

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
November 16, 1993, Designation List 255  
LP-1887

## **ANTHONY CAMPAGNA ESTATE**

640 West 249th Street, The Bronx. Built 1929-1930; architect Dwight James Baum.  
Landmark Site: Borough of The Bronx Tax Map Block 5914, Lot 315.

On June 2, 1992, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Anthony Campagna Estate and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). At the request of the owner, the hearing was continued to December 8, 1992 (Item No. 2). Both hearings were duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. At the two hearings, there were eight speakers in favor of the designation and none in opposition; the then owners took no position. The current owners have not taken a position on designation.

### **DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

#### Summary

The Anthony Campagna Estate was built in 1929-30 in the Riverdale section of the Bronx as the home of this prominent Italian-born New York City builder and philanthropist. The work of Dwight James Baum, a leading New York City architect praised for his carefully conceived and executed suburban and country residences, the house is modeled after Italian villas, an unusual prototype for New York City. The elements of the landscape design, by Ferruccio Vitale, an Italian-born landscape architect, and his partner Alfred Geiffert, Jr., were also based on Italian prototypes, in keeping with the design of the house, and won the 1934 gold medal in landscape architecture from the Architectural League of New York. The design of the house and grounds, on a site overlooking the Hudson River to the Palisades, is one of Baum's most impressive and is a major example of 1920s architectural eclecticism by a recognized master of the genre. Thus the Anthony Campagna Estate is a major example of the integration of house and setting, virtually unparalleled for its period in New York City. In addition, it takes its place among the large estates that have distinguished the history of Riverdale over the past century and a half, competing in size and magnificence with the most lavish of its predecessors.

### Anthony Campagna<sup>1</sup>

Anthony Campagna (1884-1969) was one of Manhattan's most prominent developers of apartment houses during the 1910s and 1920s. Born in Castelmezzano, Italy, Campagna took a law degree in Naples and then immigrated to the United States. After working in Chicago, first in journalism and then as a lawyer, he moved to New York in 1909 to work for the construction firm of Paterno Brothers, apartment house builders. After marrying Marie Paterno, Campagna formed his own company, the Campagna Construction Corporation, and continued successfully in the same line for several decades.

Campagna's most active period as a builder coincided with the enormous boom in apartment house construction that followed World War I, as large apartment houses sprang up in many areas of Manhattan, particularly along Fifth and Park avenues on the East Side and along West End Avenue and Riverside Drive on the West Side. Campagna became involved in the acquisition and redevelopment of major sites in both areas. His company built a number of large prominent buildings on Fifth and Park avenues, including 960 Fifth (Rosario Candela and Warren & Wetmore, 1929), a "luxury" building with apartments so large they were comparable in size to private houses;<sup>2</sup> and 173-175 Riverside Drive (J.E.R. Carpenter, 1926), occupying the entire blockfront between 89th and 90th streets.

As he became successful and wealthy, Campagna turned to philanthropy. Most of his efforts were directed to institutions in Italy or to those in New York with Italian connections. He helped raise funds for the restoration of Virgil's tomb in Naples, and for a Roman tower in Minturno. He made contributions to the Italian Historical Society in Rome, and for the excavations of Roman ruins at Herculaneum. In New York City, besides serving as a director without pay of a city school construction program, he donated a site at Fifth Avenue and 106th Street in 1929 to the Italian Hospital (never built because of the Depression) and played a major role in the creation of the Casa Italiana at Columbia University (the structure was built by his firm). His work on behalf of Italian institutions earned

him the title of Count of Castelmezzano, bestowed by King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy in 1930.

Given Campagna's devotion to the culture and history of his native country, it is not surprising that when he decided to build himself a new home in the Riverdale section of the Bronx in 1928, he would choose the Italian villa as a model and select a highly successful architect who specialized in historical styles.

### Dwight James Baum<sup>3</sup>

Dwight James Baum (1886-1939) was one of the most productive and successful architects working in historical styles during the early decades of this century. Born in Little Falls, New York, he studied architecture at Syracuse University, graduating in 1909. He opened his own office in New York City in 1914, establishing himself as a talented and versatile designer.

