

Lilian Rice was born in 1888 in National City, California, the daughter of Julius Rice, an educator, and his wife, whose artistic talent expressed itself in small oil paintings. When Rice entered the University of California, Berkeley in 1906, she came at an auspicious moment. A new campus was taking shape under the direction of John Galen Howard, who had left a flourishing architectural practice in 1901 in New York to come to Berkeley both as Supervising Architect and as the head of the School of Architecture established three years later. In those exciting days, Rice could see firsthand the design process from plan through construction as new buildings were completed on campus. She also had the advantage of learning from a cadre of gifted young architects, such as Warren Perry and William Hayes whom Howard recruited for the architecture department.

After graduating in 1910, she returned to Southern California, preferring to develop a professional career in her hometown area where she had friends and family, rather than migrating to a city to join a large or prestigious architectural firm. She was lucky to find a mentor in Hazel Waterman, who had studied art at Berkeley in the 1880s, worked with the noted architect Irving Gill at the turn of the century, and then, at his urging, became an architect in her own right. Rice worked in Waterman's office on various architectural projects, such as the Wednesday Club of 1913 in San Diego. An avid student, she learned about the properties of reinforced concrete and became familiar with the geometric forms and plain wall surfaces that Waterman like Gill employed. Thus she added a knowledge of this innovative material as well as some understanding of a modern esthetic to an architectural vocabulary already informed by her Beaux-Arts studies and experience with the Bay Area wooden shingle style.




During World War I, she supplemented her income by teaching architecture and mechanical drawing at local schools, including San Diego State Teachers College, now California State University at San Diego (SDSU). Meanwhile, she began working for the firm of Requa & Jackson and was given her greatest opportunity: to plan and directly supervise the development of a 14-mile tract of land northeast of San Diego owned by the Santa Fe Railroad.

In 1906 the railroad had bought the land to cultivate eucalyptus trees for use as railroad ties. The experiment failed, but the area became a huge orchard of 3 million aromatic, leafy trees. In 1922, hoping to recoup some of its losses, Santa Fe officials decided to divide the land into "gentleman ranchos" and to plan a garden city-type community named Rancho Santa Fe. Lilian Rice was put in charge of the project and established her own office at Rancho Santa Fe. So successful were her efforts that 5 years later, over 80 percent of the land had been sold. Although the area was in the middle of nowhere, Rice carefully created a sense of urban space by clustering commercial, school, and residential areas along a wide main street with a central strip planted with green grass and flowers. Sidewalks, white-walled townhouses with entrance gates leading to gardens, and arcaded walks created a sophisticated ambiance. Besides being responsible for its overall plan, Rice designed many of the buildings in the town. For example, she created the Rancho Santa Fe Inn, the library, a school, and various stores. Using adobe wall construction reinforced with concrete lintels, she recalled the days of the Spanish Missions and created a visual harmony that remains striking today. As an independent architect, she also designed many residences there.

