

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

THE ARIZONA INN

HALS NO. AZ-9

Location: 2200 E Elm St. Pima County, Tucson, AZ 85719
Lat: 32.242639, Long: -110.939514 (Entrance of Arizona Inn, north side of property, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: Isabella Selmes Ferguson Greenway King (b.1886–d.1953), the founder and proprietor of the Arizona Inn, was heralded by the New York Times as “the most-talked-of woman at the National Democratic Convention”¹ of 1932 because of her role in seconding the nomination of Franklin Delano Roosevelt for president. In 1932, it was unprecedented for a woman to have such an important and prominent public role in politics. Close personal friends with the Roosevelt family and bridesmaid at the wedding of Franklin and Eleanor in 1905, Isabella Greenway was an important figure both in Arizona and national politics. Mrs. Greenway was instrumental in re-thinking the national Democratic Party’s state organization by eliminating separate men’s and women’s groups in Arizona. She was the first woman elected to represent Arizona in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1933 to fill a vacated seat and served as the state’s only representative that term. She was re-elected in 1934 and served a second term in Congress. An entrepreneur and businesswoman, Mrs. Greenway launched an airline, established a cattle ranch, and built a gracious inn. Mrs. Greenway was also a social activist who created an establishment for occupational rehabilitation for World War I disabled veterans, worked for veterans’ and unemployment benefits, and served on the boards of many charitable organizations including the American Women’s Volunteer Services which trained women to support the war efforts in World War II.

The Arizona Inn and its landscape represent Isabella Greenway’s enduring legacy and provide one of the oldest, continuous examples of the western hospitality and tourism industries in Arizona. Mrs. Greenway transformed her desert ranchland into a “simple home-like, cottage hotel, complete in luxuries and convenience of service, and built with a desire to give its guests privacy, quiet, and sunshine”² Outdoor spaces and inviting landscapes were particularly important in Arizona’s climate as guests sought to escape from the cold and dreary weather in other parts of the country to relax in a sunny, arid, and lushly landscaped environment where outdoor relaxation and modern recreational opportunities were abundant.

The Arizona Inn is one of several resorts that were opened in the 1920s and early 1930s to cater to a wealthy clientele. Built during the same time period and still in existence are the Arizona Biltmore (Phoenix, 1929), La Posada (Winslow, 1930), and the Hassayampa Hotel (Prescott, 1927).

¹ Miller, pg xiii

² Conroy, pg. 9

Description: The Arizona Inn is located in the residential Blenman-Elm Neighborhood, a National Register Historic District. The Inn is approximately two miles west and north of downtown Tucson. Originally developed on the edge of the city limits, the property is primarily bounded by local streets — E. Elm Street to the north, N. Wilson Avenue to the east, and N. Olsen Avenue to the west. The southern boundary of the property abuts an unnamed alleyway which separates the Inn property from the adjacent residential property. N. Plumer Ave bisects the property from the south to E. Lee St. The main entrance to the Inn is located on E. Elm Street. The property has views of the Santa Catalina Mountains to the north and the Rincon Mountains to the east.

The Inn operates as a boutique resort hotel with casita-style rooms and suites, dining facilities, and recreational amenities on more than 14 acres. The Inn has been operated by family members since its founding by Isabella Greenway in 1930. The Inn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

This report focuses on seven acres in the historic core of the Inn. For the purpose of this report, the landscape has been divided into seven distinct areas. (Exhibit 1)

Area 1: This area is comprised of a large reception lawn, accessible directly from E. Elm Street, or from the main hotel building. The area is an open communal space dominated by a lawn outlined by walkways. A single California fan palm (*Washingtonia filifera*) serves as the focal point. A mortared flagstone walkway leads south past the open “Audubon Bar” patio and seating, and curves around the “African Terrace” into the cactus and native plant garden. (Exhibit 2) Annual flowers are planted along the south end of the lawn following the curved flagstone walkway that separates the reception lawn from the cactus garden. A secondary brick walkway leads east toward the courtyard, and then turns south toward the opposite end of the cactus garden. Enclosing the open space of the reception lawn on the north and east is a row of pruned mixed shrubs that run parallel to the brick walkway, providing privacy to guest casitas along E. Elm Street. The shrubs include Japanese mock orange (*Pittosporum tobira*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*), and xylosma (*Xylosma congestum*). Both the flagstone and brick walkways are edged with standing, native rocks mortared in place. (Exhibit 3)