Baum designed a number of public and institutional buildings, including several at Syracuse University, Syracuse Memorial Hospital, the Federal Post Office Building in Flushing, Queens, and the West Side Y.M.C.A. Building on West 63rd Street in Manhattan (located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District). He is best known, however, as a designer of suburban homes and country estates. The geographic extent of his practice varied from Newport, R.I., where he designed a villa for Count Alphonso, to Sarasota, Florida, where he built John Ringling's mansion, "Ca' d'Zan," and maintained a satellite office in the late 1920s; however, the majority of his residential commissions were in the New York City area including the Hammerstein House, a designated New York City Landmark. In 1923, he received the Medal of Honor from the Architectural League of New York "for the simplicity and charm of his residential work."<sup>4</sup>

A master of architectural eclecticism as it was practiced in the 1920s, Baum was adept in a wide variety of styles, though his own preference was "American Colonial."<sup>5</sup> A 1927 monograph on Baum's work categorizes his houses by "types": Colonial, Formal Georgian, Italian, English (i.e., Tudor), and Dutch Colonial. Matlack Price, who

wrote the brief text, explained the meaning of the word "type," using the Italian villa as an example:

*A typical Italian villa could be found only in Italy. When we adapt the type here, as a motif, or manner of design, rather than as a style or model, we depart from the original in a great many ways, and build a house which in plan, in methods of construction, in materials, and in interior equipment is as different from an Italian villa as it is from an Eskimo's igloo. Notwithstanding which, it is perfectly intelligent to call it a house of the Italian type, since the Italian villa was its point of departure. The same designation, based on the same sequence of thought, applies equally to our American adaptations of any other European style.*<sup>6</sup>

This approach would be embodied two years later in Baum's design for the Campagna house.

Baum's mastery of traditional styles was praised by the modernist architect Harvey Wiley Corbett, in a preface to the same monograph:

*It is only the exceptional architect who has the force of will and the adventurous spirit to roam through all styles and all periods and make himself master of them all. And it seems to me that this is the signal achievement of Dwight James Baum in the realm of domestic architecture. He has had the spirit and the guts to tackle Colonial, Georgian, Italian, Tudor, etc., and to emerge in every case with banners flying.*<sup>7</sup>

Baum lived for much of his professional life in Fieldston, a planned suburban development in Riverdale, the Bronx, where he designed both his house, "Sunnybank," located at the northwest corner of Goodrich Avenue and West 250th Street, and his office on Waldo Avenue at Manhattan College Parkway. The great majority of Baum's work is to be found in Riverdale, including dozens of houses in Fieldston as well as

in other parts of Riverdale including the Thomas A. Buckner, Jr., residence at 5200 Sycamore Avenue in what is now the Riverdale Historic District, and such non-residential projects as the local firehouse, the Christ Church Parish House, and an extension to the Riverdale Presbyterian Church.

Baum's Riverdale houses are carefully sited on landscaped plots. Depending on their style they are faced in clapboard (Colonial), brick (Georgian), stucco (Italian), or local fieldstone. Their facades are romantic compositions of the details appropriate to the chosen type: columns, piers, capitals, porticoes, fanlights, chimneys, Palladian windows, eyebrow windows, gambrel roofs. According to architect Mario Campioli, who worked as a draftsman in Baum's office: "After talking to a client, [Baum] had a fixed idea in his mind of the house he wanted to do, and he'd draw the elevation and then try to make the plan fit it."<sup>8</sup> For houses with large sites, Baum carefully planned and designed gardens and outbuildings.

#### The Campagna House: An "Italian Villa" in Riverdale

Riverdale, the section of the Bronx in which Campagna built his Italian villa, was incorporated into the city of New York in 1875 and developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century as a picturesque suburb of villas for well-to-do Manhattan merchants and financiers. When fifty years later Campagna, who was already living elsewhere in the neighborhood,<sup>9</sup> decided to build on West 249th Street, Riverdale still retained much of its atmosphere of country estates nestled into the woods overlooking the Hudson. Campagna's site was located directly across from Wave Hill, the first Riverdale estate which itself dated to the early 1840s, and was surrounded by other large houses and estates. To the north, along Independence and Sycamore avenues between West 252nd and 254th Streets, were the houses of the original 1850s development from which Riverdale takes its name.<sup>10</sup> To the south, along West 247th Street, were the houses of a slightly later development, Riverdale Park. Campagna's estate would take its place among the large estates that had distinguished the history of Riverdale, competing in size and magnificence with the most lavish of its

predecessors. Campagna purchased a three-acre site in 1928 from Percy R. Pyne, whose estate "Alderbrook" was located just to the south.<sup>11</sup>

