goal of becoming an accredited house museum, which will make important contributions to understanding the nuances of 20th century architecture and design arising in the country-place era.
- The report demonstrates to the surrounding Beverly Hills community and the County of Los Angeles that the resource is significant and worthy of preservation and accurate interpretation.

### Project Significance

Is the site listed or determined eligible for the National or California Registers, or local landmark, historic district or inventory?

National Historic Landmark

XX National Register of Historic Places

California Register of Historic Resources

XX Locally Designated Landmark

Other / None

Describe the site or building's HISTORIC significance (i.e. what makes the project significant as an historic site) (150 word maximum) \*

Please highlight the historical significance of the project site over the significance of your work with the project.

The estate of Harry and Virginia Robinson is highly significant within the history of early twentieth-century landscape design, fitting squarely within the background context of artistic and political

influences arising during the country-place era. The property holds significance as a garden estate property that evolved during the early development of the City of Beverly Hills. It is also significant as a place where the highly personal vision of its original owners melded botanical experimentation, intellectual curiosity, and an eclectic design aesthetic that served as a stage for engaging with members of the artistic and political elite of Los Angeles for nearly seventy years.

Participants of significance who contributed to the development of the estate include Nathaniel Dryden (architectural designer); Charles Gibbs Adams (landscape architect); Dodd & Richards (architects/engineers); Benjamin Morton Purdy (landscape architect); and Morgan "Bill" Evans (landscape architect).

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Describe why the project deserves an award, specifically addressing work conducted by your team that is outstanding or of an exceptional nature? (250 word maximum) \*

Please highlight the significance of the project over the significance of the historic structure or site.

This HALS documentation represents thousands of hours of fieldwork, research, and document preparation, performed largely on a volunteer basis. Even when Covid restricted access to the site and wreaked havoc with volunteers' schedules, the core group persevered, determined to prepare comprehensive documentation and historical research, as promised to the Friends of the Virginia Robinson Gardens. The efforts and deliverables will greatly supplement the the Friends' application for museum status, and represent timely documentation of the retiring superintendent's trove of institutional knowledge acquired over the last twenty-three years.

The team included a dynamic combination of over eighteen professionals and was supported by local landscape architecture and preservation graduate programs. The HALS documentation process coincided with the completion of a recent reorganization and digitization of extensive archives, making possible a thoroughly researched history of the site, the correction of handed-down myths and stories, and the establishment of a clear timeline of the development of the site. This project illustrates the collective will of a passionate group of professionals to highlight and preserve a valuable resource in Los Angeles. It has also cemented a core group of dedicated professionals who recognize the importance of documenting and preserving precious and fragile landscapes for future generations.

What were the project's goals and objectives? (community, intangible assets, etc.)  
– 150 word maximum \*

- The goals of the project were to provide a highly detailed archive of information that forms the basis for enhanced educational and interpretive opportunities, assists in researching the historical background for a forthcoming museum application, and enhances staff capabilities in managing, rehabilitating, and preserving the resource.
- The objectives of the project were to prepare Class I HALS documentation for submission to the Library of Congress: write a thoroughly-researched history of the property and its original owners; prepare historical and existing conditions drawings; amass and analyze photographic historic evidence; and photograph existing conditions of the site.

If the project is a Cultural Resource Report/Study, how is report being used within the community? (150 words maximum, optional)

The report is being used within the community:

- as the foundation for submission of a museum application, which will focus local and regional interest on this public resource;
- as a document for guiding resource protection and management decisions;
- as a resource for interpretive and education activities.
- as a deeper dive into research to correct long-held-myths, leading to docent training scripts being revised;
- as a site management tool, in particular planting and hardscape evaluation, and rehabilitation.

Any other information the Applicant would like the Jury to receive? (Optional)

- This project started in October, 2019 and was completed in January, 2023.
- This project was an opportunity for a group of professionals to learn how to do a full HALS documentation by experience. The goal was to provide detailed plans illustrating all hardscape and fountains, as well as accurate plant identification and location documentation for the entire six-acre site.
- Original watercolor sketches capture the feeling of the site and have been used by the Friends for fundraising notecards.

Does this project benefit the community by one or more of the following measures... Increasing accessibility (financial, equity, etc.); Assisting underserved populations; Improving quality of life for residents; Stimulating economic vitality and job creation; or other outcomes? (250 word maximum)

- The project increases access to a high quality educational experience, for all members of the public. As a publicly-owned property, underserved populations of schoolchildren throughout Los Angeles County have free access to the site throughout the year. All benefit from the meticulous research and documentation that enhances understanding of the site.
- The project has established opportunities for students in graduate programs to gain real-life experiences and contribute to future job opportunities.
- The project will assist the Friends of the Robinson Garden in achieving museum status, which will lead to opportunities to access funding for project restoration and rehabilitation.
- The project enhances public access, awareness, education, understanding, and appreciation for the beauty and uniqueness of the site.