

HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION  
LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT  
Prepared by Nicole Hernandez, MFA, City Architectural Historian

601 East Montecito Street  
La Casa De La Raza  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA  
APN 031-352-014

**Designation Status:** Designated a Landmark  
on November 10, 2020

**Constructed:** c. 1917 back portion  
1931 corner building

**Architect:** Unknown/ Soule, Murphy and  
Hastings (1929 addition)

**Builder:** Unknown

**Architectural Style:** Spanish Colonial Revival

**Property Type:** Commercial

**Original Use:** Commercial

**Period of Significance:** 1931 for construction  
of architecture, 1970 for year it became  
associated with La Casa De La Raza.



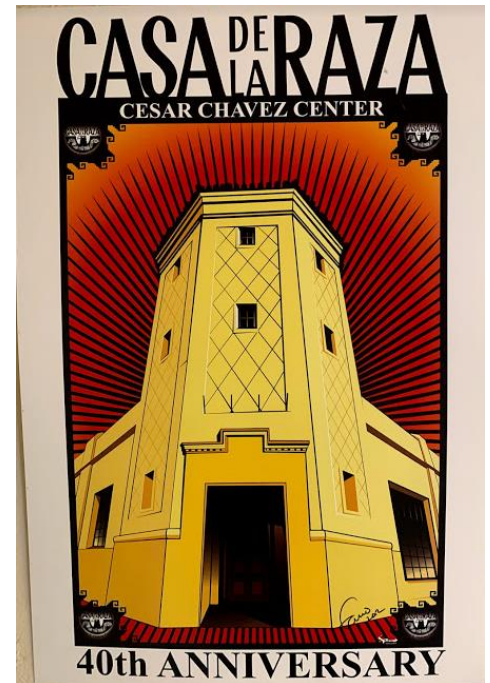
**Property description:** A three story octagonal tower rises over the corner of North Calle Cesar Chavez and East Montecito Streets. Topped with a weathervane, the center of the tower has a small octagonal belvedere covered in terra-cotta tiles with round vents in every other octagon face. The tower is covered in terra cotta tiles. Each face of the tower has a deeply recessed, small, four pane window marking each floor. The tower features a square entrance defined by a raised stucco surround and geometrical, stylized header and a panel door. Two, one-story wings flank the three-story tower and extend along Calle Cesar Chavez and Montecito Streets. Between each bay of the wings are vertical pilasters with stylized drain spouts. The wings also feature large arched openings for the doors. The windows are a mix of divided light, steel casement and wood casement windows topped with heavy divided light transoms.

**Construction History of the building:**

Based on City Directories listed below and Newspaper Clipping below, the building was first constructed on this site in 1917 as a Contractors Supply Warehouse:

**City Directory Listings:**

1912-13 - nothing in the 600 block of Montecito  
1915-16 - nothing in the 600 block of Montecito  
1916-17 - nothing in the 600 block of Montecito  
1917-18 - 605 E. Montecito - Associated Oil Co., Parker Brick Co., Union Oil Co.  
1920 - 605 E. Montecito - Associated Oil Co., Drexel AR, Baker Luther  
1929 - 600 E. Montecito - Associated Oil Co. - G W Seymour Mgr



Associated Oil Co., Parker Brick Co and Union Oil, Co. was among the first occupants; they had previously been located a block away at 236 Salsipuedes. The article below confirms the 1917 construction date.

## BUILDER SUPPLY FIRM OPENS NEW HOME FOR STOCK

Building on Montecito Street  
Erected at Cost  
of \$5000

The Contractor's Supply Company, a new corporation organized as a clearing house for all kinds of builders supplies, has opened its display and sales quarters at 695 Montecito street. The building, owned by the new company, has just been completed at a cost of \$5000.

The building is constructed out of hollow tile and brick. Its dimensions are 50 by 80 feet. The structure will house an ultimate stock of \$20,000 to \$25,000 worth of materials.

