

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

historic name Villa Serena Apartment Hotel

other name/site number Raphael Hotel

street & town 325 Ward Parkway N/A not for publication

city or town Kansas City N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64112

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. ( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Mark A. Miles  
Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO

February 26, 2009  
Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.  
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

☐ removed from the National  
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO  
County and State

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

### Category of Property

(check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

0

buildings  
sites  
structures  
objects

1

0

Total

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Multiple dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Hotel  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> & EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:  
Italian Renaissance Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
walls BRICK  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof ASPHALT  
other TERRA COTTA  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

## 8. Description

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

### Period of Significance

1928

### Significant Dates

1928

### Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Gentry, Alonzo H. (architect)

McCanles Building Company

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering  
Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other Name of repository:

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection, UMKC;  
Missouri Valley Special Collections, KCMO Public Library

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Name of Property

Jackson County, MO  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

### UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1 1/5 3/6/2/2/7/1 4/3/2/2/3/8/7  
Zone Easting Northing

2 / / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

3 / / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

4 / / / / / / / / / / /  
Zone Easting Northing

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Lot 7, Block 3, except that part in the street, Loma Linda Subdivision, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri.

Property Tax No. JA30530170600000000

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The National Register boundary encompasses the parcel of land historically associated with the building.

☐ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Rosin (Principal) and Rachel Nugent (Associate)

organization Rosin Preservation, LLC date December 2008

street & number 215 W. 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 150 telephone 816-472-4950

city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

**Maps** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs:** Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

name/title Lighthouse Properties, Inc.

street & number PO Box 856 telephone 785-825-2221

city or town Salina state KS zip code 67402

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

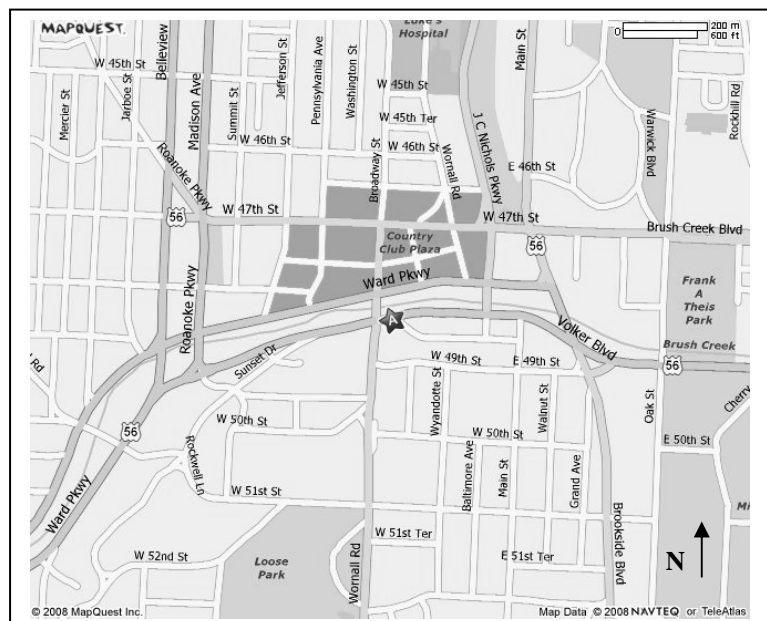
Section Number 7 Page 1

Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri**SUMMARY**

The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel, at 325 Ward Parkway, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri, is at the southern edge of the Country Club Plaza shopping district. The nine-story building has an oblique U-shaped footprint. Tapestry brick covers the concrete structure, and cream-colored glazed terra cotta accents communicate the building's Italian Renaissance Revival style. The east and west wings have hipped, red terra cotta tile roofs, while the roof of the center section is flat. The lobby retains its historic paneled wood ceiling and elaborate wood trim. The upper floors also retain their original layouts and number and configuration of units. Alterations have been largely cosmetic, although the conversion from apartment building to hotel resulted in the removal of kitchenettes. The building retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance as a grand early-twentieth century apartment hotel constructed for wealthy residents who wished to reside near the city's premier commercial district.

**ELABORATION****SETTING**

The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel occupies an irregular pentagonal lot on the south side of Ward Parkway. Wornall Road runs perpendicular to Ward Parkway along the west side of the Villa Serena, and 48<sup>th</sup> Street runs at an oblique angle along the north and east elevations. The building faces northeast and occupies the majority of the lot with landscaping around the foundation. The remainder of the parcel contains a surface parking lot. The footprint of the building is an oblique "U" shape that opens to the northeast. The two wings extend from the center section at angles greater than 90 degrees, creating space for a circular driveway and a landscaped area. The lot slopes slightly upwards from north to south, but the land immediately south of the building has a more dramatic rise, creating a backdrop that lessens the jarring visual effect of the tall apartment buildings in an area dominated by one- and two-story structures.



