

The Drehr Place Historic District is a moderately sized twentieth century urban neighborhood encompassing some 37 acres. Within the boundaries are 112 resources, 80% of which are contributing elements. With the exception of a brick veneer apartment building and two large brick gate posts marking the entrance to the subdivision, all of the contributing elements are one and two story residences. (One of the contributing buildings, the Sanders House, is already listed on the Register.) Contributing elements range in date from 1921, when the first houses are known to have been built in the new subdivision, to 1947, the fifty year cutoff, when at least two buildings were constructed. Although Drehr Place is the area's historic name, the subdivision is part of a larger neighborhood known as the Garden District by local residents and city officials. The Garden District is comprised of three early twentieth century subdivisions, Roseland Terrace, Drehr Place and Kleinert Terrace. The earliest, Roseland Terrace, was listed on the Register in 1982. Kleinert Terrace will be nominated later this year.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This project began in late 1996 when a resident of Drehr Place requested that the Division of Historic Preservation consider it for the Register. At that time the National Register staff evaluated the area by both driving and walking through the neighborhood and found that it was a viable candidate. With the endorsement of the City of Baton Rouge and the Garden District Civic Association, the National Register staff began work in the spring of 1997. The district's easily accessible location near downtown Baton Rouge made the completion of field work convenient. During the equivalent of five working days (spread over the month of May), staff mapped the buildings by style and status as contributing and non-contributing elements, defined the district's boundaries, and completed photography of the area. The results of this survey will be discussed below.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Drehr Place traces its origins to Alvin L. Drehr's July 1919 purchase of a forty acre plot then known as the Kugler Tract. Drehr paid \$32,000 for the property, which he had subdivided into lots and began offering for sale by 1921. A deed dated that year indicates that Drehr may have first called his new addition Jefferson Place, but a 1922 plat map and a 1926 deed confirm the official name as Drehr Place. Development in the new neighborhood appears to have continued at a steady pace, with the majority of the lots being built upon by the Great Depression. Even now a few vacant lots survive, usually serving as side yards. These open spaces add greatly to the lush character of the neighborhood.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING**

The Drehr Place Historic District is situated in the south central portion of Baton Rouge on flat terrain about two miles from the Mississippi River and the city's central business district. Government Street, a major east/west thoroughfare featuring mixed commercial and residential development, forms the northern boundary. Two blocks wide and six blocks long, the subdivision is laid out in a typical, perpendicular grid pattern. Although part of the original subdivision plat, one of the twelve original blocks is being excluded from this submission (see map) because it did not begin to develop until after the fifty year cutoff. On the official subdivision plat map, dated 1922, the block in question is shown as one undivided parcel. Long-time residents of the neighborhood recall that the developer did not subdivide the block and offer it for sale because it was low-lying and flood prone. They remember a gully and Drehr using the lot initially as a pasture. (He lived on nearby Government Street.) It appears that the block in question began to develop in the 1950s or 1960s. All of its buildings are one story ranch houses.

Because purchasers of Drehr Place home sites sometimes obtained more than one lot on which to place their residences, the neighborhood contains houses and plots of various sizes, especially on Drehr Avenue. This north to south running street serves as the subdivision's entrance and grand boulevard, and it is here that the majority of the district's landmark houses are found. The entrance is marked by a set of thick, slightly tapered brick pillars featuring cast concrete capitals surmounted by spherical light fixtures. With the exception of Drehr Avenue, Government, and 22nd, all of the historic subdivision's streets are named for flora. Although there is no formal park, an undeveloped quarter block owned by one of the district's families of long standing is used as such for special occasions. The neighborhood features mature plantings of trees and other vegetation, including large live oaks which, in some cases, form canopies over the streets. In some places, the original brick sidewalks are reappearing as their later thin concrete covering breaks away from the surface. Also of interest is the subdivision's system of alleyways running through the interior of each block. (The 1922 subdivision plat shows many of the blocks with the alleys in place. They continue the pattern of development in adjacent Roseland Terrace, established in 1911.)