Area 2: The transition between Areas 1 and 2 involves a grade change of approximately 2 feet. Access is provided by several stairs. Area 2 is comprised of a “sunken” rectangular lawn and courtyard surrounded by guest casitas. (Exhibits 4 & 5) The area is edged by a basket weave patterned brick walkway, pruned mixed shrubs including Japanese mock orange (*Pittosporum tobira*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), and xylosma (*Xylosma congestum*), and also low stuccoed walls. The courtyard is “T”-shaped with the long section parallel to E. Elm Street, and the shorter length extending along N. Wilson Ave. A free-laid flagstone path crosses the lawn on a north-south axis at the eastern end of the area. Two large juniper trees

(*Juniperus monosperma*) are also located at the east end of the lawn and courtyard. Several bottle brush trees (*Callistemon viminalis*) and mesquite trees (*Prosopis velutina*) are found in the courtyard.

Area 3: A garden with cactus and native plant species, and a wood shade ramada define Area 3. (Exhibits 6 & 7) The garden surrounds the ramada on the north and east sides. River rocks are placed in the middle of the garden in a pattern that simulates a dry creek bed. At the eastern edge of the garden is an “L”-shaped, eroded, unfired, adobe wall, pre-dating the Inn. The wall has been repointed and supported with a cement mixture. Brick walkways provide access to the ramada from all sides and several of the walkways are edged with interlocking clay roof tiles on end. A concrete fountain, situated west of the ramada, has been converted and is now used to support a sculpture. The fountain is surrounded by potted and annual flowers.

Area 4: The area south of the ramada includes a rectangular lawn where croquet is played, and is edged by a brick walkway. (Exhibit 8) Three guest buildings are located at the southern edge of the area. The eastern end of Area 4 contains curved and angled brick walkways and an abundance of vegetation which creates a cool microclimate. (Exhibit 9) The north-south brick walkway connects Areas 4 and 5 through an archway. A ramp for handicapped access, located mid-way between the east-west axis of the area, was added in the 1970s to improve accessibility for guests. The use of trees, shrubs, and plants in the upper and lower regions of this garden generate ample shade across the walkways throughout the day. Plants found in Area 4 include a large African sumac tree (*Rhus lancea*), palms (*Washingtonia filifera*), several large Aleppo pines (*Pinus halepensis*), rose bushes (*Rosa spp.*) and perennial flowers. Shrubs include Japanese mock orange (*Pittosporum tobira*) and xylosma (*Xylosma congestum*). Vinca vine (*Vinca minor*) serves as a groundcover under the African sumac tree.

Area 5: This area was made possible by the closure of E. Lee St. and is separated from Area 4 by a guest building. An arched walkway allows passage through the building to Area 5 from Area 4. (Exhibit 10) The linear, terraced garden drops in elevation as it moves west to east from N. Plumer Ave. to N. Wilson Ave. The area has a formal layout which includes a lawn, a central fountain surrounded in a hexagonal shape by mortared flagstone walkways with organic edges, and views east to the Rincon Mountains. (Exhibit 11) Flagstone walkways lead into the area from the hotel archway to the north and the tennis courts and pool to the south. Two concrete benches are found on the north and south end of fountain, with annual flowers planted along the edge of the fountain. The upper-most terrace contains a linear brick walkway heading west through an opening in a hedge of six-foot tall, square-pruned oleander (*Nerium oleander*). (Exhibit 12) The walkway then proceeds toward an iron exit gate. The transition space between Areas 5 and Areas 6 & 7 include several field stone walls capped with mortared flagstone. Some of the walls are also topped with a wrought iron railing. English ivy (*Hedera helix*) spills over the stone wall separating Area 5 from the badminton court. The area also includes a

citrus tree (*Citrus spp.*), and Carolina jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*). A mature crape myrtle tree (*Lagerstroemia indica*) is located between Area 5 and Area 7 at the entrance to the pool area.