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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

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Despite a commercial greenhouse and the Lyle Brickyard that once stood on the lots along Ward Parkway, the neighborhood was originally and remains today largely residential, with a mix of single-family structures, condominiums, high-rise apartment buildings, and luxury hotels. The Country Club Plaza was originally designed as an upscale shopping center for local residents. While still an important commercial district for Kansas Citians, the Plaza has become a significant tourist destination, increasing the need for area hotels. In 1974, the J.C. Nichols Corporation purchased the Villa Serena, undertaking a renovation of the building to convert it from a luxury apartment building into a luxury hotel.

East of West 48<sup>th</sup> Street along Ward Parkway are five other nine- and ten-story red brick apartment buildings with glazed terra cotta accents. South of the Villa Serena is a modern high-rise apartment building. Across Wornall Road to the west is the Intercontinental Hotel (originally the Alameda Plaza Hotel) constructed in 1971-1972.

**EXTERIOR**

The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel is a nine-story fireproof structure comprised of a concrete frame clad with brick. The building was designed in 1928 in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, articulated through symmetry, round arches, and the restrained use of stylized classical decorative elements. Inside and out, the building is symmetrically organized around a north-south axis. The center section is oriented east to west. Wings extend from both ends at oblique angles towards Ward Parkway and West 48<sup>th</sup> Street. The building rises without setbacks as a large solid unbroken mass (*see photo 1*).

The tapestry brick exterior exhibits a broad range of color that features individual bricks of charcoal grey, purple, green, yellow, and red. Cream-colored glazed terra cotta accents form all of the exterior decorative details and stand in stark contrast to the dark red brick body. Terra cotta blocks form the low, rusticated base at basement level. Above each basement window is a rough, exaggerated keystone. Double terra cotta stringcourses span the façade between the second and third stories and between the eighth and ninth stories. Paired terra cotta blocks with a simple profile form the lower stringcourse. A Greek key pattern highlights the thicker stringcourse between the eighth and ninth stories. Capping the façade is a narrow terra cotta cornice comprised of medallions, dentils, and egg-and-dart molding (*see photo 6*). On the first, third, and ninth stories terra cotta surrounds ornament windows on the north elevation of each wing and at the first opening on the east and west elevations. The façade also contains decorative terra cotta panels above the first-story windows, between the double stringcourses, and in the parapet above the center section of the building. The terra cotta stringcourses wrap around to the east and west elevations of the wings. The rear (south) elevation is less ornate. Only a flat, narrow portion of the cornice continues from the other elevations (*see photo 3*).

Originally the Villa Serena had two, identical main entrances symmetrically placed at the center of the north elevation, facing the circular driveway. Each entrance was a rounded arch surrounded by exaggerated voussoirs.

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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

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Flanking the door were two rectangular windows with simple terra cotta trim. The arched openings were later converted to fixed windows and then to secondary entrances. The 1974 renovation created a single entrance from two window openings at the middle of the façade, and a metal and glass vestibule was attached to the exterior to provide shelter approaching guests (*see photo 7*).

At the northeast corner of the west wing and at the northwest corner of the east wing small towers rise one story above the roofline. The towers begin with the ninth-story corner windows. Classical terra cotta ornament surrounds these windows and the openings above them in the form of quoins, a broken scroll pediment, and a pair of urns. Each tower also has a hipped, barrel tile roof (*see photo 5*).

Fenestration includes single or paired openings and smaller, narrower bathroom windows. The standard windows are one-over-one aluminum double-hung sashes with terra cotta sills and brick flat-arch lintels. The bathroom windows retain one-over-one wood double-hung sashes with exterior metal storm windows. These windows have brick sills and lintels. The rear (south) elevation has window-sized openings with terra cotta sills that open directly into two egress stairwells at the center of the building. Terra cotta scuppers drain water that enters the masonry stairwells. The openings now have screens.

**INTERIOR**

The interior of the Villa Serena retains much of its original configuration of spaces and functions. Like the exterior, the interior is organized symmetrically around a central north-south axis. It is likely that a wall at the center of the building originally divided the upper floors along this axis. This wall has since been removed. On every floor, a central double-loaded corridor runs through the building from the north end of the east wing, through the center block, to the north end of the west wing. The hotel has twelve guest rooms on the first floor and fourteen guest rooms on each of the upper floors for a total of 124 guest rooms.

Double elevator shafts anchor each end of the central corridor. Only the east shaft retains two elevator cabs. The north elevator in the west shaft was previously removed and the shaft closed. The other three shafts received new elevator cabs shortly before 1974.

The building also has four fireproof stairwells: one adjacent to each of the elevator shafts and two on the south side of the central corridor. The south stairwells are structurally separate from but adjacent to each other.

