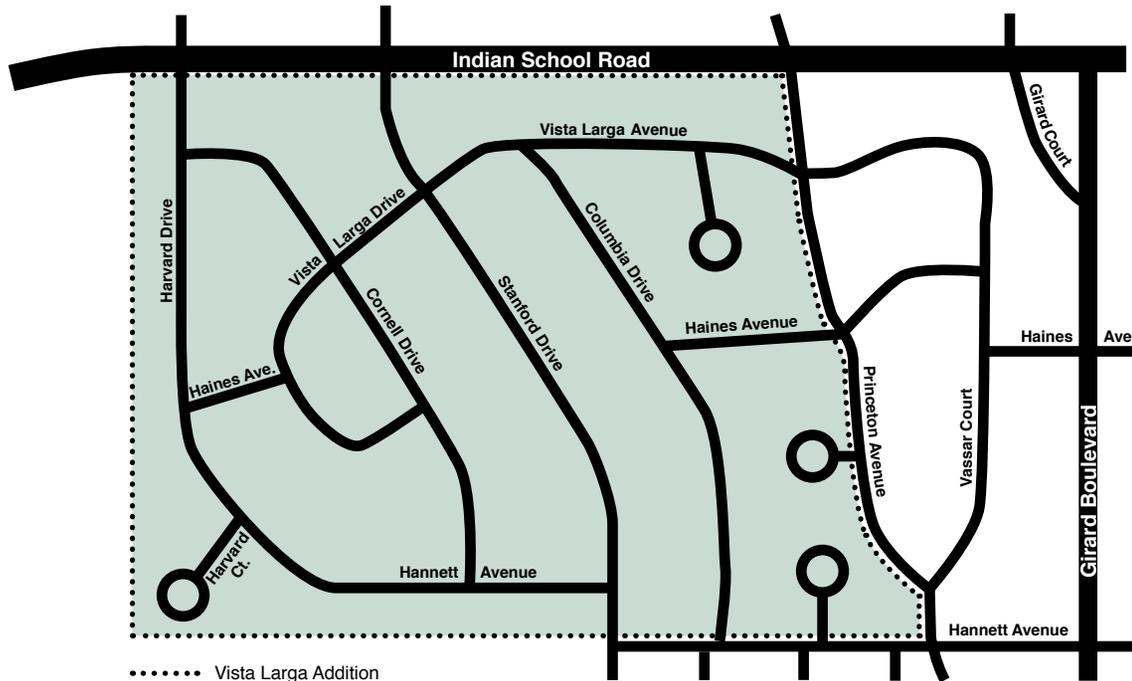


The Vista Larga Historic District

AN ALBUQUERQUE
MID-CENTURY MODERN
NEIGHBORHOOD



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MID-CENTURY MODERN
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This booklet was prepared by William A. Dodge, Ph.D., Diane Scena, and Cara McCulloch. We wish to thank the North Campus Neighborhood Association and the past and present homeowners in the Vista Larga Neighborhood for their support and encouragement in creating the National Register Historic District. Funding for this booklet was provided by the City of Albuquerque's Urban Enhancement Trust Fund and the New Mexico Architectural Foundation. Additional support was provided by the Albuquerque Historical Society. The booklet was designed by T. Fedor.

Cover Images

(Front) Contemporary Style Home at 1514 Harvard Court, NE. Constructed 1957. Lawrence Garcia, Architect. (Back) View from Back Patio into 1528 Stanford Drive NE, 1955. All photographs by Dodge, 2014 except as noted.

“Did You Know?”

After the city’s major annexation of East Mesa land in 1925, more than one hundred subdivision plats were filed in the county clerk’s office for housing additions. However, most were not built out until after World War II.

The Vista Larga Mid-Century Modern Residential Historic District is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The historic district, a part of the larger Vista Larga subdivision (see map opposite), is comprised of 112 contributing houses bounded by Indian School Road, Princeton Avenue, Hannett Avenue, and the University of New Mexico North Golf Course. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places as an excellent example of post-war suburban development featuring modernist house styles.

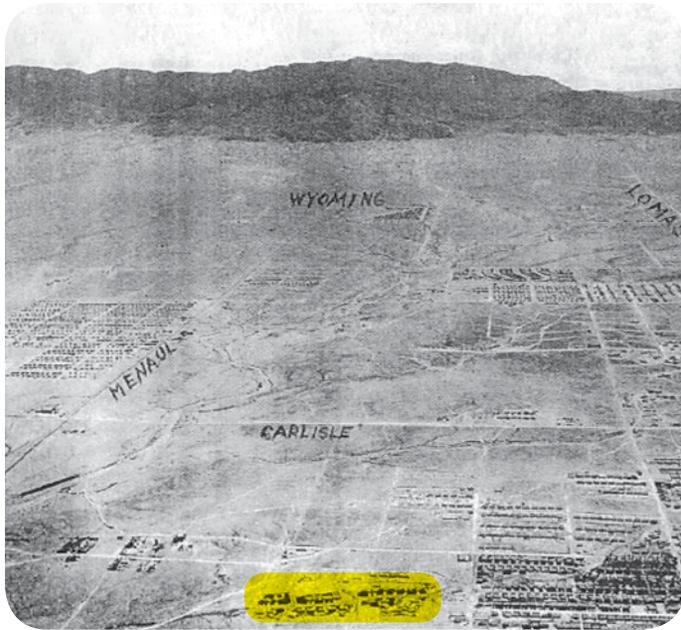
This booklet provides a brief history of the neighborhood from its platting in 1947 to 1967, the year when most of the homes were completed. It describes how the subdivision exemplifies Albuquerque’s post-war housing development and its place in the city’s history. The booklet also describes the architectural movement known as “Mid-Century Modern” which includes house-styles that became extremely popular in the second half of the twentieth century, including Ranch House, Contemporary and International styles.

