Valley Village Design Guide

The character of Valley Village is defined in large part by the history of the area – a part of the San Fernando Valley's early 20th century transition from agricultural to residential use, with neighborhoods that remain less urban, less dense, and more family friendly than those in the LA basin. Streets and developments are often aligned with former orchard plantings, with many stately older trees still providing a canopy of shade for homes and businesses. Our residents still know their neighbors, the children ride bikes in the streets and we our walk pets at sunset.

This character is important to our community, our identity, and the quality of lives for all of our stakeholders. Single family homes on larger lots co-exist with low rise multi-family housing and many unique smaller businesses. Our Valley Village Specific Plan works to ensure the appropriate balance of height, density and livability that makes the community special.

The Board of Neighborhood Council Valley Village fights hard to preserve this character. Our design guide is a template for anyone who seeks to build or remodel in Valley Village – a "how to" that can help to successfully integrate your project into one of the city's most outstanding neighborhoods.

If you are remodeling a home or constructing a new building, please take a minute to learn more about the prevailing styles that constitute the character of Valley Village. If you have questions about your project or want additional information from our Planning and Land Use Committee before you present your plans to the city, please feel free to email or call us.

Defining Character in Valley Village

VILLAGE:

late Middle English: from Old French, from Latin *villa* **'country house.'**

a group of houses and associated buildings, larger than a hamlet and smaller than a town, situated in a rural area.

SUBURBAN, LESS URBAN

Fitting the rural nature of a true village, the development of the area was an early part of the transition of the San Fernando Valley from agricultural to residential use in the early 20th century, with neighborhoods that are generally less urban, less dense than neighborhoods in the L.A. basin near established commercial centers. Streets and housing were often aligned with former orchard plantings, with remnants of walnut groves left in many yards, and lining streets.

The original commercial portion itself was designed as an old fashioned village. There is a lasting legacy of a quaint, more rural sensibility. Community Plans established more dense, more commercial corridors to the East (original center of the town called Lankershim) and North (developed later) which should attract and bear the contemporary infill development.

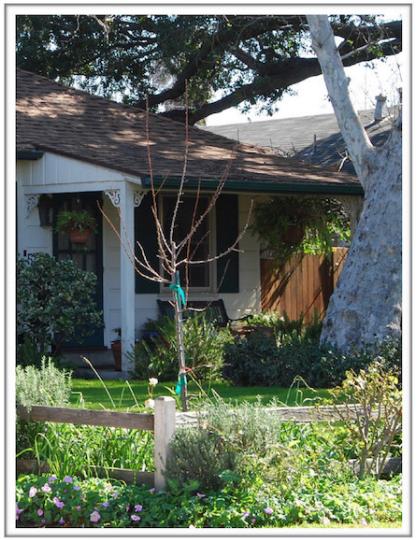
Character Largely Exhibited By Single Family Homes

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

In most subdivisions of Valley Village, the majority of houses were built before WWII, at a time when home ownership became more available to the masses, but before mass production became the hallmark of suburban valley tract housing, which diminished the attention to detail and individual qualities in a house. Houses were generally built for the land purchase, rather than whole blocks being built before houses were bought.

Intended to be modest but attractive and inviting, they were built in traditional styles such as Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, American Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional.

These styles employed classic materials and proportions, and were intrinsically articulated through the use of such features as prominent window treatments (bay windows, picture windows, dormers), pitched roofs, gables, moldings and/or wood siding. Many incorporated porches or patios for inclusive outdoor living spaces.



LOW FLOOR TO AREA RATIOS (FARs)

The original size of the house is small relative to the size of the lot on which it was built, as expressed by a ratio that compares the proportion of house square footage to lot square footage. As of 2008, half of Valley Village homes had a FAR of .25:1 (25% of lot area) or less. 92% were less than .40:1.

Previous City regulations called for ratios of .50:1 or .60:1, and only recently are planned to be at .45:1. Average lot size in Valley Village is larger than in other parts of the city, and can be as large as double or triple the standard size of 5000 square feet, contributing to lower scale and density of development.