Area 6: The southwest corner of the property bordering N. Plumer Ave. includes two Har-Tru clay tennis courts (100 feet-by-120 feet), a badminton lawn, and a seating area. (Exhibits 13 & 14) A hedge of tall oleander (*Nerium oleander*) serve to screen the tennis court from the areas to the north, west and south, and a low field stone wall capped with thick, rough-cut fieldstone separates the tennis courts from the badminton lawn. The ground plane also uses rough-cut flagstone pavers, mortared in place. The seating area lies east of the the tennis court entrance, and contains outdoor furniture with two umbrellas. Additional shaded seating is located adjacent to an uncapped mortared field stone wall. Additional plant materials include juniper (*Juniperus spp.*), Carolina jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) and a Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*).

Area 7: The heated swimming pool is located on the southeast part of the property and measures 30 feet-by-60 feet with the longer axis oriented in an east-west direction. The depth of the pool ranges from 3 feet to approximately 9.5 feet. The deck of the plaster pool is comprised of mortared, square-cut flagstone. The ground surface near the pool bar consists of large rectangular brick pavers. Along the southern edge of the pool area stands an arbor consisting of a base of brick, tufa-stone columns (several intact and others repaired/replaced with concrete mix), wooden vega beams overhead, and seven windows. (Exhibit 15) An iron gate installed for security separates Area 6 from the the pool. Plant materials in this area include a pomegranate tree (*Punica granatum*), lemon tree (*Citrus limon*), oleander (*Nerium oleander*), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) and roses (*Rosa spp.*). South of the pool along the edge of the property is an ocotillo fence (*Fouquieria splendens*), palms (*Washingtonia filifera*) and tall oleander shrubs (*Nerium oleander*).

History: Isabella Greenway's Legacy

Early in her life, Isabella Greenway faced major challenges including the death of her father when she was young, a mother who was economically challenged to provide for her, and the death of two husbands by the time she turned forty years old. After the death of her second husband, John Greenway, Isabella Greenway went on to become a nationally-known political figure, businesswoman and social reformer.

In 1927, Mrs. Greenway founded a workshop in Tucson for the many veterans who were disabled by lung disease in World War I and who had moved to Arizona for its curative climate. The workshop, called the Arizona Hut, was an opportunity for veterans to earn a living and support their families through furniture making while allowing them to continue their rehabilitation. Many of the best department stores in the U.S. carried Hut furniture including Marshall Fields, Abercrombie and Fitch, and others. When the Depression hit, department store orders for Hut furniture declined,

while productivity at the workshop continued unabated and the workshop overflowed with unsold goods. Mrs. Greenway built the Arizona Inn to house Hut furniture and to keep the veterans employed. The Inn also benefited from the burgeoning tourism industry in Arizona.

The Tucson region had become a popular destination for tourism and health-oriented resorts in the early part of the 20th century. By the late 1920s, demand for resort destinations outpaced supply in Arizona. An astute businesswoman, Isabella Greenway had purchased 14 acres of undeveloped land two miles from downtown Tucson at the gateway to the Santa Catalina Ranch with the expectation that she would, one day, develop the land. When the stock market crashed, Mrs. Greenway became concerned about decreased orders for Hut furniture. She saw the creation of the Arizona Inn as a way to further her objectives of economic self-sufficiency for veterans by providing a new venue for Hut furniture. Despite dismal national economic conditions, Mrs. Greenway forged ahead with the Arizona Inn. Her early life experience had taught her how to persevere in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, and the Inn was opened for business on December 18, 1930. The Arizona Inn provided a quiet, private respite in a sunny climate for its guests. To this day, Hut furniture can found throughout the Arizona Inn.

Isabella Greenway was personally involved in the selection of every element of the Mediterranean and Spanish Colonial Revival-style Arizona Inn. This attention to detail manifested itself in the final design and layout of the hotel site. From the orientation of the individual buildings in such a way as to create interior, protected communal spaces and courtyards, to the borrowing of ideas from Spanish gardens, to choosing specific plantings to provide shade and privacy, Mrs. Greenway's attention to detail was echoed in the motto of her business—a place of privacy and tranquility. Moreover, the singularity of the Arizona Inn's lush landscape against the backdrop of the arid Sonoran Desert speaks volumes about her hardy character and perseverance. Since most visitors to Arizona during the long winter months come to engage in outdoor recreation and relaxation, the design of the outdoor spaces at the Arizona Inn reflect the delicate balance Isabella Greenway offered between sociality, privacy, comfort, and amenities.