Campagna's choice of Dwight James Baum as architect was a logical one. Baum's practice and reputation in Riverdale was highly esteemed, and he had designed a house for Anthony Campagna's brother Michael and was planning a house for another brother, Armino A. Campagna.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Baum's expertise in adapting European styles made him eminently suited to the task of designing an "Italian villa" in the Bronx. Campagna himself handled the contracting, and imported many of the materials directly from Italy. There is some indication that the office of architect John Russell Pope may have had a hand in the design, but its role is unclear.<sup>13</sup> Baum and Campagna received a building permit for the construction of a fireproof, steel-framed residence of brick (to be covered with stucco) and Doria limestone.<sup>14</sup> A second permit was received for the construction of a garage and chauffeur's quarters to be located at the east end of the site. Construction on both was completed in 1930.

The large site, picturesque setting, and knowledgeable client gave Baum the opportunity to create one of his most impressive residential designs. Though the house that Baum designed is clearly suggestive of Tuscan villas, it is not modeled directly on any known example. Great stone piers at the entrance from West 249th Street lead to a walled circular forecourt with a central fountain; the forecourt facade combines a one-story rusticated stone portico containing the entrance vestibule, a two-story asymmetrically placed stairtower, and a projecting eastern wing, sheltered by a low hipped, tile-covered roof. The garden facade incorporates a triple-arched loggia with *grotteschi* painted in its groin vaults; it is set on a raised terrace which leads to a formal garden with a reflecting pool. The house is surrounded by wooded grounds, and it looks over the Hudson River to the Palisades. The site itself was considered to be suggestive of Italian hills. According to a note in the *Riverdale News*, published while the estate was under construction, "it is reported that this will be one of the finest estates along Italian lines in the country. The house was built on one of the finest sites, which is

quite similar in character to the hillside locations of Frascati."<sup>15</sup> Thus the Anthony Campagna Estate is a major example of the integration of house and setting, virtually unparalleled for its period in New York City.

The landscape design of the Campagna estate was the work of landscape architects Vitale & Geiffert. Ferruccio Vitale (1875-1933) was an Italian immigrant who was born in Florence and had studied landscape architecture and engineering in Italy. He began his American career in 1904, and his American work included private estates, as well as Meridian Hill Park in Washington, D.C., and plans for the towns of Pleasantville and Scarsdale, New York. Alfred Geiffert, Jr. (c.1881-1957) joined Vitale's firm in 1908, becoming a partner in 1917. He was a member of the board of design for both the Chicago Century of Progress, held in 1933, and the New York World's Fair of 1939.<sup>16</sup> Vitale's writings on the subject of Italian garden design for American settings mirror Matlack Price's thoughts on the Italian "type" in American architecture: "I would say that rather than copy them [Italian gardens] as a whole or in detail, we should draw a lesson from them -- an inspiration. ...the architect should... [try] to conceive something of his own, rather than copying or patching-up copied details."<sup>17</sup>

The Vitale & Geiffert landscape design for the Campagna estate incorporates a long *allée* of trees flanking the paved driveway leading from the entrance gates to the circular forecourt and fountain at the front of the house, and a reflecting pool and flanking garden walls that incorporate fountains. This design won the gold medal from the Architectural League of New York for landscape architecture in 1934, for "the Approach and Garden Courts for an Italian Villa at Riverdale, New York City."<sup>18</sup>

Other work contributing to the character of the house includes the ironwork of the front gates, balconies, and exterior stairways designed by Oscar B. Bach (1884-1957).<sup>19</sup> An active iron designer in the 1920s and 1930s, Bach worked at Radio City Music Hall (where he designed the colorful *repoussé* plaques on its facade), the Empire State Building, and the Williamsburgh

Savings Bank, 1 Hanson Place, Brooklyn (all designated New York City Landmarks).<sup>20</sup>

The Campagna house, its setting, and its Italian character brought it much renown. In 1939 the WPA-sponsored *Guide to New York City* described it as "one of the finest villas in the East. The house was designed...in Northern Italian Renaissance style, with stucco trim and a hand-made Italian tile roof."<sup>21</sup>

