

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT**LANDMARK NAME:** Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz House**OWNERS:** Charles J. Stava and Jacob Earl Garber**APPLICANTS:** Charles J. Stava and Jacob Earl Garber**LOCATION:** 503 Avondale Street, Houston, Texas, 77006 –
Avondale West Historic District**AGENDA ITEM:** B**HPO FILE NO.:** 21PL188**DATE ACCEPTED:** 3/4/2021**HAHC HEARING:** 03/25/2021**SITE INFORMATION:** Lot 7, Block 2, Montrose, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. Designation is requested for the two-story house. The building is 2,534 square feet on a 7,000 square foot lot.**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:**

The Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz House is a two-story, frame Craftsman-style house built 1911-1912. The house is a contributing building in the Avondale West Historic District. The Russell Brown Company, a prominent Houston development firm that designed and built custom homes, constructed the house. The notable architect Alonzo N. Dawson designed the house.

The original owner of the home, Mrs. Martha Schumacher Perlitz, was born on September 27, 1875 in La Grange, Texas to John Schuhmacher and Louise Frede. Her father was the founder of The Schuhmacher Company, the state's largest grocery wholesale business. The firm eventually grew into one of the largest wholesale grocers in the country.

The current owners, Charles J. Stava and Jacob Earl Garber, purchased the property in 2020. They are restoring the house to its original condition. The owners are seeking protected landmark designation for 503 Avondale Street to preserve the house, record its history and ensure that it remains a part of the neighborhood's historic housing stock. The Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz House meets criteria 1, 3, 4 and 8 for landmark designation and criteria 1, 2 and 3 for protected landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE*AVONDALE & AVONDALE WEST HISTORIC DISTRICT*

The house at 503 Avondale Street is a contributing building in the Avondale West Historic District. Avondale was developed as an upscale neighborhood in the early twentieth century, on par with nearby Courtland Place and Westmoreland. The original Avondale subdivision includes two City of Houston historic districts – Avondale East and Avondale West. City Council designated Avondale West a historic district in September 2007.

The neighborhood is known for its significant examples of residential architecture, including houses in the Neoclassical, Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, Prairie, American Four Square and Craftsman styles. The historic housing stock in Avondale predominantly consists of two-story houses. Some of the neighborhood's notable features, such as the red concrete sidewalks and curbs, are still present today.

Avondale's history began in 1907 when Joseph F. Meyer, Jr., a Houston businessman, sold his 31-acre pasture to the Greater Houston Improvement Company for \$105,000. The company platted the land into 129 lots across three streets, which were paved with oyster shells. The neighborhood was intended to be attractive with contemporary comforts; each lot included gas, water and sewer connections and the developer planted 500 trees in the neighborhood.

During this time, many businesses and professionals began to move beyond the Main Street corridor. Avondale became an upscale "Streetcar Subdivision" when the South End line of the Houston Electric Street Railway was extended, making it possible to commute downtown by streetcar. Deed restrictions were put into place to ensure that Avondale remained a neighborhood of single-family homes.

The Greater Houston Improvement Company held a contest to determine the name of the neighborhood. Many contestants suggested "Avondale" – in reference to William Shakespeare's hometown in England, Stratford-upon-Avon. The three main streets were named Avondale (originally Avenue, now Street) Stratford Street and Hathaway Street (now Westheimer Road). Cross streets were named Baldwin, Helena, Mason and Taft. The neighborhood was popular with homebuyers and expanded rapidly. In 1912, the development was extended west past Taft Street.

When deed restrictions expired in 1930, businesses began opening in the houses. Additional changes came to the area after World War II, when apartment buildings were built in Avondale to accommodate returning servicemen and their families. The designation of the Avondale East and West Historic Districts has helped preserve the neighborhood's historic houses and distinctive character.

HISTORY OF 503 AVONDALE

The house at 503 Avondale Street was completed by the Russell Brown Company in 1912 and was sold to Mrs. Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz for \$6,985. Her mother, Mrs. Louise Schuhmacher, owned the house next door at 501 Avondale, which was also completed in 1912 by the Russell Brown Company. A listing for 503 Avondale first appears in the Houston city directory in 1913.