One of Isabella Greenway's central tenets was guest privacy and she avoided publicizing the names of the celebrities that stayed at the Arizona Inn. The family continues to protect guest privacy. Only in recent years have the owners disclosed the names of some early, prominent guests (those who had stayed at the Inn through the 1960s). Will Conroy, Mrs. Greenway's great-grandson who is currently President of the Inn, wrote in his 2010 booklet on the Arizona Inn that notable film and music celebrities who stayed at the Inn during its first 30 years had included Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, Clark Gable, Bette Davis, James Stewart, Cary Grant, Gary Cooper, Bing Crosby, Danny Kaye, John Wayne, Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope. Other notables in the early years of the Inn have included Salvador Dali, Howard Hughes, Thornton Wilder (who wrote "The Matchmaker" at the Inn), Van Cliburn,

Ansel Adams, John Foster Dulles, Frank Lloyd Wright, Eleanor Roosevelt, then-Senator John F. Kennedy and John D. Rockefeller (a frequent guest). The Inn's guest list was both a testament to the accommodations as well as the graciousness and hospitality of its owner.

With its rambling architecture, courtyards, and interior gardens, the Arizona Inn continues to be a retreat for “actors, writers, dignitaries, judges, businessman, priests, rabbis, hedonists, doctors, scientists, politicians, and astronomers”³. The value of discretion is still adhered to today. The pioneering spirit, political acumen and entrepreneurial legacy of Isabella Greenway endure in her desert oasis, the Arizona Inn.

Building the Arizona Inn

In September of 1930, Isabella Greenway proposed construction of the Arizona Inn and retained the services of architect Merritt H. Starkweather. In order for the hotel to benefit from access to city water, as well as unobstructed desert and mountain views, the site for construction was positioned on her 14-acre property just within the Tucson city limits.

Landscape work and building construction began concurrently. In November of 1930, a local Tucson company, Powell & Powell, delivered cement for retaining walls and sidewalks and assisted with landscape grading. During early construction, sidewalks were laid either as sand, cement, or brick. At the same time, James Oliphant began additional exterior work, and three months later Miles Abram was hired to provide and manage the expanding tasks of exterior labor. Together, Oliphant and Abram simultaneously executed a multitude of tasks on the property, including the management of garden staff, of which A. Serda and A. Olmstead figured prominently. The Arizona Inn was completed in three months, and the Inn opened its doors on December 18, 1930, to host a dinner dance for a University of Arizona sorority.

History of the Arizona Inn Landscape

Over the course of the Arizona Inn's history, there have been four significant periods related to the development of its landscape. The first, in 1937, saw the construction of a swimming pool and the recreation area which extended the landscape approximately one block south and closed Lee St. between Plumer Ave. and Wilson Ave. Near the southeast end of the swimming pool, an annex including additional guest quarters, was built during the 1940s. In the 1970s, the main hotel building was expanded. This closed the north end of Plumer Ave. north of Lee St. and extended the property approximately one block west to North Olsen Ave. The last significant change occurred in 2006 when the Spalding House at the northwest end of the property near East Elm St. and North Olsen Ave. was converted from a private residence into nine guest units for the Inn.

³ Conroy, pg. 57

During the 1930's and 1940's, most of the landscaped areas were wide and open with no walls higher than 2 ½ feet tall, inviting visitors to enjoy the sun, mountain views and surrounding desert afforded by the inn's remote location. Over the years, the City grew up around the Inn, and what was once a remote location is now in the middle of a bustling city. A 6 foot wall now encloses the property and entry gates welcome visitors. These features afford greater guest security. Open guest patios are now enclosed by mature shrubs and large trees. The visitor experience has shifted from an "outward" focus towards the desert to an "inward" look toward the landscaped oasis.

In the 1930's and 1940's, the reception lawn and courtyard (Areas 1 & 2) were within direct view of one another. The courtyard was terraced, moving down gradient from the reception lawn following the natural topography, and was bounded by parallel sidewalks, fronting courtyard-facing patios and bedroom doors. Both of these areas were, and still remain, expanses of green space with mixed shrub borders. During a period of growth between the 1950's and 1960's, a north-to-south oleander hedge (*Nerium oleander*) was extended in order to increase guest privacy by closing the courtyard area from the reception lawn. Miles Abram was asked to build the pergolas and the central ramada in the cactus and native plant garden. During this period and later, a local ironworker provided terrace dividers and step railings throughout the property.