#### Description

The Campagna estate is axially organized with an *allée* leading to the two-story house and formal landscape elements. The main axis of the composition begins at the stone and iron entrance gates on West 249th Street. A drive of stone pavers set between the *allée* of trees leads to a walled forecourt with a fountain in the center. The house, as seen from the forecourt side, is asymmetrical with a two-story stairtower to the left of the entrance balanced by a low wing on the right. The one-story entrance portico in the center is rusticated limestone and consists of an arched doorway, flanked by narrow arched windows. This central portion is surmounted by a balustrade fronting the recessed central portion of the second story. The tower contains a tall arched window opening shielded by a balustrade. The wall surfaces on the forecourt side are faced with stucco with stone quoins and molded stone windows surrounds. The low hipped roof is covered with tile.

The garden side of the house, set on a terrace, is dominated by the triple-arched loggia in the center of the first story, balanced on either side by stone enframed window openings set in wide stuccoed wall spaces. Large stone quoins mark the corners. A band course above the loggia divides the elevation horizontally. The second story window openings have stone surrounds; those at the end are shielded by iron balconies. Set back from the main section are wings with arched openings surmounted by balustrades fronting the recessed second story. The wide overhang of the tiled roof is particularly noticeable on this side of the house.

The axial composition of the site continues on the garden side from the loggia, down a divided semi-circular stairway into a sunken garden area and along a large reflecting pool to a hemicycle with fountains. The pool garden area is flanked on either side by raised terraces; one is balustraded and looks towards the river, and other is fronted by an arcade which once enclosed an orangery.

#### Subsequent History

Campagna lived in the house until 1941, when he and his family left it to move into the former garage and chauffeur's quarters -- possibly as a result of the Depression-era construction slump. In 1943, Campagna leased the house to New York University, for use as a dormitory for women "taking a special course in connection with war activities."<sup>22</sup> In 1946, the house was sold to the Monitor Equipment Corporation, for use as executive offices and a corporate institute.<sup>23</sup>

Monitor continued in the house into the 1960s, when the company went bankrupt; in settlement of money owed him, Monitor's president, George M. Gibson, accepted ownership of the house. He in turn sold it in 1982 to Eugene and Arlene Kule.<sup>24</sup> The house was purchased in June, 1993 by the current owner, the Yeshiva of Telshe Alumni.

Report prepared by

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*and*  
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## NOTES

In addition to the specific notes cited below, see also Landmarks Preservation Commission, Research files, in particular "The Anthony Campagna Estate, Riverdale, New York, A Compilation of Information," prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart and Ken Lustbader, August 1993, for the Riverdale Nature Preservancy and submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

1. The information in this section has been compiled from: "Campagna, Anthony," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (Clifton, N.J.: James T. White & Co., 1973), vol. 54, 435; "Anthony Campagna Dies at 84; Led School Building Program," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1969, p. 47.
2. See Andrew Alpern, *Apartments for the Affluent* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 122-123.
3. Information for this section has been compiled from *The Work of Dwight James Baum, Architect*, foreword by Harvey Wiley Corbett, introduction and commentary by Matlack Price (New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1927); *Arthur Hammerstein House Designation Report* (LP-1282), report prepared by Marjorie Pearson (New York: City of New York, 1982); Anthony Robins, "Visible City:[Fieldston in Riverdale]," *Metropolis*, December 1984, pp. 34-39.
4. Quoted by Matlack Price in his introduction to *The Work of Dwight James Baum*, n.p.
5. The vast majority of houses pictured in *The Work of Dwight James Baum* fall into this category.
6. *The Work of Dwight James Baum*, n.p.
7. *Ibid.*, n.p.
8. Interview with Mario Campioli, quoted in Robins, "Visible City," 39.
9. See "Real Estate Activities Along the Hudson," *Riverdale News*, July 1930, p. 6, for a notice of Campagna's sale of his former home in Fieldston.
10. See *Riverdale Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1663), (New York: City of New York, 1990), 7-11.
11. *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 121 (June 2, 1928), 34.
12. See "House of Michael Campagna, Fieldston, New York," *American Architect*, 133 (Feb. 5, 1928), 155; "House of Michael Campagna, Riverdale-on-Hudson, N.Y.," *Architecture*, 61 (Feb. 1930), 94-95; "House of Armino A. Campagna, Fieldston-on-Hudson, N.Y.," *Architecture*, 61 (Feb. 1930), 96.
13. The house was attributed jointly to Baum and the Office of John Russell Pope at the 49th annual exhibition of the Architectural League of New York, 1934, and Pope's name appears on plans of the house as consulting architect. See *Yearbook of the Architectural League of New York*, 49 (1934), 3; and "An Italian Villa at Riverdale, New York City," *Landscape Architecture*, 25 (Oct. 1934), 33-35. Also see Note 24 below.
14. New York City, Department of Buildings, The Bronx, New Building Permits 693-1929 and 834-1929. The steel contractor was the Patterson Bridge Co. While the garage and chauffeur's quarters structure is still standing, it is no longer on the tax lot associated with the main house.
15. "An Appreciated Architect," *Riverdale News*, August 1930, p.15.