## STYLES

The above mentioned survey of the neighborhood revealed the following breakdown of buildings. The two gateposts are not being included in the following:

<u>Style</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Classical Revival/Colonial Revival	30	27%
Craftsman/Bungalow	26	26%
English Cottage	9	8%
Other Styles	13	12%
No Style	10	7%
Non-Contributing	22	20%

A brief discussion of each category follows.

### Classical Revival/Colonial Revival (27%)

This broad-ranging category includes mainly Classical Revival and Colonial Revival residences. There are also one or two houses that might be more appropriately termed Georgian Revival and one house with an English gambrel roof.

Examples within this overall category range from substantial two-story brick or stucco residences with various stylistic details such as fanlights, dentils, and roofline balustrades to small brick dwellings displaying only one or two classical characteristics such as columns or a door surround. Two of the smaller homes feature a slightly projecting portico, one pierced by an oculus, the other by a fanlight. There are various large and small frame Colonial Revival residences, three of which have porches in the Mount Vernon style.

### Craftsman Bungalow and "Along Bungalow Lines" (26%)

The bungalow was probably the most popular style of house to be built during the early decades of the twentieth century. Although it started out as a specific style which included certain forms as well as design characteristics, the style became so popular that some of its decorative motifs (especially the gabled porch with tapered columns) were applied to houses which were not true bungalows. During the historic period, these buildings were known as houses "along bungalow lines." The Drehr Place Historic District contains both well-developed examples of the bungalow style and a number of one-story cottages to which bungalow stylistic features have been applied.

There are also two homes which might be best categorized as Craftsman, two camelback bungalows, and two, two-story residences to which bungalow motifs have been applied.

#### English Cottage (8%)

The early twentieth century English Cottage style was part of a larger movement based upon a revived interest in the historic buildings of England (as well as an overall interest in architecture of the past). In the Drehr Place Historic District, this interest is reflected in a small but important collection of houses featuring steep frontal gables (one with a cat slide roof), arched openings, prominent facade or side chimneys, and (in two cases) half-timbering. The examples range from a moderately sized two-story half-timbered house to small cottages sheathed in brick or stucco.

#### Other Styles (12%)

This classification contains two sub-categories: 1) eclectic houses -- those with a mix of stylistic features, and 2) houses which are clear examples of a particular style but do not exist in numbers large enough to justify being assigned their own individual categories. Examples of the latter include a few houses with an overall Mediterranean or Spanish character and two Modernistic residences. Some of these "other style" buildings are described in the landmarks section (see below).

#### No Style (7%)

This classification refers to ten contributing elements which do not make a stylistic statement -- in short, unstyled buildings. For the most part, the category consists of smaller unstyled houses from the 1930s and 1940s. The grouping also includes one apartment building constructed in 1947. Unstyled historic buildings are common in many residential neighborhoods and are certainly worthy contributing elements of the Drehr Place Historic District. These buildings significantly enhance the district's identity as a historic twentieth century residential area and help it to exhibit the full range of archetypes typically found in this type of neighborhood. In short, they enhance the district's authenticity. In addition, they support the overall character of the district in areas such as massing, fenestration pattern, facades enlivened by front facing gables and dormers, and systems of porches and columns.

#### Non-Contributing Elements (20%)

This category includes buildings within the neighborhood which are not yet 50 years old or historic buildings which have been altered to the extent that their historic character has been lost. The vast majority are less than fifty years old -- mainly small 1950s and 1960s slab-on-grade ranch houses and more recent frame one story houses with an overall traditional character. Of particular interest is a frame galleried cottage which has a historic appearance, although in fact it was constructed within the last twenty years.

The non-contributing category also includes a large c.1905 Colonial Revival house moved onto Government Street from downtown Baton Rouge c.1950. Per Register guidelines and consultation with the National Park Service staff, the house is being counted as non-contributing because it stylistically predates the subdivision. In short, the phase of the Colonial Revival which it represents is c.1905, perhaps c.1910 -- but not the 1920s or 30's.

In terms of height, only two or three of the non-contributing elements are two stories.