MATURE TREES AND LANDSCAPING

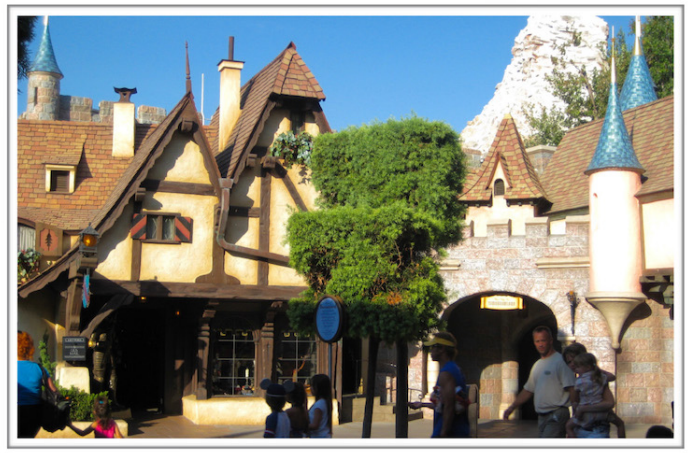
A bi-product of the low Floor to Area Ratio of the single family home lot is plenty of open space for the planting of shade trees, fruit trees, shrubs, and grasses in both front and backyards. With the vast majority of lots and streets developed 50 to 80 years ago—and walnut groves before that—our neighborhoods are full of mature trees and shrubs that distinguish Valley Village from the rest of North Hollywood and other, younger communities. The leafy canopy of mature trees is visible throughout Valley Village, connecting its neighborhoods, stretching over many streets that lack sidewalks, creating a "country" feel that is complimented by the "cottage" like style of the architecture.

"Village" Architecture in Early Commercial Strip

Beginning in 1935 and continuing until about 1951, the commercial strip on Magnolia Blvd. east of Whitsett Avenue was built contemporaneously with the inception and growth of the Valley Village neighborhoods. The staff of the Office of Historic Resources described the earliest portions as "an excellent example of an early, low-scale commercial center, emblematic of the historic development of the Valley Village neighborhood…Its Tudor Revival style reflects the historic popularity of revival architecture and designs influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement of the early part of the 20th century." The features and materials in these buildings are similar to what was built in the single family neighborhoods at the time, and share an effort to attract people through an appeal to an ideal sense of "home."

The whimsical nature—embellished by the later addition of the castle-like market that has become the Post Office—also recalls the backlot streets of nearby film studios. The area had already been established as a bedroom community for the film industry (as it still is today), and perhaps echoes the creativity and theatrical

sensibilities of those residents. When viewed in this light, the early development of Valley Village begins to seem similar to what Walt Disney would do a few years later with Main Street and Fantasyland.



“Village” Character in Other Commercial Buildings

The former Dutton’s building, now a yoga and fitness studio, is one of many commercially used buildings along the primary and secondary highways of Valley Village that are of a similar vintage and appearance as the early single family neighborhoods. House-like buildings can be found on the northeast corner of Riverside and Colfax. This corner also exhibits a contrast of modern intrusion on character where the pharmacy added a glass and metal embellishment on the façade.

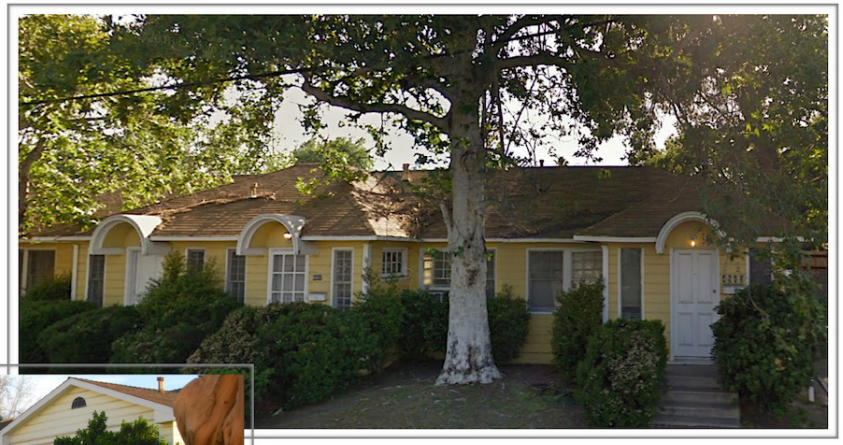
Traveling west from there on Riverside at Laurel Canyon is a more successful modernization of a commercial corner where the complex borrowed traditional motifs in its roof line and façades, but executed them in modern materials. Across the street is the Italianate Gelson’s Market facade, with architectural features from another village tradition. Farther west from there is Val Surf, which looks like a large scale model of a traditional house.