OWNER HISTORY

Mrs. Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz (b. September 27, 1875, d. June 7, 1950)

Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz, the first owner of 503 Avondale was born on September 27, 1875 in La Grange, Texas, to John Schuhmacher, a German immigrant, and Louise Frede, a Texas resident. She was one of eight children. Her father was the founder of the Schuhmacher Company, a wholesale grocery and coffee roasting firm. John Schuhmacher died in 1907.

Martha married William Ernest Perlitz on June 24, 1896, in Fayette County, Texas. William was born on December 17, 1874, in Schulenburg, Texas, to Frederick Werner Perlitz and Julia Anne Lenert Perlitz. William and Martha had three children, Lillie Marie, Werner John and William Henry. William Perlitz died on December 17, 1908 at age 34.

In 1911, Martha moved to Houston with her children and her mother. Martha was a woman of independent means and heiress to the Schuhmacher Company. She became a member of Saint Vincent DePaul Church, the Newman Circle and the Camelia Garden Club. A previous owner, Arthur Talk, told the current owner that Martha had 503 Avondale built to resemble a home she admired in her travels to California.

Martha's mother, Mrs. Louise Shuhmacher, purchased the property next door at 501 Avondale. Both houses were completed in 1912 by the Russell Brown Company. Martha was last listed at 503 Avondale in the city directory of 1920. She sold the house in 1921 to move to Troy, New York. Her eldest son was attending Rensselaer Polytechnic Institution in Troy at the time, and her other two children were at boarding schools in nearby Connecticut.

Martha died in Houston on June 7, 1950, at the age of 74. She was interred in La Grange Cemetery. She was survived by her daughter and two sons, her brother John and five grandchildren.

Mr. Fayette Perry Risdon (b. December 11, 1880, d. 1943)

Mrs. Mary R. Butler Risdon (b. January 10, 1887, d. June 29, 1951)

Fayette Perry Risdon and Mary R. Butler Risdon owned 503 Avondale soon after Martha Perlitz. The Risdons were first listed at this address in the 1922 city directory.

Fayette Perry Risdon was born on December 11, 1880, in New York. He was a civil engineer and worked for the Texas Company (later Texaco). Mary R. Butler Risdon was born on January 10, 1887 in Memphis, Tennessee, to James M. Butler of Ireland and Anna Dronom of Illinois. Mary graduated from Forest Park University in St. Louis, and lived in New York City for some time. Mary and Fayette Perry Risdon were married on September 27, 1915, in New Orleans.

The couple had two children, Florence and Marianna. Mary was a member of the Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist, where she was a Sunday School teacher. The Risdons rented out rooms in the house for several years; they moved between 1938 to 1942.

Fayette died in 1943. Mary died on June 29, 1951, at her home on 215 Emerson Street. She was survived by her two daughters and two grandchildren.

Subsequent Owners

By 1945, the property had become a boarding house. Harris County tax appraisal records show that W. P. McDonell owned 503 Avondale in 1952. Notable Houston "society realtor" Arthur Lynn Talk owned the property from the 1960s until 1995. According to the current owner, Arthur Talk sold the property to his nephew in 1995 and continued to live next door at 501 Avondale. His nephew used 503 Avondale as

an office for the family real estate and ranching operations. The house was also used as rental property. The Talk family owned the house until 2020.

The current owners, Charles J. Stava and Jacob Earl Garber, purchased the property in 2020.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

THE RUSSELL BROWN COMPANY

According to architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Russell Brown Company was a Houston-based architectural design and construction company. Russell Brown was born on December 12, 1875, in Taylor, Texas, and came to Houston in 1902. The Russell Brown Company was chartered in 1906 and specialized in residential design for upper and middle class homebuyers. After becoming successfully established in Houston, the company opened branch offices in Dallas by 1916, San Antonio by 1922 and Los Angeles in 1923. Houston architects who worked for the company included Alonzo N. Dawson, Charles W. Oliver, Mike Mebane and Gonzalo Ancira. Alonzo N. Dawson was the architect for 503 Avondale.