As originally designed, the centrally located cactus garden (Area 3) contained a ramada, an adobe wall, and many native plant species and cacti. Isabella Greenway chose and collected plants from local sources for the exterior yards and gardens. Century plants (*Agave Americana*) and oleander (*Nerium oleander*) figured prominently in the first gardens, as well as native cacti such as saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*), ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*), and prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia spp.*). J.J. Reidy was the supplier of the majority of the first garden cacti, while Guy Monthan provided the majority of the shrubs planted in January of 1931. Greenway showed great sensitivity in planting drought-resistant and hardy plants that could provide natural barriers and shade, enhancing the desert character of the Inn.

In June of 1931, a fountain design sketched by Starkweather was sent to Gladding McBean Co. in Los Angeles. The company completed the design and dimensions and worked to construct the fountain, which included custom-made tiles. The original pedestal of the fountain was installed in the Cactus Garden after June 1931; it now supports a sculpture.

Another landscape project underway by January of 1931 was the construction of a section of adobe wall, intended to form (along with a section of Ocotillo fencing) the southern boundary of and southwestern corner of the cactus garden. This wall echoed a remnant section of adobe wall that already existed on the property when Mrs. Greenway purchased it, likely remains from an early homestead. The new adobe wall

was constructed with the help of Miles Abram, James Oliphant, Guy Monthan, Powell & Powell Company (who provided the concrete footings for the wall), and Augustin Alvarez (who supplied the majority of the adobe bricks).

The addition of an adobe wall added a distinct Southwestern aesthetic to the cactus garden and fountain. Although the 1931 adobe wall no longer stands, the oldest, pre-existing adobe section remains in the eastern part of the cactus garden. Mrs. Greenway made sure to include iconic Tucson elements in the landscape. The adobe and the saguaro cacti achieved the sense of place and Southwestern exotica a typical guest was seeking, while at the same time appealing to the sensibilities of guests accustomed to the eastern United States.

In the 1930's, Area 4 was a large green expanse, terraced and sloped away from the hotel. Two sections of steps and a curvilinear flagstone pathway joined other sidewalks to the south of the upper lawn. Although this area began as an open lawn, since the 1950s it has grown to become one of the shadiest sections of the inn's landscape. As in the courtyard area, iron railings were added along the steps. These were followed in the 1970s by wheelchair ramps. In addition, hedges grew to create greater privacy for the patios.

In October 1937, professional grade, 100 foot-by-120 foot composite tennis courts were ordered from Har-Tru Corporation of New York. Two months later, tennis court construction was underway, and the Paddock Engineering Company finalized the construction of a heated swimming pool. A wading pool for children was originally constructed on the east end of the pool and measured 12' by 20'. The wading pool was later removed to provide additional space for seating around the swimming pool.

In 1937, East Lee St. bisected the Arizona Inn site. Not long after, however, this area was incorporated into the Arizona Inn property and was to become a terraced landscape which descends to a lower terrace. Based in part on landscapes Mrs. Greenway admired during her travels, the terrace garden was designed to mimic Spanish garden. This was one of the last large-scale landscape projects at the Arizona Inn.

Summary of Landscape Changes: While the Arizona Inn landscape has undergone regular maintenance and modernizing changes over time, the layout of the landscape and the original building footprints remain true to Mrs. Greenway's original intent and design. Significant periods of construction of the Arizona Inn landscape include:

- 1930-1932: Initial construction and landscaping
- 1937-early 1940's: Construction of recreation features and incorporation of Lee St.
- 1950s: maturity of plant materials and security landscaping, 1950's

Changes were made over time to accommodate guest preferences, to provide greater accessibility, and improve water conservation practices. The original intent and function of the historic landscape remains intact, in the use of plant materials, the diversity of large, open spaces, and smaller private spaces, the sense of serenity, and the homage to landscapes of Europe. The overall feeling of the secluded sections, archways, garden paths, and private patios bordering carefully manicured lawns is one of quiet privacy.

Conclusion

Isabella Greenway created a destination that both reflected her dedication to service and responded to and transcended economic conditions. Through her efforts, the design and construction of the Arizona Inn and its landscape reflects both the personal tastes of Isabella Greenway and her guests, and stands as a testament to her pioneering spirit. As Will Conroy, Isabella's great grandson stated, "The flowerbeds, hedges and trees that Isabella so thoughtfully laid out 80 years ago have grown and twisted happily into their maturity over the years. The 14 acres of grounds and gardens have provided ever more peace and quiet and fruit and shade as the 20th century has yield to the 21st."⁴ The Arizona Inn continues to attract visitors from around the world to find respite under the Arizona sun.