Finally, the booklet discusses what it means to be a National Register property and how homeowners can receive state tax credits for making improvements to their home while at the same time preserving its architectural integrity.

The Beginning

In 1947, Albuquerque was on the verge of transforming itself from a small, regionally important city to a major metropolitan area in the rapidly growing Sun Belt region of the United States. Following the war in which the city’s military facilities played a significant role, Albuquerque was now home to Kirtland Air Force Base, Sandia National Laboratory, numerous regional federal offices, small manufacturing companies, and the University of New Mexico - an expanding research university. A booming job market resulted in a dramatic population increase and the need for more city services, commercial businesses, and, of course, new residential housing, most of which was situated in an area called the “Northeast Heights” - thousands of acres of high desert landscape on the sand hills east of the city’s downtown.

“Suburban” housing construction was not new on the East Mesa. Early city leaders and land developers had looked to the east since the early twentieth century, but were wary of investing in land on the sand hills since it was prone to flooding and erosion during the rainy season, often making roads impassable for residents trying to get to work or run their daily errands. Eventually, however, developers could not resist the cheap land and wide open spaces. By the early 1900s, local businessmen like M. P. Stamm and “Colonel” D. K. B. Sellers began to plat subdivisions on the East Mesa near the university. Civic leaders promoted



Aerial view of Northeast Heights' subdivision circa 1950. Vista Larga can be seen under construction (highlighted area).
Source: Original in *Albuquerque Progress Magazine*.

this eastern expansion and in 1925 the city annexed 4,166 acres of East Mesa land taking the city limits all the way to what is now San Pedro Boulevard. The expansion of the city's boundaries soon resulted in the construction of large subdivisions, such as, Ridgecrest, Monte Vista, and College View, by builders such as William Leverett and Charles McDuffie.

Following a building hiatus caused by material shortages during World War II, subdivision development accelerated in the late 1940s and continued unabated for the next forty years. As Albuquerque and the country returned to normalcy, the Northeast Heights was overrun by surveying companies and construction vehicles as developers scrambled to put up houses as fast as they could. Seemingly overnight, subdivisions appeared on the landscape and hopped across the East Mesa. Large subdivisions, such as Hoffmantown, Inez, Snow Heights, and Princess Jeanne Park - each with upwards of 800 houses - were built by savvy developers like Dale Bellamah, Edward Snow, Fred Mossman, and Sam Hoffman. Although these housing developments were then considered the far outskirts of the city, they were in fact located close to the main gates for Kirtland Air Force Base and the Sandia National Laboratory. A little closer to downtown and the university, developers built both modestly priced and upscale, architect-designed homes in subdivisions such as, the Lobo Addition, Sunset Terrace, Altura Park, and Netherwood Park.

Among those newly platted subdivisions was an eighty acre parcel of land just north of the University of New Mexico aptly called "Vista Larga," or "long view," for its sweeping panorama of the lush Rio Grande Valley, with vistas extending as far west as Mt. Taylor. To the east, the Sandia Mountains provided a towering backdrop to the valley floor. The acreage had originally been patented under the Homestead Act on October 19, 1894 by Lewis H. Chamberlain. Throughout the next several decades, the land was bought and sold by several individuals without any significant improvements being made to the property. However, in 1942 a local developer named R. B. Waggoman acquired the parcel and envisioned an up-scale neighborhood situated adjacent to the newly opened university golf course, but not too far from downtown. In 1947 he platted a housing subdivision which he called the Vista Larga Addition.

Waggoman was no beginner when it came to big-time development projects. A year earlier, in 1946, he had completed the landmark Nob Hill Business Center at the southwest corner of Central and Carlisle. It was the first-of-its-kind shopping center in Albuquerque - located several miles east of the traditional, but increasingly congested, downtown and featuring off-street parking right in front of its cluster of retail stores. It was the forerunner of the strip shopping center that predominates the Northeast Heights shopping experience even today.



(Left) UNM's 27-hole golf course as seen in 1950. The golf course was built in three, nine-hole phases. The first nine (seen in the lower right of the photo) was completed in 1941, while the second nine (north of Campus Blvd.) was completed a year later. The final nine (now called the UNM North Golf Course) was completed between 1946 and 1950. Campus expansion over the following 25 years eliminated all but those final nine holes. In this 1950 aerial photo, the Vista Larga subdivision is seen under construction adjacent to north end of the course. Today, not only is the North Course a popular golfing venue, but also a well-loved walking trail and wildlife sanctuary valued by the local residents including those living in the Vista Larga historic district. Source: EDAC, University of New Mexico.

(Below) The Nob Hill Business Center under construction, circa 1945.

Source: <http://www.dukecityfix.com/profiles/blogs/the-history-hack-nob-hill-business-center>.