J. Y. Parker is manager of the new enterprise, which will carry a complete line of lime, cement, plaster, brick and gravel. Heretofore builders have been compelled to go to various places to buy a complete order for their jobs but the new firm will carry a full line of supplies under one roof.

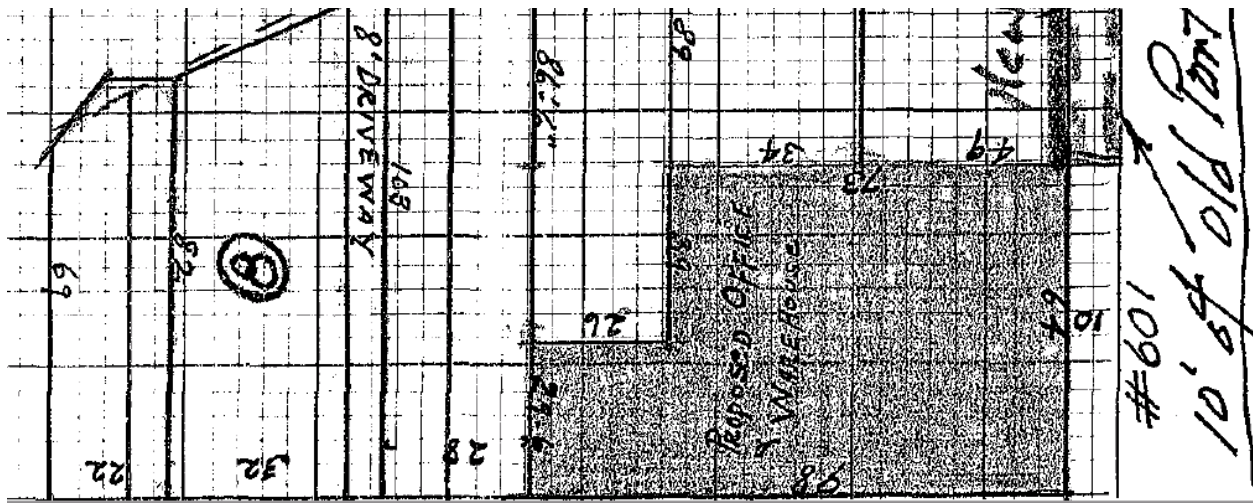
Clipped By:



gledhill\_library  
Fri, Jul 24, 2020

1929- The building was owned by Coleman and Neal, Inc. who hired Soule, Murphy and Hastings to complete an addition. Drawings illustrate additions to rear portion of the building- not the main corner of the building.

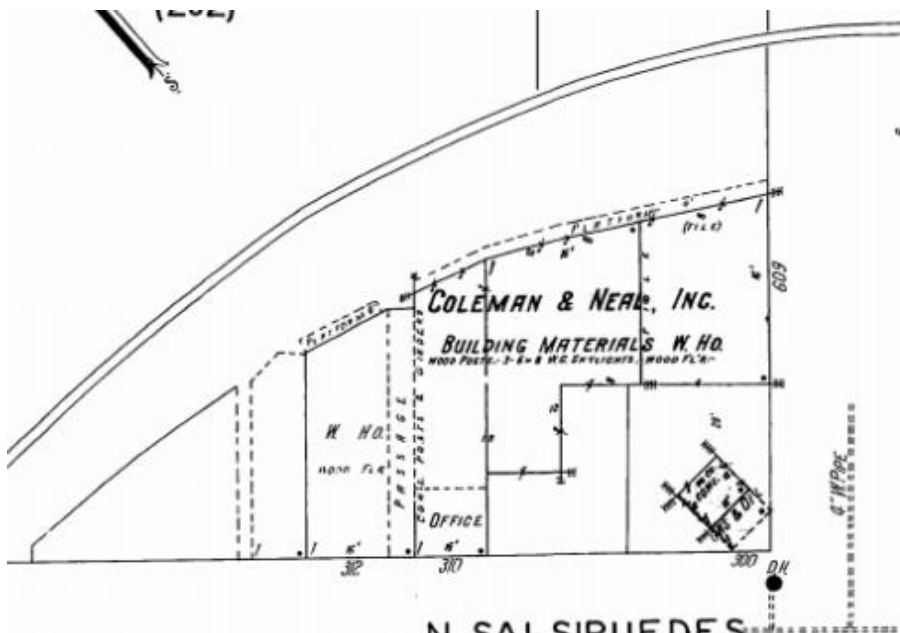
1931- The construction of the main corner of the building with the octagon tower. The 1929 permit was reissued with the proposed office and warehouse portions of the building.



