



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Villa Riviera

other names/site number Villa Riviera

### 2. Location

street & number 800 East Ocean Boulevard

not for publication

city, town Long Beach

vicinity

state California

code CA

county Los Angeles

code 0317

zip code 90802

### 3. Classification

#### Ownership of Property

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

#### Category of Property

buildings

district

site

structure

object

#### Number of Resources Within Property

##### Contributing

2

0

0

0

0

##### Noncontributing

0 buildings

0 sites

0 structures

0 objects

0 Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

NA

Number of contributing resources previously

listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

*[Signature]*  
Signature of certifying official  
California Office of Historic Preservation

6/11/96  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

Other, (explain:)

*Edson H. Beall*

7-25-96

entered in the  
National Register

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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## 6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic:

Multiple Dwelling

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic:

Multiple Dwelling

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## 7. Description

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th Century & 20th Century Revival

Other: Chateausque

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Stucco

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roof Copper

other

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### Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Situated on the southeast side of downtown Long Beach, the Villa Riviera is a fifteen-story apartment building located at the southeast corner of East Ocean Boulevard and the present day Shoreline Avenue. Designed in the Chateausque style by architect Richard D. King, the building is an obtuse U-shape in plan. A steel framed, reinforced concrete structure measuring 277 feet in height, the Villa Riviera is completely symmetrical in plan, massing, and fenestration. Built into a small bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the building's wide "U" faces northwest, framing a U-shaped driveway and landscaping. On the southern side of the apartment building sits a two-story parking garage topped by a roof terrace. Constructed of concrete, the garage has a capacity of 200 cars and is connected to the main floor of the apartment building by a concrete bridge. Although both early and recent rehabilitation projects have altered some interior spaces, the integrity of the building is almost entirely intact.

Organized in a classical tripartite composition, the Villa Riviera's facades feature a relatively plain one-story base, a slightly more detailed shaft, and a highly elaborate capital consisting of its steeply pitched roof and centered pinnacle. The building is clad throughout in smooth stucco accented with cast stone and is topped by a hipped roof finished with copper.

The main entrance is centered on the primary facade which faces northwest. The base of the building on this facade consists of a double-height first story featuring large, storefront style fenestration separated by wide pilasters. The top of the first story is banded by a simple but wide cornice which wraps the entire building and features inset panels of cast stone. The main entrance is surrounded by a decorative cast stone enframement which is topped by a pediment with an heraldic crest. A canvas canopy has been set into this enframement and the original double doors have been replaced with plain, metal-framed glass. On both the southwest and north facades of the building the first story supports a small patio accessible from the second story of the building.

Because the building is set into a bluff, its base at the southeast facade extends for two stories below the primary facade's first story. At this part of the base, the pilasters of the primary facade are transformed into modified flying buttresses. Fenestration continues to be regular, although this portion of the base features smaller casement windows at the first floor, basement, and subbasement levels.

The shaft of the building is set back slightly from the base. Decorative detailing includes cast stone veneer quoining at the building's corners, narrow pilasters between many of the windows, and two stringcourses, one running between the fourth and fifth stories and the other running between the tenth and eleventh stories. Fenestration is

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regular and symmetrical. Above the first story most windows are rectangular steel framed casements with eight lights. On the primary (northwest) facade windows follow a pattern consisting of a group of three windows, a bay with two regularly sized windows and a smaller window on either side of the bay, a group of three, another bay, and another group of three. The cup of the building's "U" features a bay with three regularly sized windows and two smaller ones on either side of the bay. Windows on the second story are separated from those directly above them on the third story by slightly recessed decorative panels, as are those of the third story from the windows of the fourth story. The stringcourse between the fourth and fifth stories wraps the entire building. It is a wide band which begins at the top of the fourth story windows and ends at the base of the fifth story windows. It is relatively plain, decorated only by strips of molding at both the top and bottom. The stringcourse separating the tenth and eleventh stories is much smaller and merely consists of a band of molding running directly beneath the eleventh story windows. It too wraps the entire building. Where the pilasters meet these stringcourses they end in bases and capitals similar to those found on Corinthian columns.