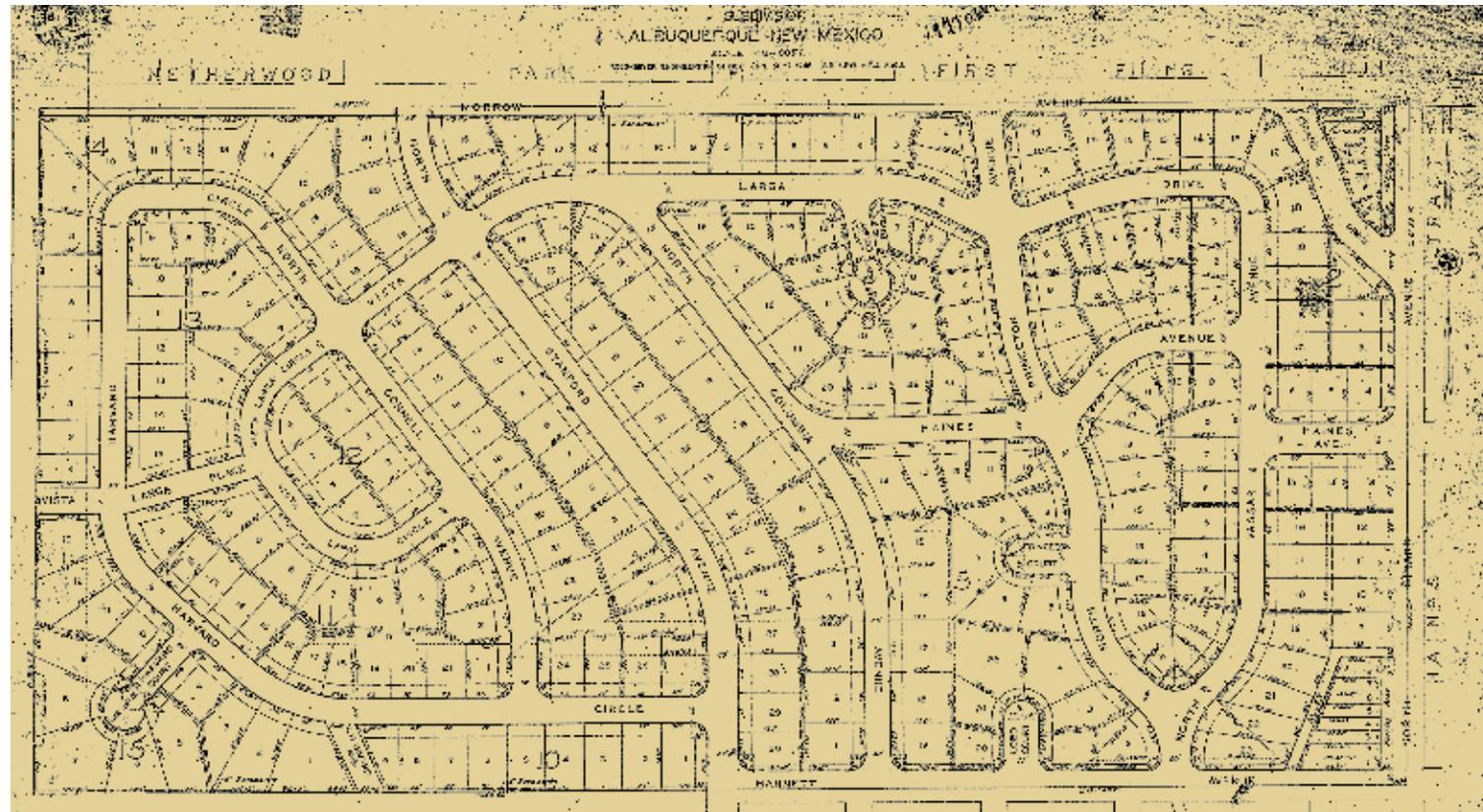


“Did You Know?”

As the Vista Larga neighborhood began to take shape, the new residents needed places to shop for groceries and other necessities. The first neighborhood business to open was a small grocery store, Rhodes Market, located on the northwest corner of Girard and Hannett. Opening its doors in the late 1940s, it was later known as Carson's Super Market, the North Girard Market, and the Grocery Emporium. In the late 2000s, the building was remodeled and became a small restaurant.

(Right) Original Plat filed with the Bernalillo County Clerk's Office, 1947

Waggoman's visionary outlook for new retail development projects was duplicated in his plan for the Vista Larga subdivision. None of his houses would face Indian School Road (originally called Morrow Avenue) which he correctly envisioned as a major thoroughfare. Instead, he designed a housing plat that featured wide, gently curving streets with dead-end cul-de-sacs that he called "courts," and cleverly utilized the natural contours of the land to lay out his street patterns. East of Princeton Avenue, Waggoman set out lots for modest sized, single-family houses built in the simplified Spanish-Pueblo or American Small House styles and even set aside lots along Girard Boulevard for commercial and multi-family dwellings. To the west of Princeton, he laid out several streets with larger lot sizes and encouraged the construction of custom designed homes that featured the latest in Mid-Century Modern styling. This area also benefited from its location adjacent to the golf course, whose open fairways enhanced the "long view" to the west.





(Top) First house built in the Vista Larga Addition at 1511 Columbia Drive NE. Constructed in 1948, the Ranch House home is non-contributing to the historic district due enclosure of the garage. (Above) The last house constructed within the period of significance, 1428 Columbia Drive, completed in 1967.

House construction within the Vista Larga Addition, but outside the historic district, started east of Princeton Avenue in 1947. The first house in the historic district (west of Princeton Avenue) was a Ranch House built in 1948 at 1511 Columbia Drive. By 1955, most of the lots north of Haines Avenue and east of Princeton were built out, while approximately sixty-five percent of the lots on Columbia, Stanford, and Cornell were completed or under construction. Lots at the west end of Vista Larga Drive, Harvard Drive, and Harvard Court were yet to start construction. In 1956, Waggoman re-platted the far west end of the subdivision by enlarging some lots along Harvard and extending the street northward to make an entrance onto Indian School Road. Home construction peaked in 1956 and by 1963 less than half a dozen lots remained vacant. The last contributing house to the historic district, a Contemporary style home at 1428 Columbia, was completed in 1967 and Waggoman's vision was complete.