1931 Permit showing the proposed office and warehouse on the corner of the building.

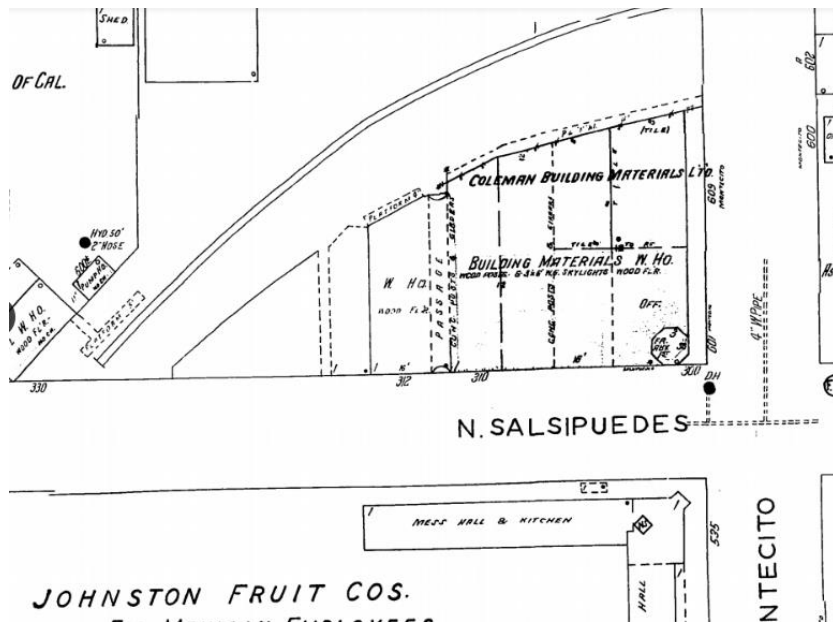
1970: Property owner Warren Coleman had an empty building. He sold the 27,000 square foot building for \$140,000 to the Chicano Positive Movement (later to become La Casa De La Raza.)

March 1, 1973: Planning Commission approves “a cultural center providing less than the minimum required off-street parking spaces.” Minutes state: “This is a unique situation that doesn’t form a precedent. This is in the public interest and community need.” Identifies uses including a \$4,000 square foot dance hall, library, reading room, lounge, small theater and office units.



Above: Sanborn 1950, Vol 1, pg. 153., showing the octagon tower element on the site.

Above: Sanborn Map 1930-31, pg. 153 showing a small building in the yard of the site with larger building behind.



**Significance:** Eligible to be designated a Landmark. The Historic Landmarks Commission added the building to the Potential Historic Resources List in 1998. Built in 1917 with addition in 1929 by noted architectural firm, Soule, Murphy and Hastings and addition in 1931 of the Octagon Tower designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, the significance of this building is enhanced by the association with the La Casa De La Raza, a community center for the Latinx community since 1970.



### ***Historic Integrity:***

The building retains enough of its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, allowing it to convey its 1931 appearance when the distinctive corner building was added to the site.