16. For Vitale, see: "Vitale, Ferruccio," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), vol. 19, 285-286; and "Vitale, Ferruccio," *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White Co., 1931), vol. 31, 106-107. For Geiffert, see: "Alfred Geiffert, Garden Designer, [obituary]" *New York Times*, Aug. 27, 1957, p. 29.
17. Ferruccio Vitale, "Italian Gardens," *Transactions of the American Society of Landscape Architects 1899-1908* (Pennsylvania: J. Thrace McFarland Co., 1908), 41-42.
18. *Landscape Architecture*, 24, no. 1 (Oct. 1934), 33.
19. Bach's work is cited in "Appliance Co. Buys the Campagna Mansion in Riverdale for Its New Research Center," *New York Times*, April 14, 1946, section 8, p. 1.
20. See "Oscar Bach Dead; Metallurgist, 72," *New York Times*, May 5, 1957, p. 88.
21. Federal Writers Project, *Guide to New York City* (New York: Random House, 1939), 527.
22. New York City, Department of Buildings, The Bronx, Alteration Application 28-1943. The application was signed by Marie Paterno Campagna who was listed as the owner.
23. Alteration application 763-1945, which states: "Monitor Institute, Inc., (non-profit), a proposed subsidiary of Monitor Equipment Corporation to be organized to coordinate and promote the use of various household equipment and to establish and maintain a central headquarters for the purpose of planning, research and study to facilitate the development and widespread use of Home Appliances. It requires a building...to house a group of executives, scientists and others interested in the development of household appliances. There will be executive offices, conference rooms, a hall for meetings, reception rooms for out-of-town members and space in which to set up model installation in a home-like environment."
24. Prior to the sale, Gibson hired Bronx architect Ludwig P. Bono to convert the house back into a one-family residence ("Amendment of Jan. 29, 1982," submitted by Ludwig P. Bono, to the Department of Buildings, The Bronx. Bono submitted copies of original plans for the house with Baum's and Pope's names crossed out but still legible).