Vista Larga Subdivision, 1955.
 One of the neighborhood's
 earliest commercial buildings,
 Rhodes Supermarket, is seen
 in the lower right at the corner
 of Girard and Hannett. Source:
 MAGIC, University of New Mexico.



Vista Larga Subdivision, 1959.
 House construction along
 Harvard Drive and Harvard
 Court (left side of photo) have
 been started, while most of the
 houses east of Cornell Drive
 have been completed. Source:
 MAGIC, University of New Mexico.





Vista Larga Subdivision, 1963. Except for a few lots, the house construction is complete. Note Indian School Road is now paved, while commercial development along north end of Girard Boulevard has yet to be started (right side of the photo). Source: MAGIC, University of New Mexico.

The Significance of the Vista Larga Residential Historic District

The Vista Larga Mid-Century Modern Residential Historic District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places for several reasons. First, it is eligible for its contribution to the city's evolution in community planning and design. The layout of the subdivision features classic subdivision styling, such as, large lots on curvilinear streets and cul-de-sacs. This not only reflects the popular subdivision design style in post-WW II America, but also accommodates the East Mesa's distinctive environmental setting - numerous small arroyos cutting through the sandy hillocks, which for many years had discouraged building in the area.

Second, the location of the historic district reflects the changing socio-economic patterns taking place in the City of Albuquerque at this time. The dramatic population increases following the war necessitated large-scale residential expansion into the Northeast Heights, which in turn promoted commercial development and city infrastructure such as, paved roads, new water and sewer services, and the construction of new shopping centers. The Vista Larga Addition was located outside the traditional downtown but close enough so that white-collar professionals could still be close to their downtown offices. And, of course, the university was located within walking distance of the neighborhood. Prior to development of Albuquerque's large shopping malls in the early 1960s – Winrock Center and Coronado

Center – most weekend shopping for clothing and other goods still meant an automobile trip downtown. By the mid 1950s, shopping patterns were changing rapidly with construction of neighborhood shopping centers for daily errands to grocery stores and pharmacies. Residents of the Vista Larga neighborhood enjoyed this convenience when the Indian Plaza shopping center, located just a mile away at the corner of Indian School and Carlisle, opened in 1961.

Although the development of the upscale houses located within the Vista Larga historic district was a typical development pattern for postwar America, it reflected a unique subdivision for the City of Albuquerque in the 1950s. The district's street layout and housing pattern remains unchanged from the developer's original 1947 plat and his 1956 replat. As such, it retains its feeling of a 1950s subdivision.

The Vista Larga Historic District is also notable for its excellent examples of Mid-Century Modern architecture. The district's houses include a variety of Modern forms and styles which reflect distinctive characteristics. Over the years the houses have been minimally changed and continue to reflect their original materials, workmanship, and design.

Mid-Century Modern Architecture

The Traditional Ranch House

The traditional Ranch House is characterized by a long and low, one-story form that encloses clearly delineated living spaces (kitchen, living room, dining room, and bedrooms) separated by walls or dividers. It also attempts to integrate indoor with outdoor space through the use of a sliding glass door to a patio area. Other key style components include: hipped roofs with overlapping eaves, large fireplace chimneys, recessed entryways, large, front-facing picture windows, front porches with wrought-iron porch supports and planter boxes, and attached garages (often multi-car).

Two fine examples of contributing properties using the traditional Ranch House form are the homes at 1414 Cornell Drive and 1435 Columbia Drive. The house at 1414 Cornell was built in 1954 using red brick with ribbon windows set high on the wall in the bedroom area of the house, and a picture window recessed next to a small entry porch. The cross-hipped roof features a large, rectangular fireplace chimney at the house's south end. An unusual feature for this time period is an attached three-car garage. The Ranch House at 1435 Columbia was built in 1955. It is clad in ashlar sandstone with a large, centered picture window flanked by double-hung windows adjacent to the deeply recessed front entry. A prominent fireplace chimney dominates the house's façade. A double-car garage occupies the north end of the home. The circular driveway is likely a modification to original front yard landscaping. Other fine examples of the traditional Ranch House include: 1513 Harvard Drive built in 1961, and 1413 Cornell Drive built in 1959 - the latter is considered a "compact" style due to its smaller size, which is probably related to its smaller lot size.