The capital of the building begins at the fourteenth story where a cast stone balcony wraps the building. Large brackets regularly spaced between windows at the thirteenth story support the balcony above. The face of the balcony features the same ornamentation found throughout the building's exterior: recessed panels of cast stone. Behind this balcony the building is again slightly set back. A cornice runs along the top of the fourteenth story behind which the building is again setback to make room for small balconies at the fifteenth story. These balconies are formed by the tops of the bay windows which end at the fourteenth story and at the corner of each balcony sits a large stone gargoyle. The only windows on the fifteenth story face onto these balconies and are topped by dormers. The edge of the building's parapet is trimmed with a plain molding which also runs along the top of these dormers.

The steeply pitched hipped roof is clad with copper cresting in the form of trefoils along the ridge. A plain stucco covered chimney pierces the ridge line on both the southwest and north wings. At the cup of the building's "U" sits the Villa Riviera's most prominent feature, the hexagonal pinnacle. Adding roughly four more stories to the building's height, the pinnacle features a decorative band of cast stone similar in width and design to the fourteenth story's balcony. Fenestration on the pinnacle consists of narrow recessed windows and its tent roof is clad in copper.

The interior of the Villa Riviera features a variety of public spaces including a foyer, a lounge, a ballroom, several offices, and hallways on the first floor. The only public spaces on the upper stories are the hallways. The glass double doors of the main entrance

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of the building open to a six-sided foyer. Modified Corinthian pilasters are positioned at the joints of each side. From the capitals of these pilasters rise moldings which rib the vaulted ceiling above. The floor is covered in travertine marble as is the kickplate. At both the north and southwest sides of the room a single glass paneled door opens to offices. At the southeast side of the room, directly across from the main entrance doors a large arched opening leads to a hallway. Directly across from this opening is another identical arched opening which leads to a large ten-sided lounge known as the Round Room.

The Round Room is sunken three steps below the level of the rest of the first floor. It also features a travertine floor and kickplate. Directly opposite the arched doorway mentioned above sits a fireplace with a large molded mantle. This fireplace is not original to the building. A column at the center of the room, originally covered in wood paneling, is now covered with mirrored glass. The ceiling also appears to have been originally covered with wood paneling, although now it is covered with smooth plaster. Walls are covered in smooth plaster throughout the building and in this room each wall features a slightly recessed arch. On either side of the fireplace, large arched windows with forty-two lights each take the place of these recesses. At the north and southwest sides of the room are doorways leading to the hall in front of the managers office and directly into other offices, respectively. The offices entered through the southwest doorway were originally a smoking room.

There are two passenger elevators located in the northern wing of the building and one freight elevator located in the western wing of the building. At the first floor of the building the elevator doors are surrounded by large enframements of cast plaster intricately molded. On the two passenger elevators, a large brass floor indicator similar in design to an analog clock is positioned at the top center of the enframement. The rest of the floors of the building feature the same floor indicators and enframements of similar size and form but without the elaborate molding. The interiors of the two passenger elevators have been completely altered.

Directly across from the passenger elevators in the northern wing and the freight elevator in the western wing, is a staircase leading to the upper floors. They feature wood newel posts and hand rails supported by wrought iron grillwork painted metallic gold.

Hallways on this first floor appear to be almost completely original. With the exception of the floors in the north wing which are covered with white and olive checkerboard linoleum tile, floors and kickplates are covered with twelve inch squares of light grey marble. Doors along the first floor hallway are generally wood paneled with either two or three units, and a simple crown molding lines the halls. At the western end of the first floor hallway, the original mailboxes, constructed of wood with brass hardware, are still in use. Lighting fixtures in the hallways and the entrance foyer are not original.