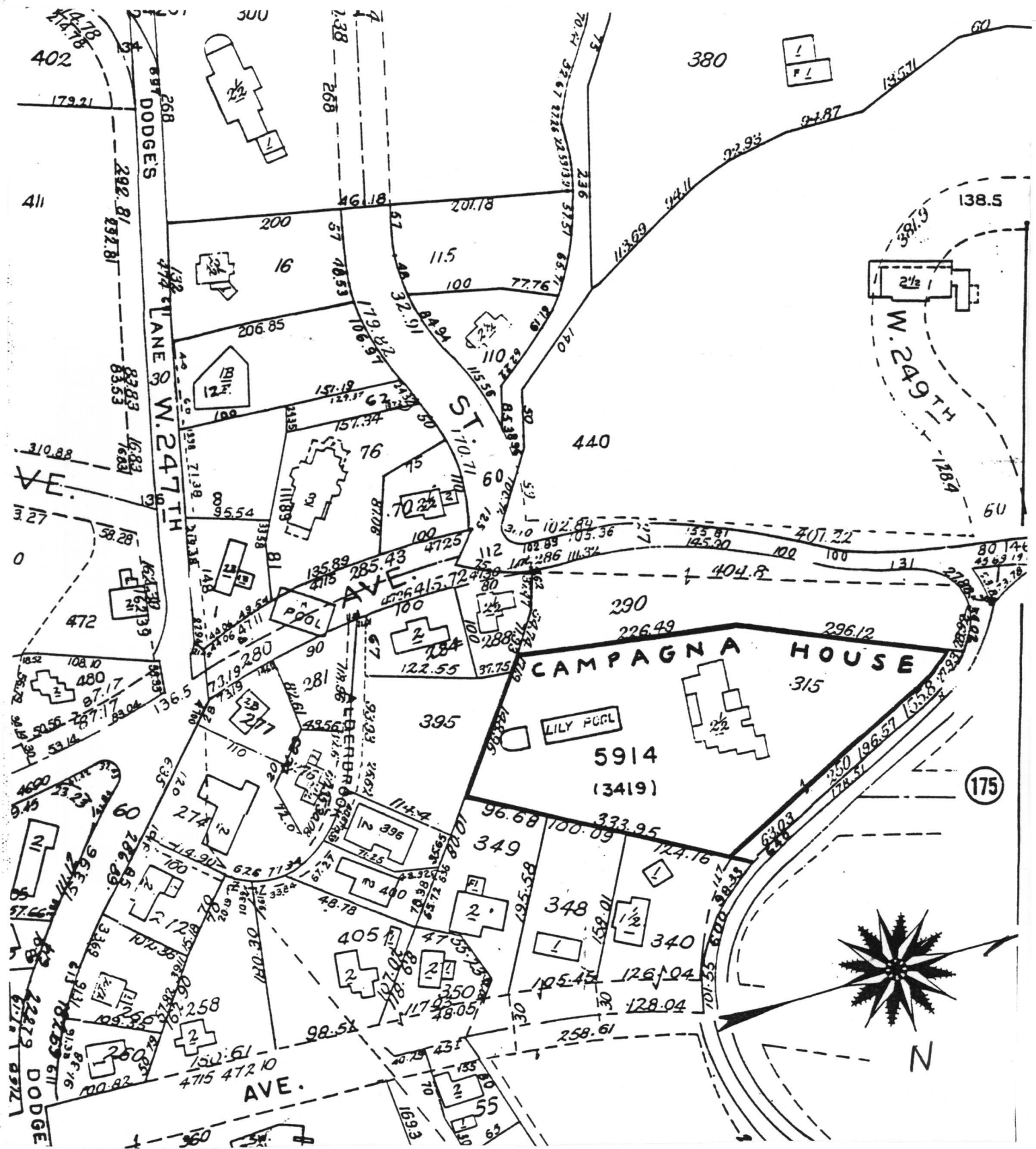
## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Anthony Campagna Estate has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Anthony Campagna Estate was built in 1929-30 in the Riverdale section of the Bronx as the home of this prominent Italian-born New York City builder and philanthropist; that it was the work of Dwight James Baum, a leading New York City architect praised for his carefully conceived and executed suburban and country residences; that the house is modeled after Italian villas, an unusual prototype for New York City; that the elements of the landscape design, by Ferruccio Vitale, an Italian-born landscape architect, and his partner Alfred Geiffert, Jr., were also based on Italian prototypes, in keeping with the design of the house, and won the 1934 gold medal in landscape architecture from the Architectural League of New York; that the design of the house and grounds, on a site overlooking the Hudson River to the Palisades, is one of Baum's most impressive and is a major example of 1920s architectural eclecticism by a recognized master of the genre; that the Anthony Campagna Estate is a major example of the integration of house and setting, virtually unparalleled for its period in New York City; and that it takes its place among the large estates that have distinguished the history of Riverdale over the past century and a half, competing in size and magnificence with the most lavish of its predecessors.

Accordingly, pursuant to Chapter 21, Section 534 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Anthony Campagna Estate, 640 West 249th Street, Borough of The Bronx, and designates Tax Map Block 5914, Lot 315, Borough of the Bronx, as its Landmark Site.