***Criterion A. Its character, interest or value as a significant part of the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation :*** As a community center for the Latinx people of Santa Barbara since 1970, La Casa de la Raza is important to the heritage of Santa Barbara as demonstrated in the history of La Casa de la Raza below:

**La Casa de la Raza (House of the People), 1970-Present: Historical and Contemporary Significance**  
by

**Ralph Armbruster Sandoval.**



#### History: 1960s-1970s

La Casa de la Raza emerged from the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Chicano Movement involved many different organizations and political perspectives, including the United Farm Workers, the Brown Berets, the Crusade for Justice, La Raza Unida, and many others. In Santa Barbara, Chicana/o community members and activists had long pushed for social change, as the city's Mexican American residents were spatially segregated for decades, based on racial discrimination in housing, on the Eastside. These residents had organized for multiple generations, but it wasn't until 1970/71 when a unique community-based, social justice organization known as La Casa de la Raza was established inside a former building materials warehouse/cement factory that includes a well-known iconic tower. Located on 601 East Montecito Street, just blocks away from Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic

Church and the Milpas corridor, La Casa de la Raza became a critical stopping point for Chicano Movement leaders like UFW co-founder César Chávez who often met with Chicana/o community members and activists around the union's boycotts and organizing drives. The UFW collaborated quite extensively with El Teatro Campesino (The Farm Workers Theater), an avant-garde satirical and highly politicized theater group that empowered farm workers with their productions. Later, El Teatro de Esperanza (The Theater of Hope) was based out of La Casa de la Raza and large murals created and designed by local Chicano artist Manuel Unzueta were installed inside La Casa. Manuel Unzueta became internationally famous for his murals and continues to teach art and be a significant influence in the Santa Barbara community. These artistic

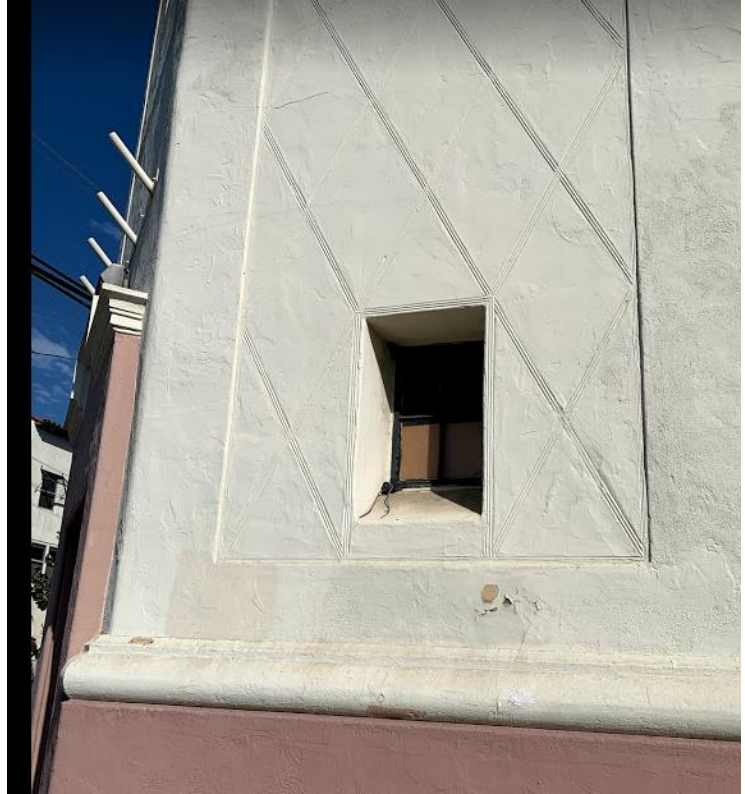
pieces—along with Teatro de Esperanza and many musical groups from that era who played concerts at La Casa—demonstrate that La Casa de la Raza was a space where Chicana/o culture and identity was affirmed and valued. It should be noted here, as stated in La Casa's original mission statement, the organization was never intended to be "separatist," but rather a "joint effort by Chicanos and supporters outside the Chicano community." That same ethos has been sustained until the present, as board members and supporters have come from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. La Casa's vision has always been broad-based, transformative social change for all oppressed communities.