Carpet covers the concrete floors throughout the building, and suspended acoustical tile grids cover the plaster ceilings. Plaster adheres directly to the exterior brick walls and to interior clay tile walls. The original painted wood trim is extant in the corridors and at the windows and doors within the guest rooms. Each guest room has a

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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

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solid door with a traditional two-panel profile on the corridor side.<sup>1</sup>

Lobby

The main entrance opens into the lobby. The lobby occupies the entire length of the center block, but only half of its depth (*see first floor plan*). The reception desk and the office behind it are opposite the entrance. The lobby has a stone tile floor and an elaborately carved, paneled wood ceiling. The wood paneling surrounding the main entrance and the reception desk is complementary but does not appear to be original. A marble-clad half stair on either side of the reception desk leads to the central corridor and the first-floor hotel rooms. The elevators anchor either end of the lobby (*see photos 8 and 9*).

Upper floors

The upper floors are identical in layout and décor (*see second floor plan*). The corridors are carpeted with wood baseboards. One painted board runs the length of the corridor at floor level. A second, simpler board is set a few inches above the lower one. Wallpaper covers the plaster walls. Acoustical tile hangs below the plaster ceiling to conceal mechanical ductwork and electrical conduit. Each doorway has a simple, painted wood casing. The original design included transoms above each door. These were removed during the 1974 renovation.

In the conversion from apartment building to hotel, the overall configuration of each floor was maintained, while the interior division of spaces within each unit was altered slightly. Each unit originally contained a living room, a small bathroom, and either a bedroom or a narrow dressing closet. In addition, most units had kitchens and dining alcoves. During the 1974 renovation, the kitchens and dining alcoves were removed and the space incorporated into the living area. Bathrooms were also enlarged or rearranged to provide a sink and vanity in a separate space from the toilet and bathtub. The bathrooms retain their original tubs, ceramic hex tile floors and marble thresholds.

Basement

The basement, accessible from the stairwells adjacent to the elevator shafts, contains the boiler room, mechanical and electrical equipment rooms, men's and women's locker and restrooms, storage and housekeeping facilities, and a restaurant. While these functions are largely historic, the arrangement of spaces has changed slightly. The north ends of each wing had rentable spaces. One of these spaces housed a beauty shop from at least 1935 through 1974.

The restaurant at the north end of the west wing does not retain any historic fabric. The two-level space is accessible from the lobby. One of the basement windows on the east elevation of the north wing was converted to

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<sup>1</sup> The doors have a historic appearance, but documents from the 1974 renovation specify replacement of all guest room doors.



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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

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a door to allow direct access to the restaurant from the driveway. The other areas of the basement are largely utilitarian and have no notable historic fabric.

**INTEGRITY**

The Villa Serena's Italian Renaissance Revival architecture, refined ornamentation, and fire proof construction are readily visible on the exterior and interior. As the Raphael Hotel, the building retains most of its original character-defining features. Distinctive interior elements, such as the lobby's stone floor and paneled wood ceiling, the configuration of corridors and guest rooms, and many of the period-specific finishes, remain intact. Where integrity is compromised, the alterations generally reflect the conversion of the building from residential apartments to a hotel. For example, on the upper floors cozy apartments were opened up to create generous guest suites. General remodeling also resulted in updated finishes throughout the building. On the exterior, one barely notices the non-historic windows. None of these changes diminishes the historical significance of the building or the architectural qualities for which it is being nominated. The Villa Serena was the first of six luxury high-rise apartment buildings constructed on this stretch of Ward Parkway south of Brush Creek and the Country Club Plaza. Its Mediterranean architectural motif, grandeur, and high-style design remain consistent with J.C. Nichols' original vision for the Country Club Plaza.