1414 Cornell Drive NE.



1435 Columbia Drive NE.

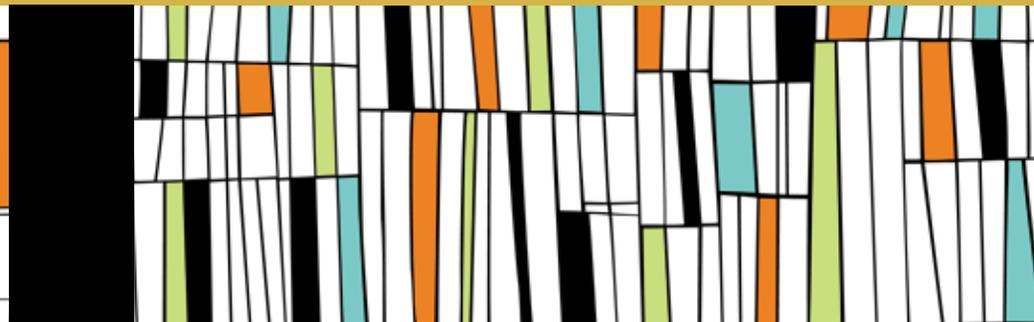
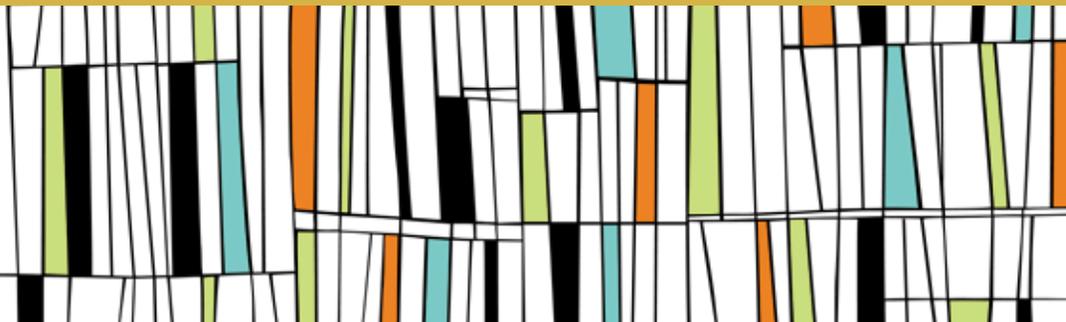
Traditional
Ranch
Houses

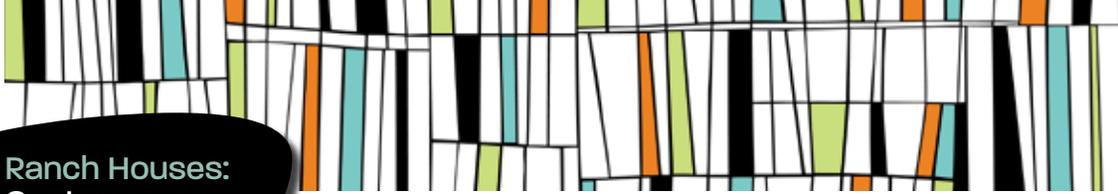


1513 Harvard Drive NE.



1413 Cornell Drive NE.





Ranch Houses:
Contemporary
Style

Alternative Style Ranch Houses

A interesting aspect of the Vista Larga historic district is the number of Ranch Houses that deviate from the traditional hipped roof styling. For instance, the house at 2515 Vista Larga Drive (built 1953) has Contemporary styling (see below) that features high ribbon windows and a flat roof with overhanging eaves, while the house at 1417 Columbia Drive has a flat roof overhanging eaves and a screen wall.

Two other Ranch House styling variations are unique to New Mexico. The first is the simplified Spanish-Pueblo Revival Ranch House at 1427 Stanford Drive (built 1953). This home has a compact Ranch House form but with simplified Pueblo Revival styling such as a flat roof with a parapet wall and a smooth stucco finish. However, the large picture window, prominent chimney, and wrought iron porch supports are classic Ranch House features. The Spanish-Pueblo Revival style was first developed by the noted architect John Gaw Meem in the 1920s and 30s and is commonly found in many Albuquerque subdivisions.

The second variation is a Ranch House designed in the style of Meem's Territorial Revival style made popular in the 1930s. It too has a flat roof with a parapet wall and stucco finish, but its character-defining features are the brick coping at the top of the parapet and the triangular window pediments. The house at 2316 Hannett Avenue, built in 1961, is a fine example of classic Territorial Revival styling, but is long and low, suggesting a zoned interior, with a recessed entryway featuring large flanking side lights to a single entry door.

(Top Right) 2515 Vista Larga Drive NE.
(Bottom Right) 1417 Columbia Drive NE.





Ranch House:
Spanish-Pueblo
Revival Style

1427 Stanford NE.



Ranch House:
Territorial
Revival
Style

2316 Hannett NE.



Ranch House:
Storybook
Style

2207 Vista Larga Drive NE.



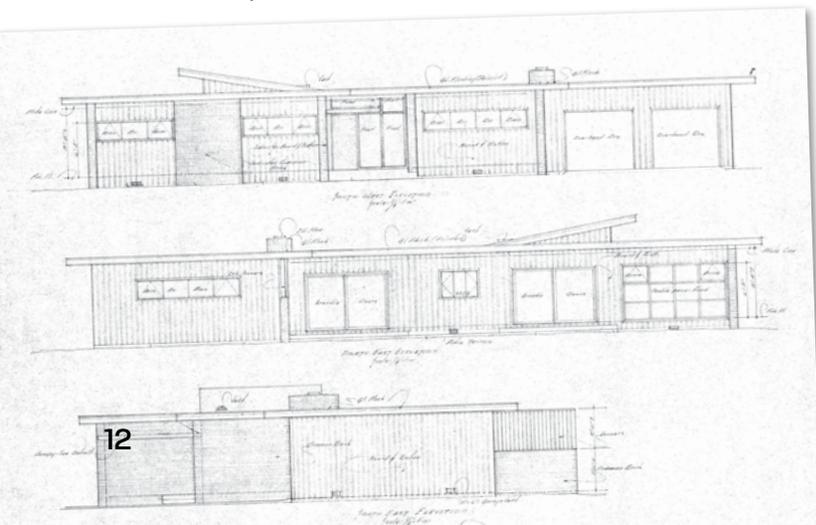
One of the more unusual adaptations of traditional Ranch House form is the home at 2207 Vista Larga Drive. It has a steeper than average side-gabled roof with an overhanging roof line that covers the front porch, a picture window and sliding windows with shutters. However, projecting from the east side of the building is gambrel roof that frames a second picture window. This unexpected feature gives the home a “Storybook home” appearance (a house style commonly found in Bellamah’s Princess Jeanne subdivision in the Far Northeast Heights also constructed in the early to mid-1950s).