#### Recent History: 1980s-2000s

Moving forward from the 1960s and 1970s, La Casa de la Raza evolved into a full-fledged community service center, offering childcare, English-language classes,



computer skills classes, job training and career services, educational workshops and classes for youth, food preparation, concerts and much more. Weddings, *quinceñeras*, fund-raisers, and festivals were also held at La Casa de la Raza, ever since its inception. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rise of conservative politics at a state and national level. Proposition 187, a ballot measure targeting undocumented immigrants, passed by a wide margin in 1994, as did Proposition 209, banning affirmative action in 1996. Social justice organizations relied on La Casa de la Raza as a meeting place to organize and mobilize against these initiatives. Meanwhile, Calle César Chávez was unveiled on the Eastside in 1997 and La Casa briefly closed in 1999 for earthquake-related retrofitting.



#### The Present: 2000-2020

In 2000, La Casa's leadership undertook a major community needs assessment and survey, canvassing Latinx families on the Eastside. That survey was crucial for solidifying the youth and family services programming that had been going on at La Casa for well over two decades. Moreover, La Casa began a very productive relationship with Santa Barbara City College, as various classes (particularly computer skills and job training) were offered at La Casa. More businesses and non-profit organizations also began renting space at La Casa, providing financial stability to the organization. Most crucially, over the last 2-3 years, La Casa has been providing emergency services, food, child care, educational assistance, and clothing to the Latinx community and other communities in need during



Home to many community activities. This is a photograph of the youth boxing program at La Casa De La Raza. Photo courtesy of Len Wood, Santa Barbara News Press.



the Thomas fire and subsequent flood that took more than twenty lives in January 2018. La Casa's ability to open its doors and provide these services was crucial most particularly for Santa Barbara's Chumash community which was hit hard by these natural disasters.

Finally, since mid-March 2020, with the rise of Covid-19, La Casa has once again opened its doors to those in need, providing families with food, clothing, and other crucial supplies. La Casa also provided much needed space to social justice organizations focused on racial and intersectional justice, especially after the George Floyd killing in Minneapolis, just after Memorial Day. Organizers with Black Lives Matter created strong ties with La Casa as they not only worked for racial justice in the City of Santa Barbara, but also in Lompoc at the federal prison where the pandemic rate rose dramatically. La Casa, moreover, continues to be a space where other social justice organizations such as Food and Water Watch and the Santa Barbara Immigrant Legal Defense Center call home, as they seek environmental justice and equity for all marginalized communities, especially immigrants and the working poor. A key community radio station, 96.5 KZAA LP FM, operates from La Casa de la Raza as well.

In sum, since 1970, La Casa de la Raza has been a place for the Latinx community of Santa Barbara hosting weddings, baptisms, concerts, dance performances, educational workshops and conferences, and non-profit organizations supporting the under-represented communities of Santa Barbara.



La Casa De La Raza's theater was a hot spot for 1980s alternative bands. Above: A 1984 flier for the Red Hot Chili Peppers show. Below: Flier for a Black Flag show benefitting the Clinic.





Above is a sample of the posters for Festivities over the past 50 years at La Casa De La Raza.



Above: Murals on the interior in the theater completed by the community.



***Criterion D. Its exemplification of a particular architectural style or way of life important to the City, the State, or the Nation***