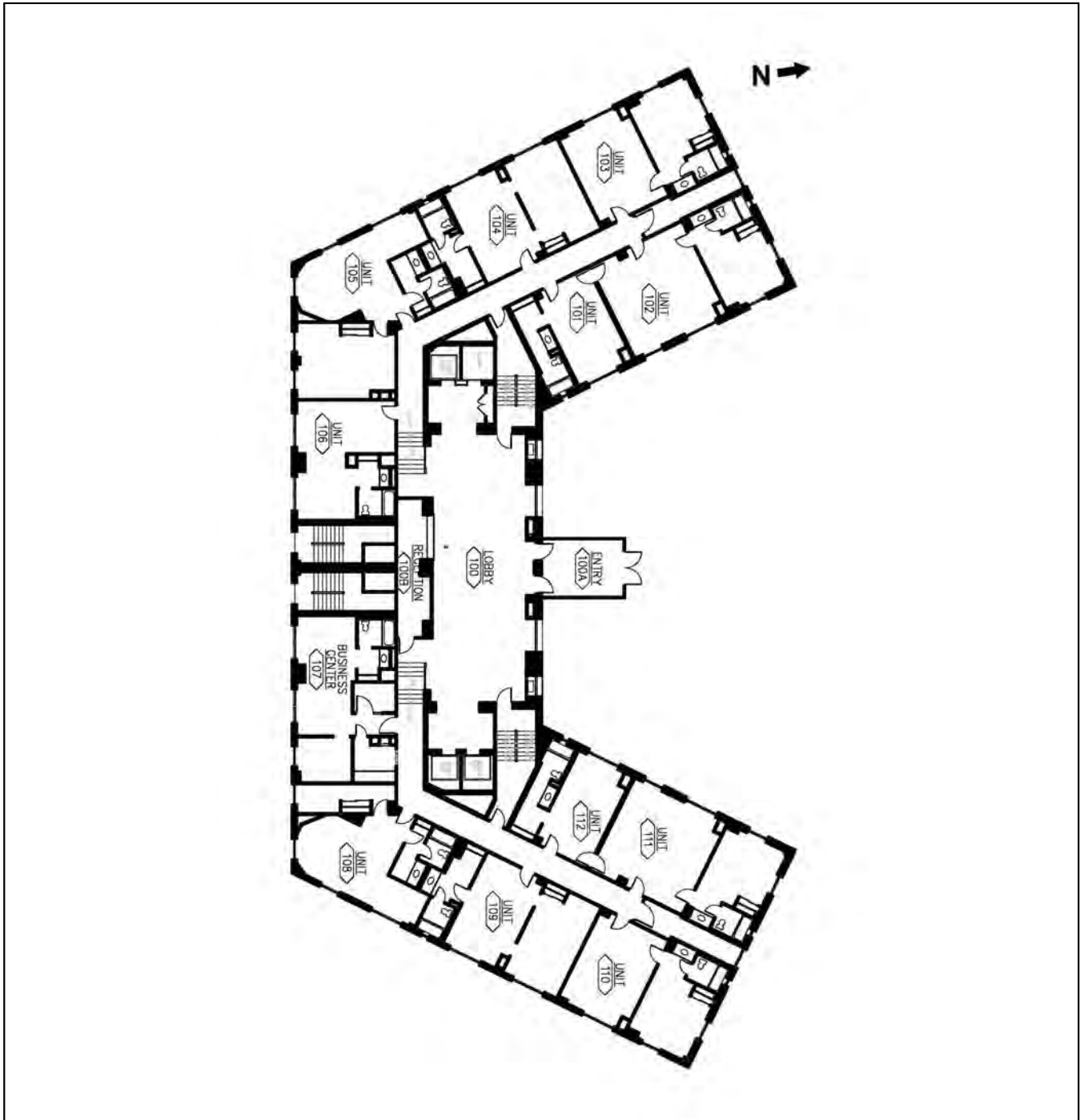
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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

**FIRST FLOOR PLAN, 2008**



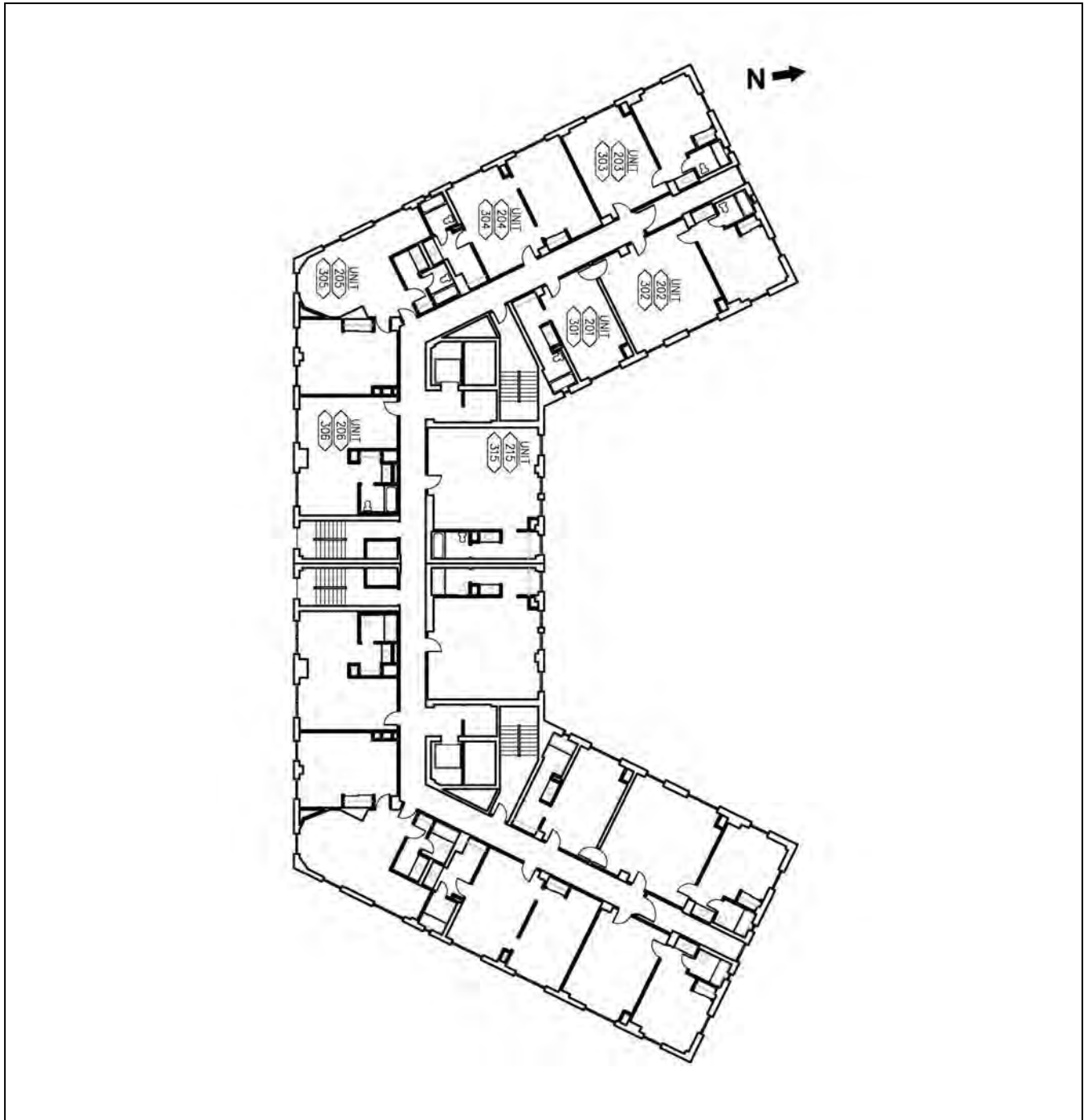
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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