The Contemporary Style Home

The Contemporary style house features low-pitched gabled or flat roofs with wide, overhanging eaves, often with exposed roof beams. The asymmetrical façade utilizes natural building materials (wood, stone, and brick) and often features large expanses of uninterrupted wall surface. Entryways are recessed or obscured by other architectural features – such as screen walls, or even located under a carport or on the side of the home. Glass surfaces can be prominent, sometimes reaching from floor to ceiling under a broad gabled roof. The interior space is designed using an open concept, with combined living spaces (kitchen, dining room, living room) and usually a bedroom wing. Architects also sought to integrate interior with exterior spaces. As such, Contemporary homes feature courtyards, porches, decks, balconies, and patios that are linked through sliding glass doors and large windows. The Contemporary style was a favorite of architects designing custom built homes in the 1950s and 60s.

Examples of Contemporary style homes in the district include the brick home at 2611 Vista Larga Drive, built in 1960. It has a front-gable roof with projecting beams, which create a tall windowless façade that is interrupted by an entryway featuring large panes of glass. The adjoining two-car garage, set at a right angle to the main house, continues the use of high glass and features a slant roof that continues the angle of the roof pitch on the main building.

Harvard Court, a small cul-de-sac in the southwest corner of the historic district offers a wonderful collection of Contemporary homes all constructed in 1957. A fine example is the house at 1509 Harvard Court. It features a low-pitched roof line, with a façade that is highlighted by tall, vertical panes of glass separated by dark wood window frames that contrast to the stark white finish on the building. The façade is divided by a wide, rectangular brick fireplace chimney. Two other houses also feature distinctive Contemporary styling. The home at 1502 Harvard Court features a projecting front-gable with exposed beams that shield large, divided glass panes opening into the main living space. The brick house next door at 1504 Harvard Court is flat roofed with a continuous row of ribbon windows set just below the overhanging eaves. The placement of these windows interrupts the solid brick wall surface, thus providing light to the interior space while allowing privacy in the front of the house.



Drawings for 1522 Stanford Drive NE. Architect: William W. Ellison, AIA, 1953. Courtesy of Cara McCulloch.



2611 Vista Larga Drive NE.



1509 Harvard Court NE.

Contemporary Style Homes

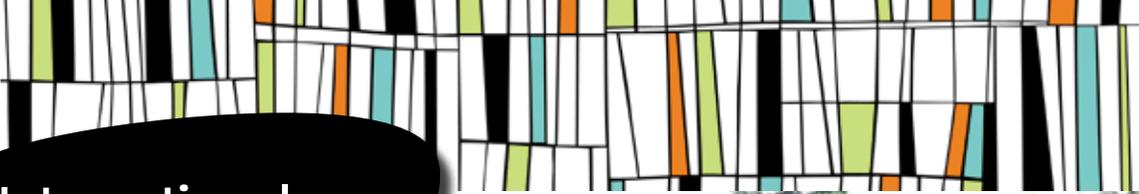


(Above) 1502 Harvard Court NE.
(Below) 1428 Stanford Drive NE.



(Above) 1418 Cornell Drive NE.
(Below) 1418 Harvard Court NE.





International Style Homes

Other notable Contemporary style homes include: 1418 Harvard Drive, built in 1959; 1428 Stanford Drive (with architecturally compatible additions), constructed in 1952; and 1418 Cornell Drive, built in 1955.

The International Style Home

This style was one of the first designs of the Modernist Movement designs and became popular in the 1930s. It features a flat roof with no overhanging eaves and an asymmetrical façade highlighted by unadorned windows that are flush with outer walls. Common features include: large window groupings, called ribbon windows, floor to ceiling windows, and large expanses of windowless wall surfaces. Courtyards are common features of this style. The “American International” style often uses brick or wood siding rather than the traditional white stucco finish. Brick was especially popular in Albuquerque, where the material was produced locally and was thus an inexpensive building material.

The Vista Larga Historic District has two examples of the International style house, which are located interestingly on adjacent lots at 1606 and 1610 Cornell Drive. The house at 1606 Cornell, built in 1956, is a dark red brick L-shaped building with tall, narrow vertical windows facing the street, and features a recessed entryway flanked by glass block sidelights. A pair of high ribbon windows face the front courtyard in the ell. The house at 1610 Cornell, also built in 1956, is also L-shaped but features a combination of brick and stucco and has larger windows than its neighbor at 1606. The entryway is deeply recessed at the corner of the ell and has a frosted glass sidelight.

(Top) 1606 Cornell Drive NE.
(Bottom) 1610 Cornell Drive NE.



“Who Built the Neighborhood?”

Many of the Modernist houses located in the historic districts were architect designed. Local architects known to have designed homes in the neighborhood include: Garlan Bryan (who lived at 2409 Hannett), Max Flatow, Lawrence Garcia (New Mexico's first Hispanic-surnamed registered architect), James Liberty, Richard Wright, Bill Shelton, Arthur Marshall, Robert Walters, and William Ellison. A number of local constructors worked in the subdivision, most notably Robert Koeber and John Hill.