Also at the end of the western wing of the building is the original ballroom, now converted into a tearoom. Originally encompassing the entire end of the western wing, from the northwest facade to the southeast facade, the Ballroom was divided into two spaces sometime during the

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1930s or 1940s in order to create rentable office space at the northwestern side of the wing. Originally four columns stood at the center of the room in a rectangular pattern; during renovation a wall was placed through the two northwestern columns. A fireplace original to the room has also been removed. The ballroom is entered through unpainted, wood paneled double doors featuring brass hardware. In the hallway, the doors are surrounded by a large enframingent of cast plaster, almost identical to those surrounding the elevator doors. The room features three large, arched windows set into the wall. This arched pattern continues on the room's other walls with shallow recessed arches similar to those found in the Round Room. The two columns at the center of the room are modified versions of the Corinthian order: their bases are plain and square, half of their shafts are also plain and square, separated from the base by a simple molding, the upper half of their shafts are fluted. The columns which are embedded into the walls on either side of the entrance doorway, at the corners of the room and between the windows, are also modified Corinthian in design, but are fluted throughout the shaft. Suspended from the coffered ceiling are six lighting fixtures of hammered wrought iron positioned at regular intervals. Although original to the room and otherwise unaltered, they were painted in the building's most recent renovation in the 1980s. Also at this time new carpeting was installed and the entire room was painted.

The public spaces on the upper floors were altered during the building's most recent renovation which was carried out in order to conform to local earthquake and fire ordinances. These alterations included lowering the hallway ceilings and narrowing the corridors; however, since the finish on the walls and ceilings very closely matches that of unaltered spaces and original doors were reinstalled with their original hardware when available, this alteration is almost impossible to detect. The staircases on these upper floors remain intact and feature wood handrails supported by wrought iron grills similar to those of the first floor, but less elaborate. Lighting fixtures, crown molding, and carpeting in these hallways are new, but consistent in style with the period and compatible.

A free-standing, two-story garage separates the main building from the beach. The garage, also of reinforced concrete construction with a steel frame, is a basic rectangle in plan and is without ornamentation. The first story of the garage is at beach level and is approached down a steep incline at the foot of Shoreline Drive. The second story is entered from a driveway between the garage and main building. A terrace is located on the roof of the second story and is accessed by a decorative bridge from the main story of the apartment building.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

 nationally     statewide     locallyApplicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     DCriteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture19291929

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

King, Richard D., ArchitectKinne & Westerhouse, Builders

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State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas of significance noted above.**Summary**

The Villa Riviera is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion C as an outstanding example of a Chateausque style luxury apartment building. The building is widely recognized as one of the most important landmarks in the City of Long Beach, not only for the beauty of its architecture, but also for its sheer size at 277 feet and for its prominent location on the Pacific Coast. It stood as the tallest building in Long Beach until the ARCO towers were completed in the 1980s.

**Background**

The Villa Riviera was conceived by Lionel V. Mayell, who began to develop and finance the project in 1927. Mayell played an important role in the development of multifamily housing in Long Beach as the successful promoter of the "own your own" apartment concept. His first cooperatively-owned project was the Aratban in 1922, followed by the Cooper Arms two years later. Construction of the Villa Riviera began in 1928 and was completed in 1929. Construction costs were somewhere in excess of \$2.5 million. Frank F. Merriam was appointed sales manager in 1928. Merriam was formerly Speaker of the State Assembly and represented the district for eleven years. Apartments sold for \$12,000 to \$50,000, depending on the number of rooms and furnishings.

The use and ownership of the Villa has changed over time. During the Depression, the ownership reverted to the Mortgage Guaranty Company of Los Angeles and was operated as an apartment hotel. The Burger Hotel Company purchased the building for \$1.5 million in 1937. During World War II, the Navy leased several floors of the building to house officers which brought about the nickname "Home of the Admirals." In 1946, the Burger Hotel Company sold it to George S. Allen for \$2 million. He sold it in 1954 for \$1.75 million to the Morris Hotel chain in Beverly Hills. In 1955 the Villa was sold again, this time for \$2 million to a consortium called the Villa Holding Company, which reconverted the building back to a cooperative.