**UPPER STORY FLOOR PLAN (TYPICAL), 2008**



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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

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**SUMMARY**

The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel is a nine-story brick building located on the southwest corner of Ward Parkway and Wornall Road, south of Brush Creek and the Country Club Plaza shopping district in Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri. The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel is locally significant under National Register Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE. Prominent local architect Alonzo H. Gentry designed the elegant residential hotel in 1928 for the McCanles Building Company, a noted local developer. The Villa Serena was the first in a row of six large-scale luxury apartment buildings just steps away from the newly completed Country Club Plaza shopping district. The oblique U-shaped Italian Renaissance Revival-style building has a fireproof concrete frame, red brick cladding, and strong horizontal lines achieved with refined cream-colored terra cotta trim. The building is entirely symmetrical around the north-south axis. As the first luxury apartment-hotel in a row of similar structures, it is also the most expressive and ornate of the six buildings that line the south side of Ward Parkway. The Italian Renaissance style was specifically chosen to harmonize with the Spanish and Mediterranean motif of the Country Club Plaza development on the north side of Brush Creek. The high-end shopping center was designed for wealthy patrons. The Villa Serena offered such individuals a convenient and appropriate choice of accommodations. The Villa Serena operated as a 124-unit apartment hotel until 1974, when the J.C. Nichols Company purchased, renovated, and renamed the building. The 124-room Raphael Hotel opened in 1975, and remains an important local establishment. The original architectural features of the Villa Serena remain intact and the building maintains its original sense of residential luxury. The period of significance for this property is 1928, the date of construction.

**ELABORATION**

**ITALIAN RENAISSANCE REVIVAL ARCHITECTURE**

The Italian Renaissance Revival is a majestic architectural style that gained popularity at the very end of the nineteenth century and continued into the early twentieth century. The disciplined, methodical architecture with classical influences contrasted with the more interpretive styles of the Victorian era popular at the time. By the end of the nineteenth century, many architects, as well as their well-to-do patrons and clients, had toured Italy, studying first-hand Renaissance-period architecture. When they returned to the United States, their designs reflected this new understanding of the original Italian buildings. Their designs were also truer to the tenets of Classicism than earlier revival styles, such as the Italianate, which was predominantly based on pattern book examples.<sup>2</sup> The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago bolstered the renewed interest in Classicism among architects.

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia McAlester and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 398.

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Italian Renaissance Revival design was typically applied to stately, institutional, architect-designed buildings rather than private residences. Large-scale symmetrical massing and heavy, rusticated masonry foundations are important characteristics of the style more appropriate to such grand applications. Rounded arches and precise classical detailing in molding and cornices enriched façades and projected an air of luxury and importance about the building.<sup>3</sup> Early examples of the Italian Renaissance Revival style are load-bearing masonry structures, as were their fifteenth century inspirations, and the weight expressed in the rusticated bases was as much a structural necessity as it was an aesthetic choice.