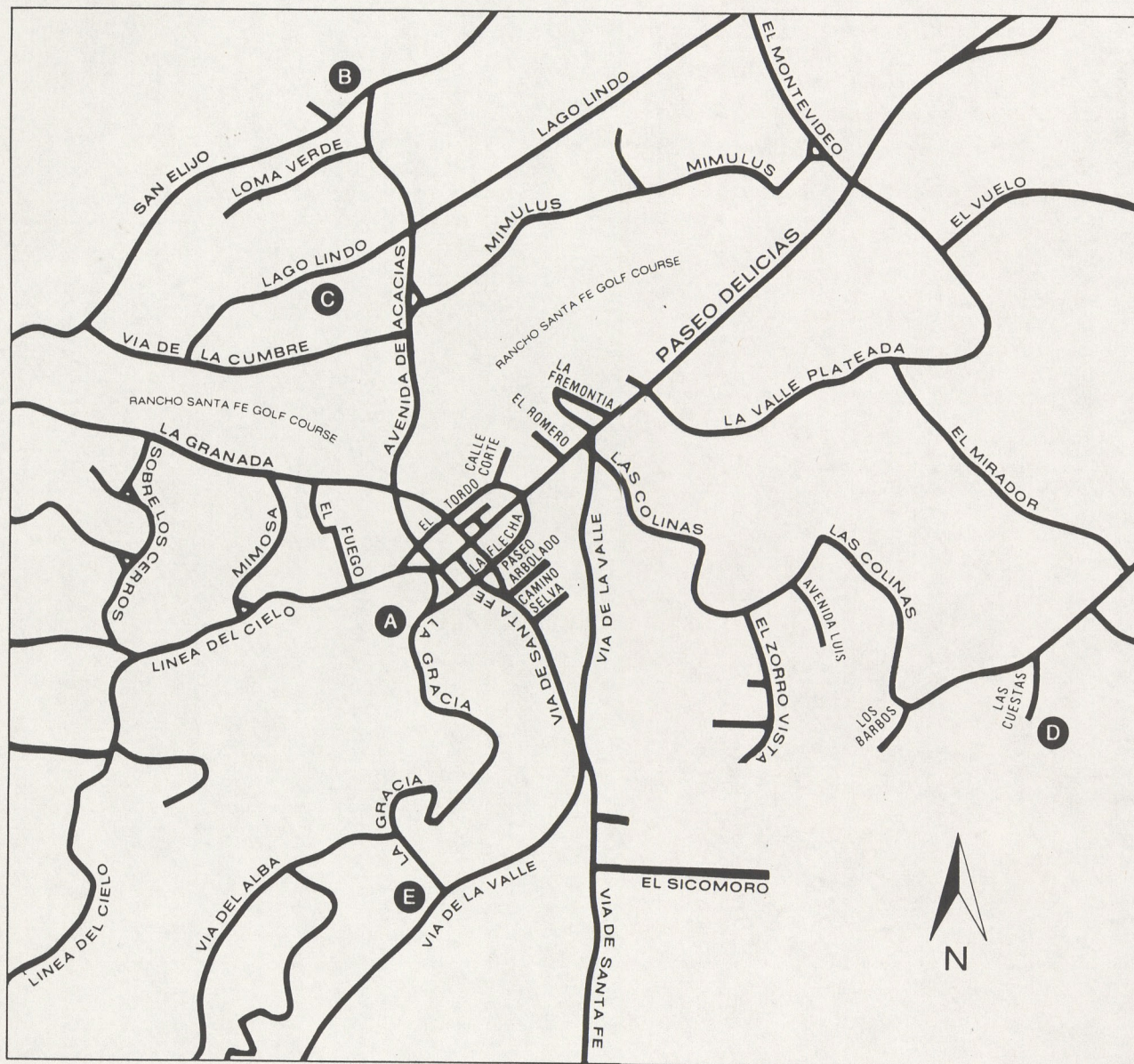
Lilian Rice was able to realize her talent in many ways at Rancho Santa Fe. As she recalled, "Working out the architectural development of Rancho Santa Fe has been a task of tremendous personal interest and satisfaction. With the thought . . . that true beauty lies in simplicity rather than ornateness, I found real joy at Rancho Santa Fe. Every environment calls for simplicity and beauty. . . . No one with a sense of fitness . . . could violate these natural factors by creating anything that lacked simplicity in line and form and color."

Rice also worked in the shingle style of the San Francisco Bay region. In 1932, she designed an exposed wood and beam clubhouse for the women's ZLAC Rowing Club. Membership had grown so large that the headquarters was moved from San Diego to a site on Mission Bay, where Rice planned a simple wooden structure containing both a boathouse and quarters for members that is reminiscent of Julia Morgan's St. John's Presbyterian Church of 1917 in Berkeley. Typical of her sense of whimsy, Rice added a gate made of oars as an entrance to the club. (Because she was so active a member, a "Lilian Rice Trophy" was donated in her memory after her death in 1938.) In 1933, the San Diego chapter of the American Institute of Architects cited the clubhouse for an award of merit.

Rice was well known for her personal warmth, humor, and pleasant working relationships with clients. She followed the example of Hazel Waterman and Julia Morgan by employing young women recently graduated from architecture school in her office as well as men. She died at Rancho Santa Fe after a sudden operation. Sam Hamill, who worked as a junior draftsman for her in the twenties, recalls, "What I remember most . . . was the wholesome, sympathetic, and sensitive understanding she brought to student, employee, or client. Her residential designs seemed to reflect the personality and lifestyle of the client." 

Historic Lilian Rice Homes in Rancho Santa Fe

Tour Map



A Lilian Rice Home

Mrs. Martha Hilton
16780 La Gracia

A cottage built by Lilian Rice for her own home, this is an excellent example of the simplicity of her architectural style.

B Terwilliger Home

Leith and Tom Clotfelter
San Elijo

This home by Lilian Rice, located on a hilltop within the center of Rancho Santa Fe, has retained the original gardens as well as a magnificent grove of Oak trees.

C Attrill Home

Dr. and Mrs. Reymart Roland-Holst
Lago Lindo

A "country home" design of Lilian Rice.

Located at the top of a rise with a beautiful view of the Village of Rancho Santa Fe.

D Pease Home

Mr. and Mrs. Edward Spector
16639 Las Cuestas

One of Lilian Rice's grander homes, at one time in the 1930's, it was used as a private boarding school.

E Elmer Cord Home

Susan and Rob Lankford
Via de la Valle

One of Lilian Rice's many hilltop designs, this home was remodeled in the 1970's by La Jolla architect Thomas Sheppard. Built in the original Santa Fe Railroad eucalyptus grove, it sits amid the oldest trees in the Ranch.

E Buffet Luncheon en plein air to be served in the historic Cord/Lankford home located on Via de la Valle from 11 am to 2 pm. Please follow the map for directions.