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The building was constructed during a building boom which occurred in Long Beach after World War I. Long Beach boosters, spurred on by thriving oil and real estate industries, were determined to change the image of the city with first class architecture. New "skyscrapers" and "highrises" transformed the look of the skyline. Unlike Los Angeles which had a 150 foot height limit until 1956, buildings in Long Beach could rise as high as the technology would allow. Elegant commercial buildings, hotels, and apartments were testimony to a more sophisticated built environment. The Villa Riviera was the quintessential structure designed during this period of the city's growing architectural refinement. A full-page spread of the Villa in a 1929 issue of *Architectural Digest* put Long Beach on the architectural map of the West Coast.

Buyers were attracted to the Villa Riviera not only for the beach front location and architectural distinction, but also for the luxurious amenities. In addition to the 154 apartments and two penthouses, the building included a ballroom, lounge, roof garden, restaurant, shops, and parking structure. Dressing rooms and showers for bathers and maids' quarters were located in the basement and subbasement, which appear as the first and second stories from the beach. Each floor was designed to include ten apartments ranging in size from one to five rooms, however, any sized suite could be accommodated if ordered before the building was completed. Suites came completely furnished and featured space-saving, built-in cabinetry and even included china and linens. Once again, specific design requests could be made before or during construction.

There were several other luxury highrise apartment/hotels constructed in the city during the post-World War I building boom. Among the most prominent were the Breakers Hotel, a fifteen story edifice on the beach (1925); the Cooper Arms (1922); the Lafayette Hotel (1929); and the Broadlind (1928). The Villa Riviera, however, was by far the most architecturally distinctive of this new property type, and the only such structure designed in the Chateausque style.

## The Chateausque Style

The Chateausque style of architecture is loosely based upon that of sixteenth century French chateaus, and combines elements from the Gothic and Renaissance periods. The Chateausque style was one of many historic styles which gained popularity in the United States during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the Victorian era, when elements of historical styles were freely combined, often resulting in bizarre architectural hybrids, the period revival movement stressed correct interpretations of historic styles. The rise of period revival architecture is, in part, attributed to the increasing number of European-trained American architects. Richard Morris Hunt, the first American architect to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, is most closely associated with the Chateausque style. His most famous work is the G.W. Vanderbilt estate "Biltmore" which was constructed between 1888 and 1895. As Virginia and Lee McAlester explain in their *Field Guide to American Houses*, "the Chateausque style required massive masonry construction and elaborate, expensive detailing and was therefore unsuitable for vernacular imitation. It thus remained a relatively rare, architect-designed fashion throughout its brief period of popularity."

The form and dissemination of the Chateausque style in Southern California, as expressed in the Villa Riviera, was somewhat different from that of the rest of the country. On the East Coast and Midwest, the style was most popular in the design of large, single family

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houses between 1890 and 1910. While there are several Victorian era mansions in the Los Angeles basin which draw upon the Chateausque style, their clapboard and shingle cladding belie the true nature of the style -- which requires stonework. One such building, located in the Westlake area of Los Angeles, is an 1896 wood frame and clapboard house. The Ringe House in the West Adams area of Los Angeles is a later, more authentic example of the Chateausque style. Designed in 1906 by the Frederick L. Roehrig, the house, with its stone exterior, has the monumental stature associated with the style. An important example of the style, as applied to an institutional use, is the Mary Andrews Clark Memorial Home, a YWCA building dedicated in 1913.

With the exception of these isolated, earlier examples, the style did not gain popularity in Southern California until the 1920s. It was most frequently used in the design of luxury apartment buildings, as illustrated by the Villa Riviera. The highest concentration of 1920s Chateausque style apartment buildings is in Hollywood, with fine examples in the adjacent areas of Hancock and West Hollywood as well. Lesser examples of Chateausque apartment buildings were two or three stories in height with wood frame construction and stucco finish. More significant examples, such as the Villa Riviera, were four to sixteen stories in height with reinforced concrete or steel frame construction -- with brick, cast stone, or stucco finish. Roofs were also likely to be finished in more expensive material such as slate or copper. Important examples which still stand include the Chateau Marmont, a residential hotel in Hollywood built in 1925; Chateau des Fleurs, an apartment building in Hollywood built in 1927; La Fontaine, a 1928 apartment building in West Hollywood; and El Royal, constructed in 1929 in Hancock Park. Of these examples, the Villa Riviera stands as the largest, and perhaps the purest, example of the style in Southern California. The Villa Riviera exhibits the most important characteristics of the Chateausque style with its steeply pitched hipped roofs, multiple dormers, vertical orientation, stone-like exterior, and pinnacle.