While architects widely employed the earlier Richardsonian Romanesque style for residential, ecclesiastical, and commercial buildings throughout Kansas City, the transition to the Renaissance Revival and Classical styles was gradual and cautious.<sup>4</sup> Two of the earliest Renaissance Revival style buildings in Kansas City were the Kansas City Public Library building, built 1895-97, and the Federal Courts Building and Post Office, built 1896-1900.<sup>5</sup> The massive block-long buildings with strong horizontal elements exhibited many of the defining characteristics of the Renaissance Revival style, including rusticated masonry bases with deep joints, arcaded or colonnaded second-story porches, and pedimented windows.<sup>6</sup>

As building technology evolved after the turn of the twentieth century, steel and concrete frame construction enabled architects to design much taller buildings than those erected during the Italian Renaissance. The 1906 R.A. Long Building at 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Grand Boulevard illustrates this transition.<sup>7</sup> The 14-story office tower has an ornate stone façade. Although it was the tallest building in Kansas City at the time of its construction, the intermediate stories of the Long Building contain strong horizontal bands that deemphasize its height. Ornamental brackets support the moderately wide eaves. Even though some buildings were designed with stone bases, most of the tall buildings constructed during the early decades of the twentieth century, regardless of style, were clad predominantly with brick, as solid stone masonry facades were both cost- and height-prohibitive.

While it was not a popular style for single-family residences in Kansas City, the Italian Renaissance Revival style was easily adapted for multi-family apartment buildings, particularly in areas where developers erected high-rise luxury buildings during the 1920s. The Italian Renaissance Revival was one of several styles developers preferred to convey the prestige of their buildings through design, materials, and ornament. The Bainbridge

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<sup>3</sup> Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture*, (New York: The Penguin Group, 1980), 220.

<sup>4</sup> George Ehrlich, *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, 1826-1990*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 50.

<sup>5</sup> The Kansas City Public Library was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on 23 May 1977. The Federal Courts Building and Post Office was demolished in 1938.

<sup>6</sup> McAlester, 399.

<sup>7</sup> The R.A. Long Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on 8 January, 2003.

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Villa Serena Apartment Hotel  
Jackson County, Missouri

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Apartments at 900-908 Armour Boulevard is a fairly modest, seven-story example built in 1925.<sup>8</sup> The building has round-arched colonnaded porches, shallow eave brackets, and Classical terra cotta ornamentation.

The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel is a unique example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style within the Country Club Plaza area and a rare example within the wider city. The nine-story building has a concrete frame and a brick exterior like many of its contemporaries and neighbors. However, the crisp, white terra cotta ornament distinguishes the Villa Serena as a luxury apartment building. The symmetrically organized façade is ornamented with sharp Classical details, such as fruit-filled urns and Greek key and dentil moldings. The terra cotta base has deep joints and exaggerated voussoirs to emulate large blocks of stone. At several locations, terra cotta stringcourses provide striking horizontal elements. The red terra cotta tile roof has very shallow eaves. This combination of features makes the Villa Serena an excellent example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style as applied to tall buildings toward the end of the 1920s.

The elegant and refined Italian Renaissance Revival façade of the Villa Serena harmonizes well with the more-modest Spanish and Mediterranean motifs employed for the Country Club Plaza and for the surrounding apartment buildings. The McCanles Building Company also developed the Villa Locarno and the Riviera apartment hotels just east of the Villa Serena the year after they completed the latter building. The Villa Locarno and the Riviera are more massive than the Villa Serena, and they do not exhibit the same refined ornamental detail. The Villa Serena is the most visually interesting of the luxury apartment hotels on the block and is the truest to the Italian Renaissance Revival style.

**PROPERTY HISTORY**

The lot on the east side of Wornall Road just south of Brush Creek, where the land begins to rise out of the creek valley, was adjacent to the Bismark Place residential subdivision. The large property surrounded by narrow residential lots contained two small one-story dwellings, an auto outbuilding, and a large greenhouse.<sup>9</sup> In 1927, developer J.C. Nichols platted the land between Main Street, Wornall Road, Ward Parkway, and 49<sup>th</sup> Street as the Loma Linda subdivision. The two blocks were divided into twelve large lots. The McCanles Building Company purchased three lots along the north edge of the subdivision shortly thereafter.

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<sup>8</sup> The Bainbridge Apartments was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the *Armour Boulevard Multiple Resource Area District III* on 28 July 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, Ltd, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Kansas City, Missouri*, (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917), Vol. VI, Sheet 797, Database online. <http://sanborn.umi.com.proxy.mcpl.lib.mo.us/mo/4720/dateid-000005.htm?CCSI=45n>. Accessed 11 August 2008.