Known for its Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, Santa Barbara owes much of its charm to the many thick plaster walls and clay tile roofs of this style. The various subtle details carved in wood or crafted in iron add to the quality of the architecture and character of the city. Spanish Colonial Revival architecture will always be key to Santa Barbara's identity. In 1916, Bertram Goodhue, author of a book on Spanish Colonial architecture, helped to kick-start the new Spanish style with his designs for the Panama California Expo in San Diego. Until then, the only Spanish themed architecture was based on Mission prototypes. Soon, however, architects and patrons began to look to Spain itself for detailed examples of the Spanish style. Throughout the territories originally settled by the Spanish in the Southwest, as well as Texas and Florida, the Spanish Colonial Revival flourished. In Santa Barbara, the style was championed by many architects including George Washington Smith, Lulah Maria Riggs, Winsor Soule, Reginald Johnson, William Edwards, and Joseph Plunkett. Also key to the success of the Spanish Colonial Revival in Santa Barbara was the Plans and Planting Committee through which Pearl Chase and others helped to sway Santa Barbara towards a more unified architectural style based on the City's Spanish Colonial and Mexican past. After the earthquake of 1925, much of this vision was realized in the rebuilding of State Street and the Pueblo Viejo area, from which Santa Barbara has received much of its beauty and notoriety. The details of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture vary greatly depending on which period of Spanish architecture is being referenced. In Santa Barbara, the Andalusian vernacular, (southern-Spanish farmhouse) was the key inspiration for the simplicity in detail found in much of the region's architecture. The Spanish Colonial Revival style emphasizes the interplay of cubic volumes, patios, pergolas and verandas; each interpreted and redefined by local architects or regions in their own oeuvre of the form, massing, and decorative treatments. In Santa Barbara, the Spanish Colonial Revival style was exemplified by George Washington Smith, one of Santa Barbara's noted architects from the 1920s when he was one of the most popular architects in the United States. Santa Barbara has examples of the Spanish Colonial Revival style throughout the city from the distinct commercial buildings on State Street, to large homes and estates on the Riviera, to multi-family housing and hotels in the West Beach neighborhood along the waterfront.



Soule, Murphy and Hasting, one of Santa Barbara's premier architectural firms, completed an addition to the building in 1929. The unique octagon tower corner portion of the building and its wings were added in the 1931. The building embodies the Spanish Colonial Revival style's character-defining features, including the stucco walls; terra-cotta roof tiles that create a decorative edge from the roof to the wall; deeply recessed divided light windows; the octogen tower flanked by two wings with vertical pilasters with stylized drain spouts with large arched openings for the doors.



Another key to the success of the Spanish Colonial Revival style in Santa Barbara was the Plans and Planting Committee, through which Bernhard Hoffman, Pearl Chase and others helped to sway Santa Barbara towards a more unified architectural style based on the City's Spanish Colonial and Mexican past. After the earthquake of 1925, much of the rebuilding in Santa Barbara was in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. This building reflects the design envisioned by the early planners as character-defining elements of Santa Barbara, a theme carried throughout downtown even into the industrial area of East Montecito, only a few blocks from the Spanish Colonial Revival Jr. High School and the commercial corridor of Milpas Street that was being designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style as well. The style was infiltrating all parts of life in Santa Barbara, not only the elite State Street commercial buildings and high end homes, churches and schools, but for people of all means, including small homes for moderate income families, apartment buildings, bungalow courts, and industrial buildings.

***Criterion F. Its identification as the creation, design or work of a person or persons whose effort has significantly influenced the heritage of the City, the State or the Nation;***

Internationally known and important Latinx muralist, Manuel Unzueta painted a series of murals in La Casa De La Raza. The excerpt from an article in the Santa Barbara Independent describes his importance to the community,



“When the Chicano movement kicked off in the 1960s, artists in the United States reclaimed the Mexican mural tradition by covering urban barrio walls with didactic messages

Above: Mural by Internationally recognized muralist Manuel Unzueta at La Casa De La Raza.



celebrating Mesoamerican culture and by presenting this work as an alternative to Eurocentric aesthetic sensibilities. The godfather of such art in Santa Barbara is Manuel Unzueta, whose creations climb across walls all over the American Riviera, at schools, colleges, in La Casa de la Raza, and at the Franklin Center, among other locations.



Whereas American art emphasizes technique, resulting in paintings that force consideration of the inner workings of the human mind, explained Unzueta, in Mexico, “artists pay more attention to detail.” His own murals foreground the features of indigenous faces, Aztec symbols, and sometimes even the tendons of clenched forearms as in those seen striving toward respect and enlightenment in a mural called “The New Spirit” that greets visitors entering La Casa de la Raza on Montecito Street.

Above: *The New Spirit* Mural at La Casa De La Raza by Internationally known artist, Manuel Unzueta.