The only other example of the Chateausque style in Long Beach was the Pacific Coast Club, which has been demolished. It was constructed between 1925 and 1926 at the southwest corner of East Ocean Boulevard and First Place. The Villa Riviera, therefore, stands alone as the only significant example of the style remaining in the City of Long Beach.

## Richard D. King

The architect of the Villa Riviera, Richard D. King was born in Jackson, Tennessee in 1879. He appears to have been a prolific, but little known architect. During his forty year career in Southern California he designed a wide variety of buildings including theaters, apartment buildings, office buildings, industrial buildings, schools, and public buildings. Among the dozens of buildings he designed are the Vernon City Hall (demolished), San Raphael School in Los Angeles, and the Hollywood Professional Building on Hollywood Boulevard. He formed a brief professional association with Ellis W. Taylor in the mid-1910s, but appears to have primarily worked alone. He lived in Hermosa Beach with his family and died in 1945. The Villa Riviera was, no doubt, the high point of his career. Unfortunately, there is not enough readily available information on King to determine his significance in the architectural history of Southern California, the influences of his work on other architects, or whether or not the buildings he designed are still extant.



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- "Chain Buys Villa for \$1,750,000." Press Telegram, December 28, 1954, p. Unknown.
- Gaillard, Paul. "The Villa Riviera." *Where to Live*, February 1989, p. 57.
- Gleye, Paul. *The Architecture of Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Rosebud Books, 1981.
- McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991.
- "The Villa Riviera: Long Beach's Landmark." *One the Move*, p. 49, 64. (Long Beach Public Library Clipping File, no date or source.)
- "Skyscraper Rises Rapidly: Completion of Long Beach Apartment Project Set for Thanksgiving Day." *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1928, pt. V, p. 1.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

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Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	1	3	90	5	7	0	3	7	36	6	9	0
Zone			Easting				Northing					

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing					

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing					

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing					

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

The land referred to herein is situated in the County of Los Angeles, State of California, and is described as follows:

Lot 1, Block 2, Alamitos Beach Townsite Tract, as recorded in book 59, pages 11 and 12 in the Office of the County Recorder in said county.

See continuation sheet

### Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the land area historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Teresa Grimes, Architectural Historian

organization Historic Resources Group

street & number 1728 N. Whitley Avenue

city or town Los Angeles

date January 31, 1996

telephone (213) 469-2349

state CA

zip code 90028

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"Villa Riviera to be New Apartment of Unique Beauty." *Press Telegram*, November 20, 1927, p. 1.

"Hotel to Cost \$2,500,000 Assured." *Press Telegram*, November 20, 1927, P. 1.

"Steam Shovels Busy on Villa Riviera Site." *Press Telegram*, December 6, 1927, p. Unknown.

"Frank F. Merriam Sales Manager for New Villa Riviera." *Press Telegram*, April 22, 1928, sec. C,  
p. 1.

"Noted Hotel is Transferred in Recent Deal," *Los Angeles Times*, 1955. (Long Beach Public  
Library Clipping Files, date and page unknown.)

"Villa Riviera Will Sell Apartments." *The Independent*, September 2, 1955, p. Unknown.

"Riviera Cafe Will Open Saturday." *Press Telegram*, August 28, 1931, p. 6.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PROPERTY OWNERS:

Dorian Campbell-Graham, President  
Anna Maria Doland, Vice President  
Cynthia Hope, Secretary  
Chris De Cristofaro, Treasurer  
David Cunningham, Director

Villa Riviera Homeowners Association  
800 E. Ocean Boulevard  
Long Beach, CA 90802