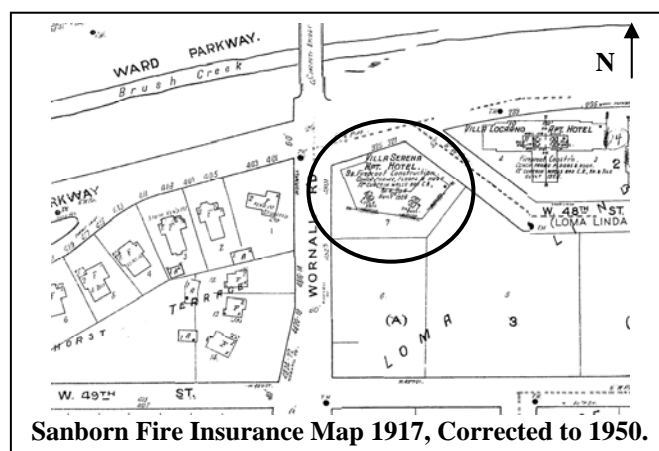
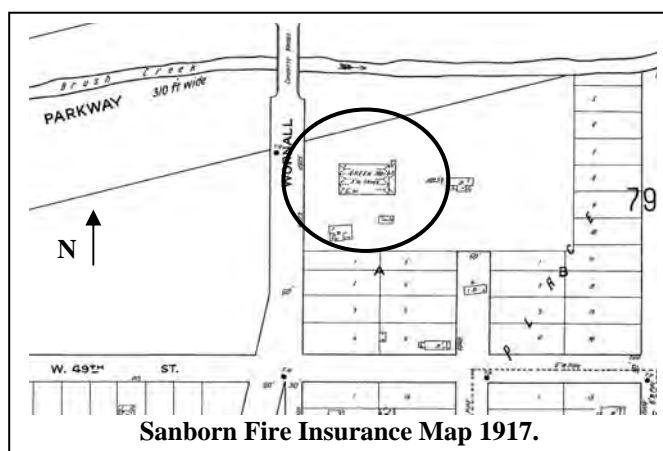
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The McCanles Building Company received a permit for excavation at 325 Ward Parkway, the lot at the corner of Ward Parkway and Wornall Road, on November 9, 1927<sup>10</sup> and a permit to build a nine-story apartment building six weeks later on December 23, 1927. McCanles commissioned architect Alonzo H. Gentry to design the brick and concrete structure. The Italian Renaissance Revival-style Villa Serena was completed in 1928 at a cost of \$600,000, roughly \$7 million in today's currency.<sup>11</sup>



The Villa Serena operated as an upscale apartment hotel until 1975.<sup>12</sup> A group of investors purchased the building in 1971 with plans for extensive renovations. The J.C. Nichols Company purchased the Villa Serena, along with the newly completed Alameda Plaza Hotel and the Raphael Hotel in San Francisco, California in 1973.<sup>13</sup> After renovating the building, it reopened as the Raphael Hotel in 1975.

**MCCANLES BUILDING COMPANY**

Guy McCanles was deeply involved in Kansas City's apartment building boom of the 1920s. His McCanles Building Company built several of the structures along Armour Boulevard that are included in the National Register-listed *Armour Boulevard Multiple Resource Area*.

<sup>10</sup> City of Kansas City, Missouri, Landmarks Commission, Building Permit for 325 Ward Parkway, Building permit number 88490, 1927.

<sup>11</sup> City of Kansas City, Missouri, Landmarks Commission, Building Permit for 325 Ward Parkway, Building permit number 15137, 1927.

<sup>12</sup> "Villa Serena Sold," Kansas City Star, 21 March 1971, J.C. Nichols Scrapbook, Microfilm, From the *Western Historical Manuscript Collection in Kansas City*, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>13</sup> "J.C. Nichols to Buy Hotels," Kansas City Star, 22 October 1973, J.C. Nichols Scrapbook, Microfilm, From the *Western Historical Manuscript Collection in Kansas City*, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Missouri.

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Toward the end of the decade, the McCandles Building Company learned of an opportunity to expand their design influence in another part of Kansas City. They purchased land immediately south of the Country Club Plaza in 1927 from developer J.C. Nichols. The steep hill on the south side of the Brush Creek valley provided a natural backdrop that would reduce the visual effects of any tall building erected on the site. Nichols rationalized the construction of the tall buildings as necessary to house the large numbers of people he hoped to attract to his new shopping center.

In 1927, the McCandles Building Company, as owner and builder, commissioned local architect Alonzo H. Gentry to design the \$600,000 nine-story building at the southeast corner of Ward Parkway and Wornall Road.<sup>14</sup> While Nichols was not directly involved in the design process, his influence was certainly felt. The tall brick building with refined ornament was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. The Mediterranean influence extended to the building name: the Villa Serena. The following year, Gentry designed two more luxury apartment hotels for McCandles adjacent to the Villa Serena: the Villa Locarno and the Riviera were completed in 1929. Although the McCandles Building Company commissioned and built all three buildings, each one has unique stylistic elements and design features. These three buildings, along with their neighbors to the east formed a cohesive compliment to the Country Club Plaza shopping district.