Sources:

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⁴ Conroy, p. 9

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Exhibits

Exhibit 1: Aerial view of the Arizona Inn property with study areas identified



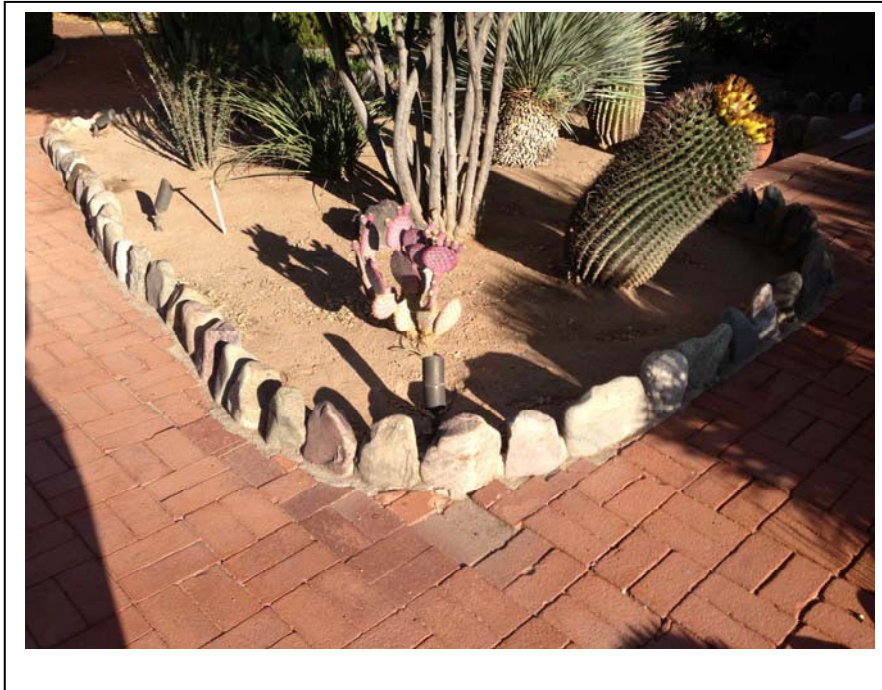
Source: Pima County aerial imagery, 2010.

Exhibit 2: View of the lawn and annual flowers near the Inn's main building



Photographer:
Crystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 3: Field stone set on end as a border in Areas 1 & 3



Photographer:
Helen Erickson,
2013

Exhibit 4: View of the lawn and surrounding guest casitas in Area 2



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 5: Mature vegetation and guest casitas in Area 2



Photographer:
Helen Erickson,
2013

Exhibit 6: Adobe wall with cactus and native plant garden in Area 3



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 7: View of ramada and palms in Area 3



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 8: Croquet lawn facing west in Area 4



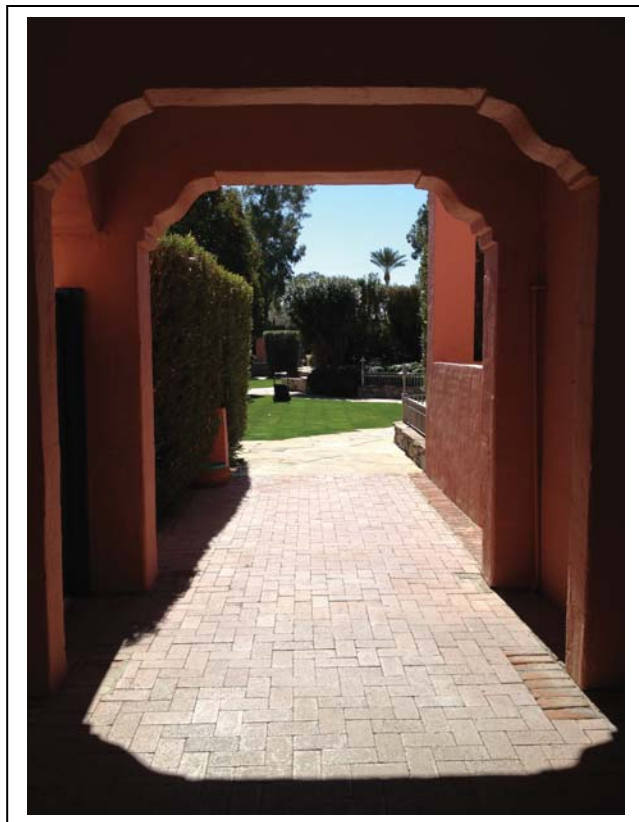
Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 9: Mature vegetation creates a cool microclimate in the eastern end of Area 4