## ASSESSMENT OF INTEGRITY

In addition to the comments made above about the nature of non-contributing elements, it should be noted that a non-contributing rate of 20% is low for a Register district in Louisiana, even by New Orleans standards. In terms of alterations to historic buildings, each building was evaluated by the National Register staff and a judgment call was made on contributing vs. noncontributing status based upon the severity of the alterations. It should be stressed that there were actually very few instances of serious alterations to historic residences. In addition to having a low non-contributing rate, the district has very well preserved historic buildings.

## LANDMARKS SAMPLING

- 1) 830 Drehr Avenue. This large, two story stucco house with a tile roof, an expansive verandah, and a projecting entrance porch with arched openings is strongly suggestive of Mediterranean architecture.
- 2) 875 Drehr Avenue. This large two-story brick mansion is evocative of the Italian Renaissance with its spreading green tile roof, its incorporation of the upper story windows into a wide frieze-like band, and its use of pronounced round head windows with blind arcades. The rather grand house culminates in a handsome entrance portico with a segmental pediment and Tuscan columns.
- 3) 914 Drehr Avenue. This camelback house is perhaps the finest bungalow in the neighborhood. It features tall tapered brick piers, a large gabled L-shaped porch featuring oriental-looking stick work in the porch's gable peak, windows with subdivided upper sashes, and wide overhanging eaves with exposed rafter tails and brackets.
- 4) 915 Drehr Avenue. This grand two-story, stuccoed house is an example of the Colonial Revival style. It features an entrance surrounded by a fanlight and side lights, a small portico with Corinthian columns supporting an entablature surmounted by a balustrade, an entablature beneath the facade's roof and a side wing surmounted by an additional balustrade.
- 5) 1001 Drehr Avenue. This eclectic, two-story, brick, "L" shaped residence has an overall Mediterranean character, although its front triple arch window reflects Spanish influence. Part of the roof is tiled; the rest rises upward to form a parapet with tile coping.
- 6) 2231 Cherokee Street. This one-story stuccoed house is one of two in Drehr Place reflecting the Modernistic taste. Although a low-key example, it is striking because of its rarity. (Modernism was never popular for residences, particularly in conservative Louisiana.) The asymmetrically massed house features a partial clerestory over the living room, bands of windows, and a prominent roof overhang which yields an energetic horizontal composition. Distinctive geometric handrails lead to the recessed front entrance.
- 7) 2205 Myrtle Street. More restrained than the above, this Modernistic two-story stuccoed residence has crisply articulated advancing and receding wall planes and a marked flat parapet ledge.
- 8) 2201 Myrtle Street. This two-story residence is the district's largest home in the English style. It features two steep gables, half-timbering on the facade's second level and a band of four windows featuring diamond shaped panes.

- 9) 2230 Olive Street. This red brick, two-story Georgian Revival residence features an entrance with a fanlight, a projecting portico with coupled columns, and corners articulated to resemble quoins.

## **BUILDING MATERIALS**

Buildings in the district are sheathed in one of three materials: 1) wood, 2) brick veneer, or 3) stucco veneer. Although the majority are roofed with asphalt shingles, there are a few examples displaying tile roofs.

## **CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS**

Taken together, the buildings in Drehr Place illustrate the appearance of an historic twentieth century suburb. Any 50+ year old structure which has not been severely altered is considered a contributing element for purposes of this application. Contributing buildings range in date from 1921, when the first houses are known to have been built, to 1947, the fifty year cutoff, when at least two of the district's buildings were constructed.

Significant dates	1919
Architect/Builder	N/A
Criterion C	

The Drehr Place Historic District is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a well preserved, representative historic twentieth century neighborhood within the context of Baton Rouge. It is locally significant in the area of community development and planning because it helps tell the story of the early twentieth century growth and development of Baton Rouge.

## **Architecture**

Drehr Place is architecturally significant because the neighborhood is, in effect, a window into the past, allowing people to view and understand the appearance of a period neighborhood. Stylistically, the subdivision illustrates very well the eclecticism of the early twentieth century. Classical Revival/Colonial Revival and Craftsman/Bungalow appear in the greatest numbers, with a wide variety of examples in each category. Sprinkled into this already rich mixture are a few landmarks in more "exotic" styles such as Mediterranean/Spanish and Modernistic. Then there are striking eclectic houses which feature a mixture of styles and a handful of the ever popular English Cottage style.

