



NPS Form 10-900  
(Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: **N/A**

other names/site number: **Berta Sepulveda Residence**

2. Location

street & number: **37 Muñoz Rivera St.** city or town: **Isabel Segunda**  
vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state: **Puerto Rico** code: **PR** county: **Sabana Grande** code: **121**  
zip code: **00747**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  X  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  X  meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_\_\_ statewide  X  locally. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Arleen Pabón PhD  
Signature of certifying official

May 3, 1994  
Date

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau



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6. Function or Use  
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Historic Functions

Cat: **Domestic**

Sub: **Single Dwelling**

Current Functions

Cat: **Domestic**

Sub: **Single Dwelling**

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7. Description  
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Architectural Classification: **other: vernacular eclectic**

Materials

foundation: **reinforced concrete**

roof : **concrete**

walls : **reinforced concrete**

other : **N/A**

Narrative Description

See accompanying continuation sheets.

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8. Statement of Significance  
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Applicable National Register Criteria

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.

- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance: **Architecture**

Period of Significance: **1926-1927**

Significant Dates: **1926, 1927**

Significant Person: **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation: **N/A**

Architect/Builder: **Rafael Bofill**

Narrative Statement of Significance

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

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10. Geographical Data  
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Acreage of Property: **less than one acre**

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	—	—	—	—	—	—
2	—	—	—	—	—	—

  X   See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

Boundary Justification

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11. Form Prepared By  
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name/title: **José E. Marull, State Historian/ Rafael Crespo PhD**

organization: **Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office**

date: **January 28, 1994**

street & number: **109 San José St.** telephone: **(809) 721-3737**

city or town: **San Juan** state: **PR** zip code: **00901**

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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Summary

The Berta Sepúlveda House, located at 37 Muñoz Rivera Street, in the town of Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico, is a two-level, single-family house built in 1926-27. The structure was built in concrete and it has a corrugated metal hipped roof. It is designed in a vernacular eclectic style, reflecting the Modernismo movement that influenced Puerto Rican architecture at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Located on a rectangular urban lot, the house is centrally located within the front line, leaving a concrete-paved alley at either side, each about nine feet wide, and ample backyard space. The ground level is used for storage and basement, and the first floor, raised seven feet from the ground, is used for living quarters.

The main or northwest façade is approached from the sidewalk through a double iron-grill door, flanked with concrete pedestals and urns on each side. The pedestals, with red ceramic trim at the top. The centrally located entrance leads to an imposing stairway that rises to the balcony on the main floor. The steps on the stairway and the floor of the balcony are covered with locally produced concrete tiles, designed in a rug pattern, with geometric and floral forms. The stairway, which narrows at the top, has six urns with pedestals, tying at the top with a raised round concrete balcony. The balcony has six Tuscan-style concrete columns over concrete pedestals, equally spaced and integrated into the concrete balustrade that surrounds the balcony. The pedestals are trimmed with red ceramic tiles. The metal roof overhangs the balcony, following its contour. A conspicuous dormer with three openings is located directly above the entrance.

The balcony surrounds the living area which projects forward at the doorway. This entrance consists of a pair of panned wood doors with stained glass panels in green, blue and clear colors, with geometric designs reminiscent of the Prairie style; these designs are repeated on the two receding narrow casement windows flanking the entrance door. The front door has a transom with a rectangular pattern, an arrangement that is repeated on each casement window at the entry. Over each transom is a red ceramic trim, which

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covers three sides of the frame, reappearing at the window base. Only the bottom escapes this treatment.

The receding rooms at each side of the main entrance have similar openings, articulated with the same elements, except for the use of double casements windows instead of doors and the presence of a built-in concrete bench beneath them.

The basement has three narrow arched openings with iron bars on each side of the front entrance. The openings repeat the use of red tiles at the top and bottom. A horizontal concrete band separates the basement from the balcony.

The south or rear elevation shows an open concrete gallery with the same treatment of columns and balustrades as the front façade, except for the ceramic tiles. Resting on pedestals within the balustrade, the columns define three bays, with a straight-run stairway at the end of the gallery. The gallery has seven door openings shielded from the rain by an overhanging hipped roof. The openings, of various widths and with double or single wooden louvered doors, are less elaborate than the openings on the front façade. The doors have smaller glass panels with a simpler design and no ceramic tile trim around the transom. The gallery is supported by square concrete piers below the columns, creating an open space below, which is used for storage and as a basement.

The interior space arrangement at the Berta Sepúlveda House consists of three zones with an elongated extension, organized as an "L"-shaped plan. The central zone is made up by the public areas of the living room and hallway; these are flanked by bedrooms at both sides of the hallway and a bathroom to the left, which make up the two remaining zones.

The living or public areas are divided by two mediopuntos; the first one is decorated with stained glass and the second one has a wooden base. Approached in succession, they help organize the central space, while adding transparency to the living areas.

From the living room a hallway leads to the service wing. Next to it, near the pantry and the kitchen, and independent from the living areas, is the dining room. A double wooden door with glass

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panels leads to the hallway and into the back gallery that mediates between the service area and the garden. The hipped roof slants toward the patio created by the long axis of the "L"-shaped plan.