Above: The mural featuring Martin Luther King at La Casa De La Raza by Internationally known artist, Manuel Unzueta.

‘The Chicano movement is a pressure movement,’ explained Unzueta. ‘It asks kids to dream. Why shouldn’t a little kid from the barrio want to be an astronaut?’ He posed this question about a month ago as he was helping to put the finishing touches on a new mural inside Santa Barbara Junior High School. It covers two sides of a hallway. One wall represents the thinkers of the material world, and it includes portraits of many famous scientists against a background of solar systems and supernovas.

The other wall represents the spiritual world and features two towering Chumash Indians at opposite ends of the image, bearing water jugs. The Chumash are bending over, and, as water spills from their jugs, it spirals down into an ocean teeming with life. An arrow-straight rainbow shoots across the entire mural, which recounts the fable of the rainbow bridge

that the Chumash gods created for the tribe to cross over to the mainland when their ancestral homeland on the Channel Islands became overcrowded. Those who doubted the gods and looked down fell into the ocean and were turned into dolphins.”

The article “Fundraiser for Artist and Teacher Manuel Unzueta.” featured in the Santa Barbara Independent further details the importance of Manuel Unzueta to the Santa Barbara community:

“Unzueta has produced some of the most powerful statements and images found in Chicano Art since its inception during the height of the Chicano Movement. Manuel’s ability to define and recognize the historic and cultural relevancy of the Mexican American experience through his paintings and murals has made him a local treasure. Manuel is an internationally recognized artist with work displayed in Mexico City, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC and other cities throughout North America.

Manuel’s exemplary commitment to education and community service has been a beacon of hope and inspiration for thousands of students through his lectures in the City’s public schools, at Santa Barbara City College and UCSB. The countless volunteer hours he has given to support community public art projects have added a distinct cultural flavor to our neighborhoods. Equally important, Manuel assisted and advised thousands of students as an EOPS counselor at SBCC. It was in this capacity that Manuel offered a safe haven for students challenged by higher education. Manuel has been an excellent mentor and has offered a different level of leadership for young people through his unique artistic perspective.

Currently, Manuel is assisting the City of Santa Barbara’s Youth Arts Alliance Program. Brand new neighborhood murals at Bohnett Park and the Eastside Library are proof of how Manuel uses his talent and experience to inspire today’s youth. He also sits on the La Cumbre Junior High Foundation that seeks to improve the health and wellness of children and families living on Santa Barbara’s greater Westside.



Above and below: Murals by Internationally recognized muralist Manuel Unzueta at La Casa De La Raza.



Lastly, Manuel's impact and contribution to the community of Santa Barbara has helped shaped our city's cultural landscape through his art and teachings."

***Criterion G. Its embodiment of elements demonstrating outstanding attention to architectural design, detail, materials and craftsmanship:*** The three-story octagon with one-story wings with vertical pilasters with small stylized detailing demonstrates outstanding attention to design. The terra cotta roof of the octagon tower and belvedere demonstrates outstanding attention to materials and design.

***Criterion I. Its unique location or singular physical characteristic representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood:*** The unique octagon tower over Calle Cesar Chavez and Montecito Streets has been an important icon to the Lower Eastside neighborhood since its construction in 1931. Moreover, a symbol of a place representing the history and culture of the Santa Barbara Latinx and greater under-represented communities since 1970 as the home of La Casa de la Raza Community Center.

**Works Cited:**

City Directories: 1912-1929

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"Fundraiser for Artist and Teacher Manuel Unzueta." *Santa Barbara Independent*. April 16, 2013

Grumbine, Anthony, Harrison Design. Hernandez, Nicole. *Santa Barbara Style Guides, Spanish Colonial Revival*. City of Santa Barbara, Community Development Department. November 2014.

Sandoval, Ralph Armbruster. *La Casa de la Raza (House of the People), 1970-Present: Historical and Contemporary Significance*. July, 2020.

Santa Barbara Daily News, April 17, 1917

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