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 10: Archway through guest building from Area 4 to 5



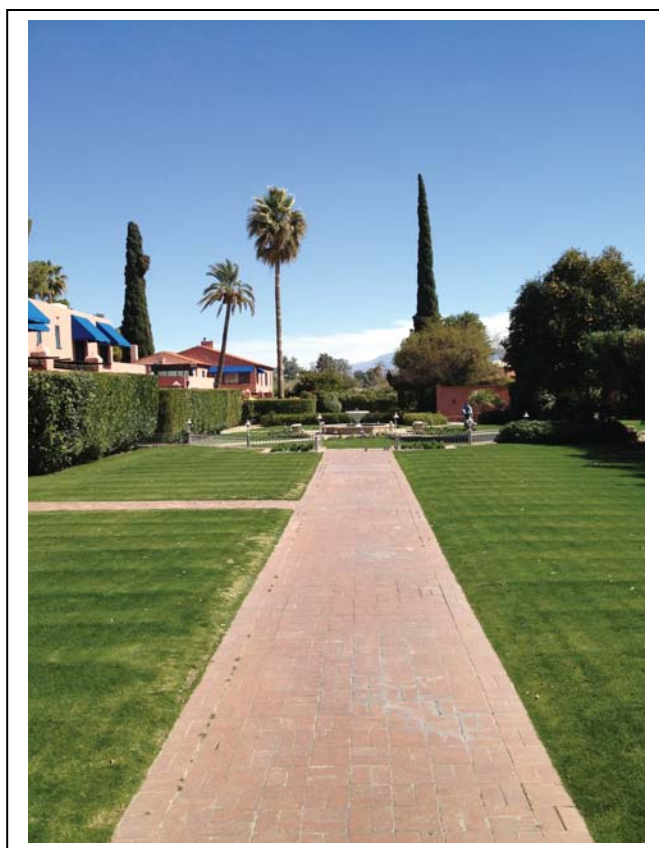
Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 11: Irregular flagstone walkway leads to the fountain in Area 5



Photographer:
Helen Erickson,
2013

Exhibit 12: Linear brick walkway in Area 5, facing east



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 13: Flagstone wall adjacent to tennis courts, Area 6



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 14: Tennis courts in Area 6



Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

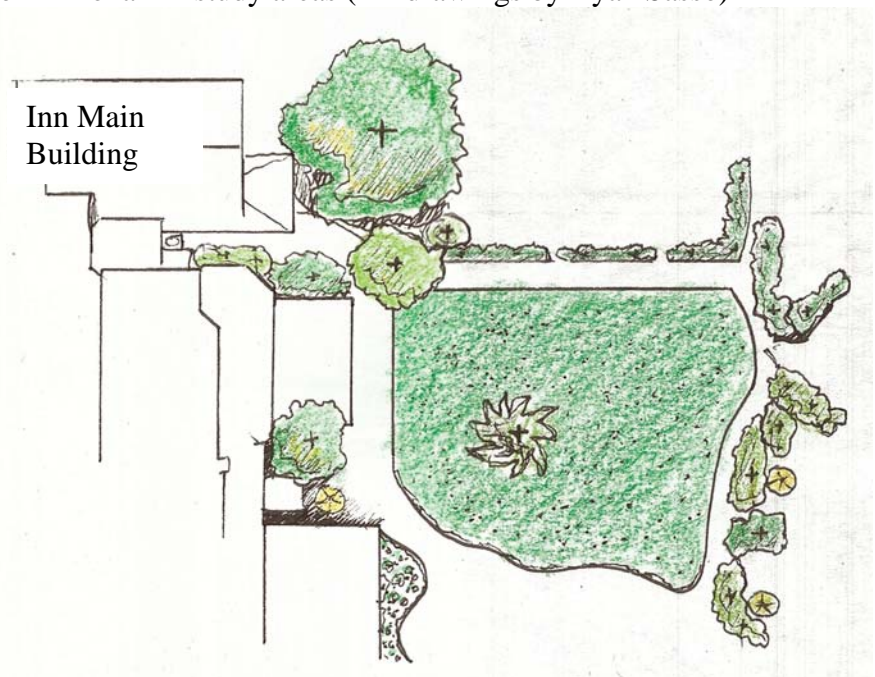
Exhibit 15: Arbor adjacent to southern end of swimming pool