**ALONZO H. GENTRY -- ARCHITECT**

Alonzo H. Gentry was born February 14, 1889 in Independence, Missouri to Overton H. and Emma Robertson Gentry. After graduating from the local high school, Gentry attended Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia, graduating with a degree in electrical engineering. He later entered Columbia University, graduating in 1916 with a bachelor of architecture degree. Following his schooling, Gentry went to work as a draftsman and designer for the George B. Post & Sons architecture firm. After five years in the New York office, Gentry was promoted to branch manager of Post's Cleveland, Ohio office. Five years later, in 1926, Gentry moved to Kansas City, Missouri and opened his own architectural practice.<sup>15</sup>

Alonzo H. Gentry was regionally known for designing hotels and apartment buildings. He often employed popular styles, such as Art Deco and Renaissance Revival to adorn concrete-framed high-rise structures. In addition to the Villa Serena apartment hotel, in 1927 Gentry designed the Robert E. Lee Hotel in St. Louis. The 14-story brick building also a Renaissance Revival design. Three of Gentry's early hotels are listed individually on the National Register of Historic Places: the Hotel Sunflower (1925) in Abilene, Kansas; the Tiger Hotel (1929) in Columbia, Missouri; and the Warrior Hotel (1930) in Sioux City, Iowa. Gentry's modernistic

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<sup>14</sup> City of Kansas City, Missouri, Landmarks Commission, Building Permit for 325 Ward Parkway, Building permit number 15137, 1927.

<sup>15</sup> William Rufus Jackson, *Missouri Democracy; A History of the Party and its Representative Members – Past and Present*. Vol. III, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Inc., 1935), 680-681.



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Brownhardt Apartments, built in 1929 in Kansas City, Missouri is within the Armour Boulevard Multiple Resource Area, District III.

Gentry joined with partners in 1931, incorporating the firm as Gentry, Voskamp & Neville, Architects, Inc. They completed a diverse range of projects over the next three decades. The firm designed Kansas City's Municipal Auditorium in 1935, a nationally noted Art Deco building which *Architectural Record* called one of the ten best buildings designed worldwide that year.<sup>16</sup> Ten years later, Gentry, Voskamp & Neville designed the National Register-listed President Gardens Apartments, a complex of 36 Colonial Revival style buildings intended to house 1,500 defense workers for the Pratt & Whitney engine plant.<sup>17</sup> The firm designed the Truman Presidential Museum and Library in Gentry and Truman's hometown of Independence, Missouri in 1956-57.

Gentry retired from the firm in 1961, but was brought out of retirement to design the Marshall Library Building for his alma mater Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia in 1964. Alonzo H. Gentry died in 1967 at the age of 80.

**CONCLUSION**

The Villa Serena Apartment Hotel was designed in 1928 as a luxury multi-family residential building. Architect Alonzo Gentry adopted the Italian Renaissance Revival style to help the building relate to the newly developed Country Club Plaza, located just to the north. While Country Club Plaza developer J.C. Nichols preferred to have single-family housing surrounding his new shopping center, he realized that a larger density of residents was necessary to sustain the up-scale commercial district. For this reason, Nichols sold the properties south of the Country Club Plaza to developers who would build luxury high-rise apartment buildings. The Villa Serena was the first of six such buildings and is architecturally the most interesting. The unique footprint of the Villa Serena optimized the view across Brush Creek. It continues to express the refined style and sense of luxury imbued by its Italian Renaissance Revival design.

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<sup>16</sup> "Alonzo H. Gentry, Architect, is dead," *Kansas City Times*, 7 February 1967, Obtained at Kansas City Landmarks Commission architect files.

<sup>17</sup> Allen Tateman, *President Gardens Apartments Historic District*, (Jefferson City, MO: Department of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Program, 1998), 9.

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**PHOTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

**Photographer:** Brad Finch  
F-Stop Photography  
Kansas City, Missouri

**Date of Photographs:** July 2008

*Digital images submitted with nomination on CD-ROM*

Photograph Number	Description	Camera View
1.	Front (North) Elevation	South
2.	North Elevation	Southeast
3.	South and West Elevations	East
4.	East Elevation	West
5.	Detail of East Wing Tower	East
6.	Window Detail on North Elevation	South
7.	Main Entry Detail	Southwest
8.	Lobby Entrance	Northwest
9.	Lobby and Elevators	West

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VILLA SERENA  
APARTMENT HOTEL  
KANSAS CITY  
JACKSON COUNTY, 2'30"  
MISSOURI

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