Anthony Campagna Estate, 640 West 249th Street, The Bronx  
 Landmark Site: Borough of the Bronx Tax Map Block 5914, Lot 315

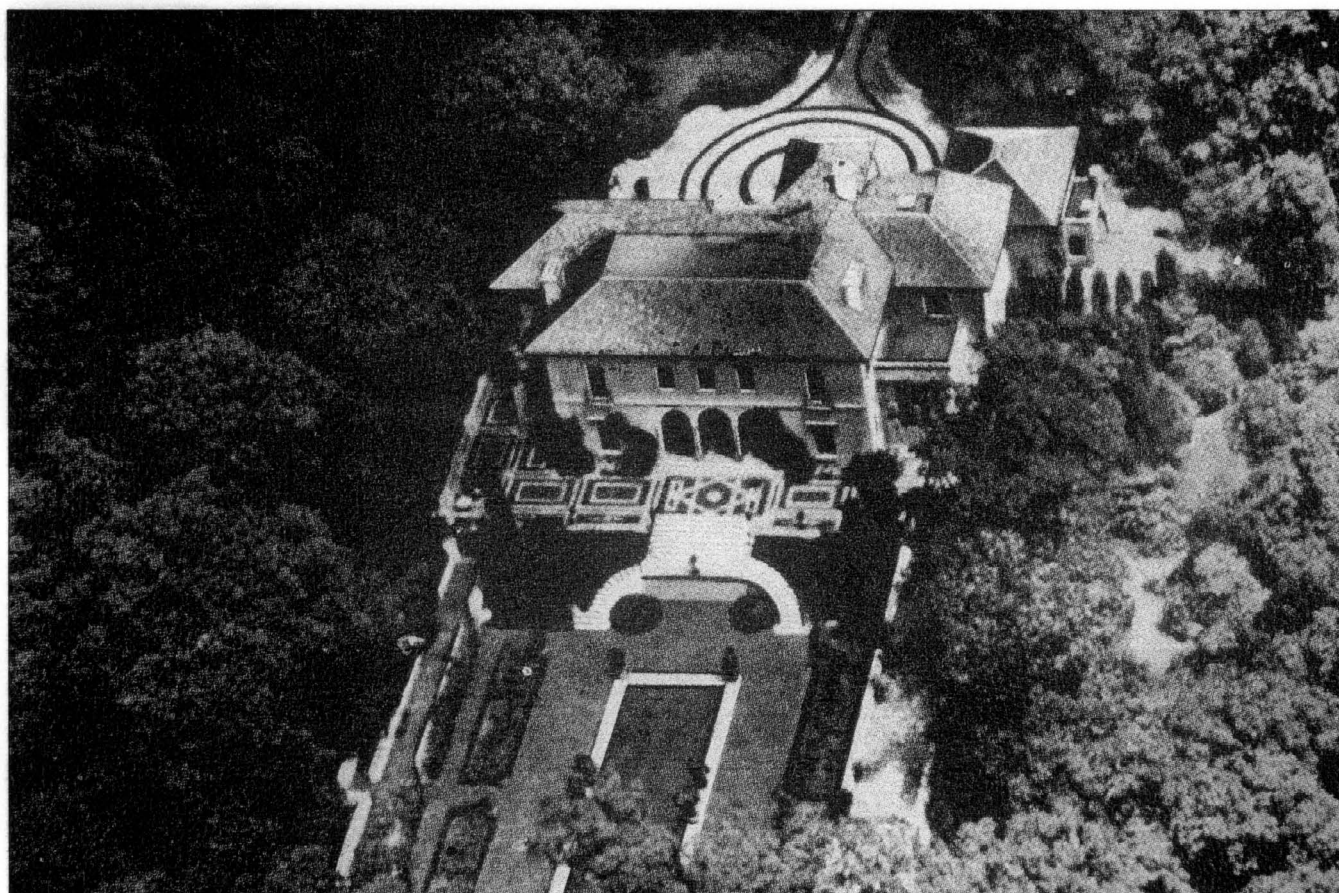
Graphic Source: Bronx Land Book, vol. 2 (Redi-Real Estate Data, 1982)



Anthony Campagna Estate  
640 West 249th Street, The Bronx  
Garden facade  
Photo: John Barrington Bayley, c.1965



Anthony Campagna Estate  
640 West 249th Street, The Bronx  
Entrance facade  
c.1950



Anthony Campagna Estate  
640 West 249th Street, The Bronx  
Aerial view looking northwest  
c.1950





Anthony Campagna Estate  
640 West 249th Street, The Bronx  
Entrance facade  
Photo: John Barrington Bayley, c.1965