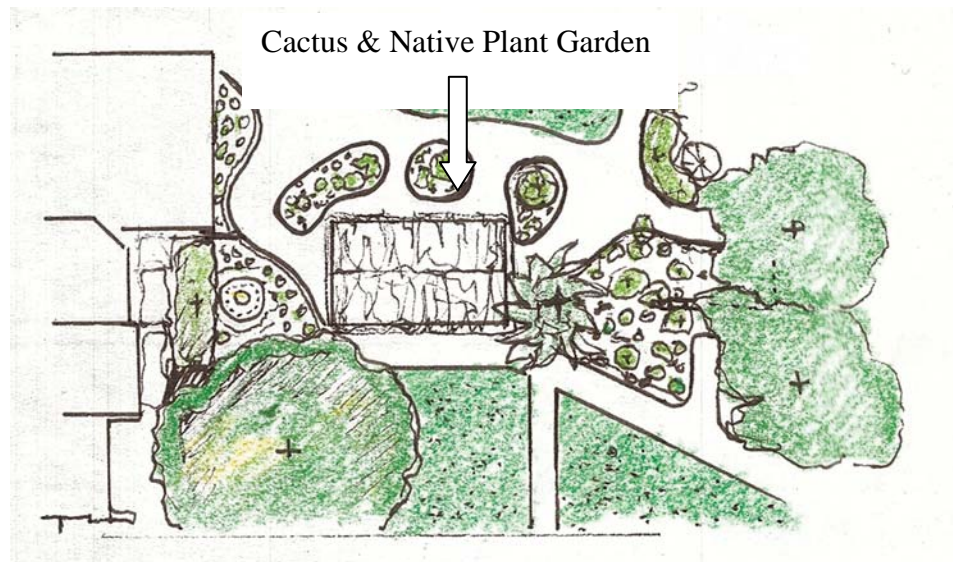
Photographer:
Chrystal Cheek,
2013

Exhibit 16: Plan view drawings of Arizona Inn study areas (All drawings by Ryan Sasso)

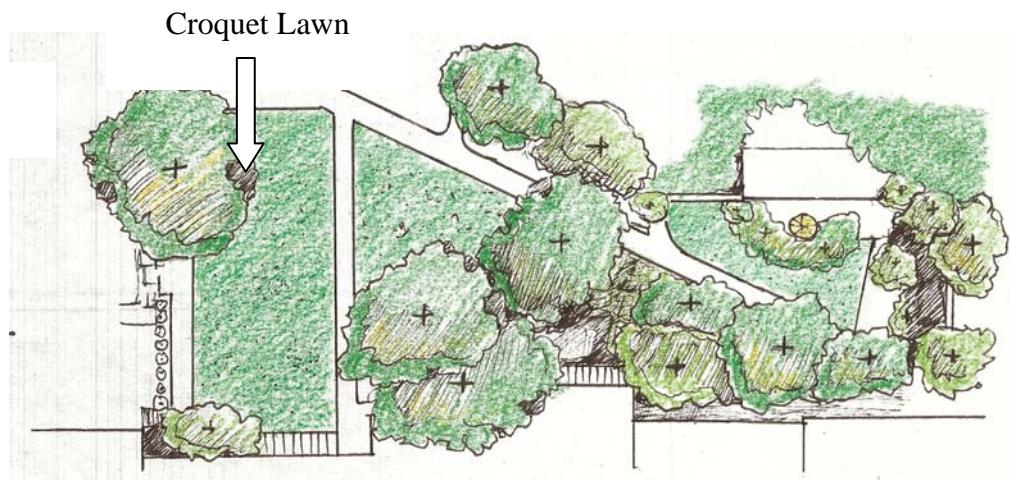
Area 1



Area 3



Area 4



Area 6



Area 6

Tufa stone &
wood vega arbor