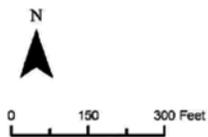
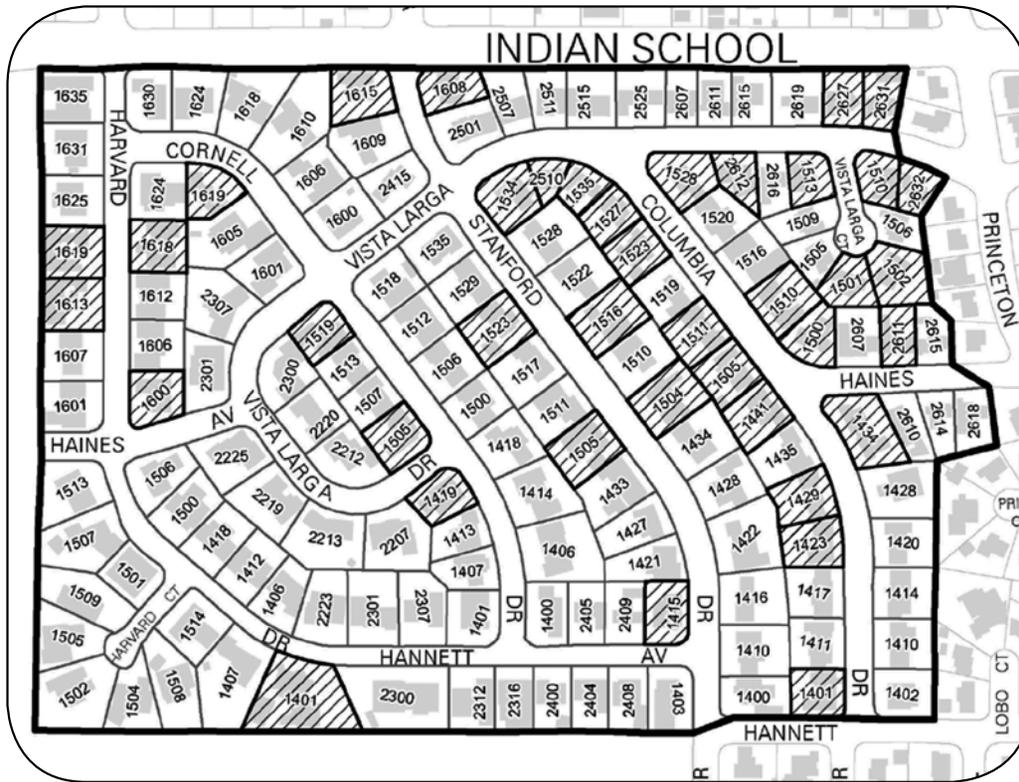
The National Register of Historic Places & You

The Vista Larga Mid-Century Modern Residential Historic District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register is a program supported by the National Park Service that includes a list of buildings, sites, structures, objects and districts that have been judged to have made a significant contribution to American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture at the local, state, or national level. Properties can be individually listed or be part of an historic district as a “contributing” property. (A property located within a district that does not meet eligibility criteria is referred to as a “non-contributing” property). Eligibility criteria center around the home’s historic and architectural “integrity.” Integrity is judged by not only by its historic appearance, but also whether or not it retains its original materials, design features, and aspects of construction. The neighborhood is also listed on the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties which has similar guidelines to the National Register.

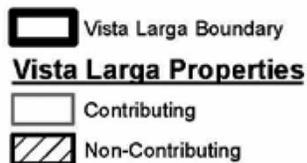


The Vista Larga Mid-Century Modern Residential Historic District is eligible for inclusion in the National and State Registers for: (1) its contribution to the mid-twentieth century history of the City of Albuquerque - a period of time when the city was transforming itself from an Old West railroad town to a modern Sunbelt City - and, (2) the architectural quality of the properties that reflect a variety of Modern house designs from this time period. By maintaining the historic qualities of the houses, residents have the unique opportunity to help preserve the timeless character of their neighborhood while at the same time contributing to the preservation of Albuquerque’s history.

A National Register listing, whether it be an individual property or an historic district, has what is called a “period of significance,” that is, in what year or years did the property or the district attain its historic significance. For the Vista Larga historic district, the period of significance begins in 1947, the year construction of its houses began, and ends in 1967, when almost all of the house lots were built out. Any houses constructed outside this period of significance are non-contributing properties to the district.



Map of Vista Larga Historic District Showing District Boundaries and Contributing and Non-Contributing Properties. Source: AGIS. City of Albuquerque Planning Department.



Tax Credits for Historic Homes

Owners of private properties listed on the National Register have no restrictions as to what they can do with their properties. However, homeowners who do coordinate remodeling of their historic home may be eligible for State of New Mexico tax credits of up to fifty percent. Details of this tax credit program are available through the Historic Preservation Division of the state's Department of Cultural Affairs. Tax credits are available for projects such as, roof replacement, deteriorating original woodwork, window repair, and other actions that affect the home's character-defining features. It also covers work to the home's foundation and its mechanical and plumbing systems. To be eligible for these financial benefits, the work must be approved in advance by the Historic Preservation Division and must benefit the rehabilitation and preservation of the home's historic architectural qualities. To earn tax credits, remodeling or repair projects must maintain a house's integrity as much as possible. For tax credit purposes, decisions regarding additions to the original building plan, replacement of original materials, or other changes to the home's facade are made through consultation between the homeowner and Historic Preservation Division staff.

For more information, visit the Historic Preservation Division's website at

www.nmhistoricpreservation.org.