The Classical Revival/Colonial Revival category accounts for over one-third of the district's contributing elements (30 houses). Examples range from a grand two story house reflective of the Italian Renaissance, to Classical Revival houses with handsome porticoes (three of which are pedimented), to a red brick Georgian Revival house, to a gambrel roofed house, to interpretations of the Mount Vernon look. In terms of size, they range from what many would call mansions (although moderate sized ones, such as landmarks 2, 4 and 9) to small cottages.

Drehr Place is also an excellent example of the bungalow period, which is finally being recognized as an important chapter in the history of American domestic architecture. The neighborhood has 26 houses which are members of the bungalow family (almost one-third of the contributing elements) in a concentrated area. Many of these are well-developed examples

characterized by broad openness, elaborate transfer of weight, massing that hugs the ground, and the bold expression of structural members. Others have only one or two bungalow features (such as tapered columns) applied to buildings which, without those details, would not be considered bungalows.

Although the number of English Cottage style houses within Drehr Place is relatively low (9 out of 110 buildings, or 8%), the visual impact of these dwellings upon the neighborhood is far greater than this small number would suggest. The picturesque English look was quite popular for residences in early twentieth century America, whether they be baronial halls or cozy cottages of the type found in Drehr Place. At the up-market end were the so-called "Stockbroker Tudor" houses (a modest example of which is landmark # 8). For middle class America, the style was popularized through mail order house catalogs and magazines, with specific models being advertised with evocative names such as "The Devonshire," "The Sussex," and "The Dover." The style as a whole was referred to at the time as "old English" and "Quaint English Cottage Style." As explained in Part 7, the Drehr Place examples range from the above mentioned moderately sized, half-timbered house to small cottages sheathed in brick or stucco.

In addition to houses in the above mentioned styles, two Modernistic dwellings (landmarks # 6 and # 7) bring a great deal of architectural interest and distinction to the Drehr Place Historic District. Although both are restrained examples, they are important because of their rarity. While Modernistic architecture, in its various permutations, was quite popular, it was never widely accepted for houses. It just didn't fit the "cozy cottage" domestic ideal. This is particularly true in conservative areas such as the Deep South. Hence, it is surprising to see two "Moderne" houses in Drehr Place tucked in amongst traditional bungalows, English cottages, and Colonial Revival residences.

Finally, it should again be emphasized that Drehr Place is impressive in terms of integrity. Only 20% percent of its resources are non-contributing, and contributing elements are very well preserved.

## **Community Planning and Development**

Drehr Place is of local significance in the area of community planning and development because it illustrates the early twentieth century expansion of Baton Rouge eastward from the Mississippi River. Although Baton Rouge is a very old community, having been settled in the colonial period, it remained relatively small until the early twentieth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, the city extended only a few blocks in (east) from the Mississippi River. The town experienced considerable growth and prosperity in the early twentieth century due to various factors, the most important being the arrival and expansion of the petrochemical industry (most notably, a huge Standard Oil plant). As the city's population more than doubled between 1910 and 1930 (14,897 to 30,279), there obviously was a need for additional housing. Roseland Terrace, the first subdivision, was established in 1911. However, apparently there were still more people than houses. A July 1919 article in the local paper noted an "acute" shortage of homes in the city, estimating that three or four hundred more were needed. Drehr Place (1919) and Kleinert Terrace (1927) were presumably a response to this need. In South Baton Rouge, the College Town subdivision was founded to accommodate those working at LSU, which had just moved to its new and larger campus.

Drehr Place is also a fine representative example of the type of bedroom suburb which sprang up around major eastern cities in the early years of the twentieth century. These neighborhoods were designed to give working men in the cities a more rural domestic life. Drehr Place exemplifies the early-twentieth century "garden suburb" with its small lots, liberal planting of trees along streets, and rear alleyways. In addition, the subdivision is more attractive than most because utility poles were deliberately placed (and are still located) along the rear alleyways. Thus its bucolic atmosphere is preserved and enhanced.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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