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Summary**

The Berta Sepúlveda House is a single family dwelling, located in the urban core of the town of Sabana Grande. Designed by architect Rafael Bofill, a native of Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, the reinforced concrete dwelling with a metal hipped roof, built on two levels consisting of a basement on the lower floor and living quarters on the upper one. The property is a good representative of the modernismo influence (1890 -1930) in Puerto Rico. The property is eligible to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for architectural importance, at the local level, as representative of the new construction techniques and styles introduced by the new middle class in Sabana Grande. The prosperity generated by the sugar industry boom found a physical manifestation in the construction of new residences in the urban core of the city; the Berta Sepúlveda House is a clear expression of their economic and social achievements.

**Background**

The Berta Sepúlveda House was constructed a time when many social, political and economic changes were occurring in Puerto Rico. With and the arrival of a new century and the new North American government installed on the Island, Puerto Ricans had become very optimistic about the ideals of democracy and liberty, and the promise of economic progress.

As part of these changes, from 1900 to 1920 the economy was shifting from a mercantilistic system to a capitalistic oriented one. Large portions of land were acquired by absentee companies from individual farmers to be planted exclusively with sugar cane. The old semi-feudal system of haciendas was fading, creating a movement of people to the coast and the urban centers, where money

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and jobs were available.

New developments in trade and commerce strengthened the position of a new bourgeois class of criollos, who served as intermediaries between foreign investors and the producers of the raw materials to be exported from the island. Having the same concerns of the foreign investors who subsidized their ventures, they substituted the weakened power of local landowners.

The new bourgeois class looked at the city as the place to settle down. Competing for social status and public recognition, the construction of new houses was a way to express their economic and social achievements. Attempting to emulate the fashionable models of international architecture, their houses reflect their aesthetic concerns. Building from the past and the present, blending the exotic with the local, it is a highly eclectic production, with buildings trying a new language, sensitive to the tropical climate and adapted to local taste.

The effort to establish better safety and construction standards led the Insular Government in 1899 to officially urge cities to be divided into three contiguous zones, from the center to the outskirts: the first zone, at the center of town, included the plaza and the city's main streets; the second zone consisted of the immediately surrounding area; and the third zone was the periphery of the urban area. Each zone required the use of specific construction materials, thus creating implicit social and economic differences among dwellings. A disastrous fire in 1892 forced Sabana Grande to adopt these measures during its reconstruction; the three zones were formally implanted in the 1916 and 1921 municipal ordinances, remaining in effect until 1940.

The Berta Sepúlveda House, constructed between 1926 and 1927, is located in what was known as the second zone in Sabana Grande, a rather wide zone with more flexible regulation of construction specifications. Wooden constructions, for example, were allowed without any other requirement. This flexibility allowed the construction of less durable structures, such as wooden houses, and led to a constant change in the physical and typological composition of the area.

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**Historic significance**

The historical significance of the Berta Sepúlveda House relates particularly to its architectural type that reflects the stylistic changes generated by the new middle classes at the beginning of the century. Designed by Rafael Bofill, a Puerto Rican architect from Mayagüez, it was a wedding present from Mrs. Sepúlveda's first husband. Rafael Bofill was a self-made architect with no known formal training; yet its impressive design made the house a local landmark since its construction.

The house borrows a variety of elements from different sources. As a means to express the wealth and prestige of its owners, examples of fine craftsmanship and detailing are found throughout the house: Tuscan style columns, concrete balustrades and urns, stained glass with Prairie-style geometric designs, Spanish ceramic tiles and local concrete tile. The wide curved balcony, the complex floor patterns and the diversity of materials and textures used create a flamboyant effect quite congenial with the Caribbean climate.

According to Sabana Grande's Historic Architectural Survey of 1991, from a total of seventy-five structures in the urban core identified as significant, thirty-two were located on the five streets that comprise the town's second zone. Among these structures, the Berta Sepulveda House, carefully preserved by its owner, stands out as a significant example of an urban house typology that represented new aesthetic ideas of the time and the social aspirations of a new middle class. According to these considerations, the house is eligible to be listed in the National Register under Criterion C.

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Aguiló Ramos, Silvia. Historic - Architectural Survey of Sabana Grande, a survey prepared for the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, 1991.

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Lugo Negrón, Norberto. Sabana Grande: El pueblo de los Prodigios. San Juan: Departamento de Instrucción Pública, 1988.

Negrón Hernández, Luis R. Sabana Grande: Notas para su historia, Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, San Juan, 1986.

Rigau Pérez, Jorge. Modernismo: Architecture in Puerto Rico at the turn of the century (1890-1930), Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. Puerto Rico 1900: Turn-of-the-Century Architecture in the Hispanic Caribbean 1890-1930. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992.

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**UTM References**

We are unable to determine the easting and northing coordinates for the property, since the U.S.G.S. map for the Sabana Grande does not have necessary U.T.M. ticks. Therefore, we have located the property at 66 degrees, 57 minutes, 36 seconds west of Greenwich and 18 degrees, 4 minutes, 51 seconds north of the equator.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundaries include all of the property corresponding to lot number nine (9) of urban block number thirty (30) of the urban area of Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries comprehend the urban lot historically and currently associated with the property.

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SITE PLAN  
SCALE 1:1000

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