The northeast corner of Laurel Canyon and Magnolia is anchored by a two story building that looks like a larger version of a Colonial Revival or Minimal Traditional house (though it is currently over-saturated with signage). The rest of it is traditionally low scale, embellished by awnings, another traditional motif.

This other main commercial strip, moving north on Laurel Canyon to Chandler, contains some other village/traditional storefronts, such as Brittany Floors, but reflects development stretching into the 1960's, still low in scale and articulated with individualized storefronts, including elements such as the Carter Sexton art palette sign and the Metropolitan Pit stop car sign, which are "vintage" if not "village."

“Village”/Traditional Character in Multi-Family Buildings

Multi-family buildings in Valley Village developed alongside single family houses on many of the primary and secondary highways. There are numerous examples of early complexes from the 1930’s through the 1950’s which resembled the single family houses in their design, materials, and relatively low FARs. They looked either like a cluster of small traditional houses, or a courtyard grouping of a two story version of a Colonial Revival or Minimal Traditional house, with pitched roofs, gables, siding, bay windows, etc.

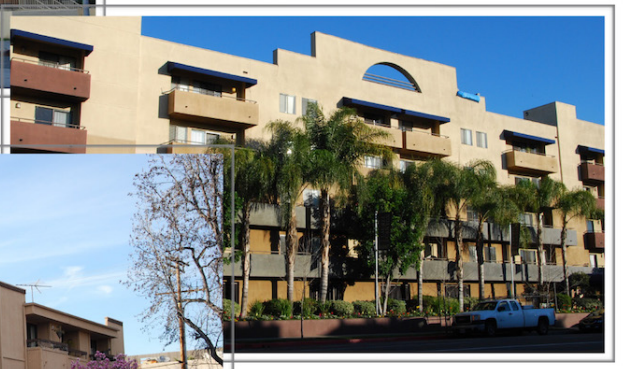


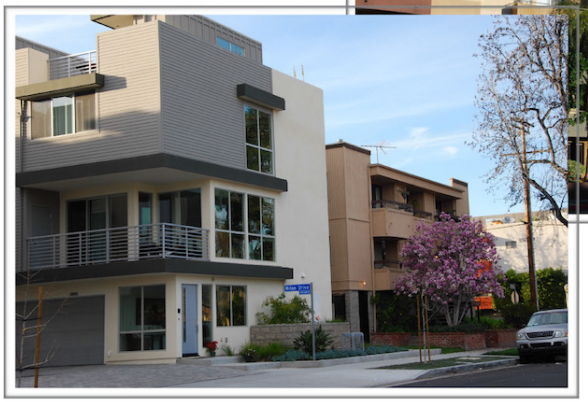
With their low-rise, low FAR, and traditional architectural designs accompanied by open space for trees and landscaping, they extended the single family neighborhood character out of the subdivisions, and onto the main streets.

For many years, though styles veered away from the materials and classic motifs, new multi-family development remained similar in density and/or height. As buildings have grown larger, the traditional character has been best conserved in Spanish, Mediterranean, and Cape Cod styles.

Out of Character Multi-Family Buildings

Too many subdivisions have been over built with apartments and condos with greater density and higher FAR'S. Even if some are low in height, and may be reminiscent of the traditional styles, most are large, dense, modern buildings of 3, 4, or even 5 stories. The encroachment of this kind of development on single family neighborhoods is what led to the inception of the Valley Village Specific Plan, intending to assure "uses are consistent with the general character of the existing single-family developments within the Valley Village area"and "to preserve the quality and existing character of the Valley Village area." **The previous pages all together hopefully provide a sense of that character.**





“Village”/Traditional Character in Institutional Buildings

In addition to housing and commercial space, there are also many educational and religious institutions in Valley Village. Many of them date back to the 1920’s through 1960’s, and carry with them the aforementioned hallmarks of traditional and/or village character such as Spanish Colonial style, pitched roofs, window treatments, and low FAR’s providing open space, mature trees, and landscaping. They compliment both the residential neighborhoods and the commercial spaces, contributing a running thread through the fabric of character in Valley Village.