RANCH STYLE



Large Chimney • Picture Window



Wrought Iron Supports • Decorative Shutters

CONTEMPORARY STYLE



Floor to Ceiling Windows • Low-Pitch Gable



High Ribbon Windows • Asymmetrical Façade

INTERNATIONAL STYLE



Recessed Entry • Blank Wall Space

Maintaining the Historic Integrity of Your Historic District

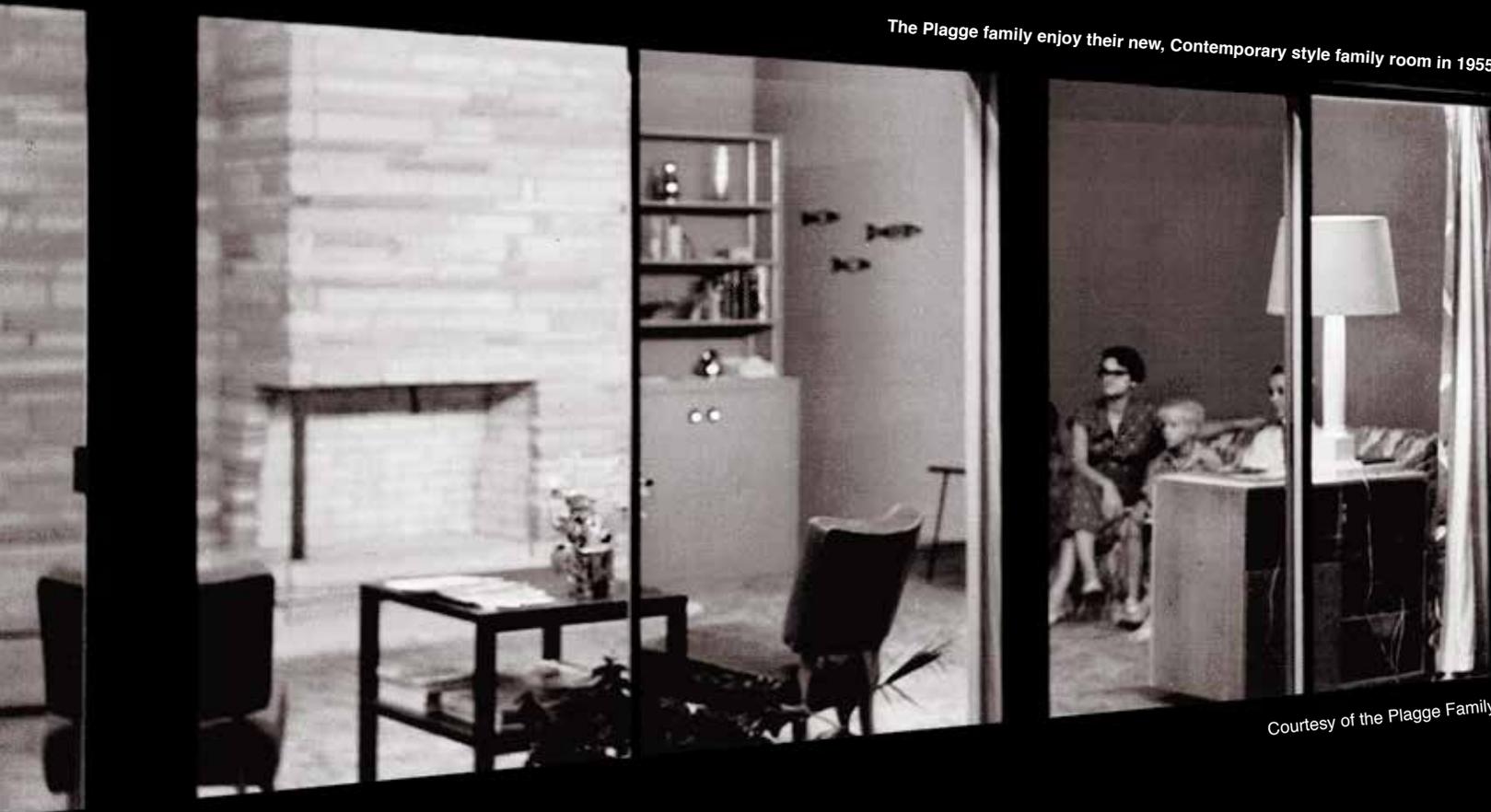
The integrity of the Vista Larga historic district is based on how well individual homeowners maintain the historic architectural qualities of their house. If a homeowner makes changes to the exterior of their house, such as, building an addition, converting a garage into living space, or changing window and door openings, that are inappropriate to the design or style of the original plan, the house may lose its National Register eligibility as a contributing property. This does not mean that homeowners cannot make improvements to their homes, but to maintain their historic significance, such changes must be carried out with a sensitivity to the home's original design and materials. The state's Historic Preservation Division is available to consult with the homeowner about making modifications to their house and possibly earning state tax credits (see preceding section).

The key to maintaining the architectural quality of your mid-century modern house is knowing what aspects of your home are “character-defining features;” that is, those features that characterize the style of your house. Other important considerations when repairing or remodeling your historic house:

- Repair character-defining features using like materials,
- When repair is not possible, replace with compatible materials that convey the visible appearance of the original,
- If you are building an addition, try to place it to the rear or side of the home so as not to detract from its original facade,
- When adding new features to your home (doorways, window openings, architectural details, etc.) do not radically change, obscure, or destroy character-defining features.

By maintaining your home's architectural integrity, you can make an important contribution to Albuquerque's history and help maintain the neighborhood's unique sense of place.

The Plagge family enjoy their new, Contemporary style family room in 1955.



Courtesy of the Plagge Family.