The firm designed and built several homes in Avondale between 1908 and 1925. These included seven houses on prestigious Avondale Avenue, at 104, 216, 218, 410, 501, 503 and 610 Avondale. The company built numerous houses in the Westmoreland, Montrose, Boulevard Oaks and River Oaks neighborhoods and in the Dallas subdivision of Munger Place, and was the general contractor of such notable Houston houses as the William S. Farish House (1925) in Shadyside and the Cleveland Sewall House (1926, National Historic Landmark) in River Oaks.

Around the start of World War II, Russell Brown retired to his ranch in Juliff, Texas, and the company ceased operations. Brown died in 1963.

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

American Craftsman

The house at 503 Avondale is a two-story, frame Craftsman-style residence. Craftsman design evolved out of the popular Arts and Crafts Movement of the early 1900s, when architecture shifted away from the more elaborate Victorian style. It was the prevailing architectural style in the United States between 1900 and 1930. Craftsman style is often associated with bungalow house forms, and both were inspired by architects Charles Sumner Greene and Henry Mather Greene. The Greene brothers were in practice together in Pasadena, California, from 1893 to 1914. According to Virginia McAlester, author of *A Field Guide to American Houses: Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*, the Greenes began designing Craftsman-style houses in 1903.

The defining features of Craftsman-style houses include low-pitched gabled roofs, wide eaves (usually with exposed brackets under the eaves), partial or full-width porches supported by tapered square columns or piers and prominent but simple decorations. Most traditional Craftsman houses are one-story

bungalows, but large two-story homes were also built in the style. The Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz House is an early and elaborate example of Craftsman design for Houston.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz House at 503 Avondale Street is a two-story frame, Craftsman-style house. The body of the house has a side-gabled roof with an oversized gable-front dormer. The roof is covered in asphalt shingles. There is a sleeping porch on the second floor that has a shed roof. An interior brick chimney is at the top right of the roof. The exterior of the house is clad in narrow wood siding. The sleeping porch and dormer are covered in shingle siding. The house sits on a pier and beam foundation.

The house is two bays wide. The first floor contains a full-width porch. The left bay of the porch, where the brick entry steps are located, has a front-facing gable with open eaves, decorative rafter tails and three symmetrically spaced brackets. Two square columns rest on brick bases with masonry caps are on either side of the entry. The entry includes a single-pane glass door with single-pane sidelights with a simple wood surround and decorative ledge above.

The right bay of the first floor contains the porch balustrade with simple square balusters. The right corner of the porch is supported by square column on top of a brick base with masonry caps and a third column in the same style as those at the entry. A large, plate glass window is centered in the bay. The window surround matches those of the front door. This section of the porch has a shed roof.

The second floor of the house contains a partial-width, enclosed sleeping porch with a shed roof and open eaves with decorative rafter tails. The porch has wood shingle siding and is enclosed with decorative shutters. The historic photo (Exhibit B) indicates the original windows on the sleeping porch were Prairie style, multi-paned with upper sashes over single-pane lower sashes.

An oversized gable-front dormer with open eaves and decorative rafter tails is centered on the roof. The dormer contains a two plate glass windows with a simple wood surround. The historic photo (Exhibit B) indicates the original windows in the dormer were Prairie-style, multi-pane casements. Three Craftsman-style brackets are symmetrically spaced under the gable.

RESTORATION HISTORY

When the current owners Charles J. Stava and Jacob Earl Garber purchased the property, the home's façade had been significantly altered. Stava and Garber began a comprehensive project to restore the house to its original 1911-1912 appearance.

According to the owners, the original tripartite window with beveled glass insets facing the street were removed and replaced with a large plate glass window. The upstairs gallery was enclosed to become additional living space. The original Prairie-style gable windows were also removed and replaced with plate glass panels. The front porch was enclosed with vertical wooden slats.

The homeowners have removed the porch slats and intend to open the upper gallery. They ordered custom-made reproductions of the original windows, which will be completed and installed soon. In addition, they replicated the porch railing based on architectural and pictorial evidence. The owners are painting the house in its original colors based on chemical analysis of paint chips taken from the facade. The Martha Schuhmacher Perlitz House meets criteria 1, 3, 4 and 8 for landmark designation and criteria 1, 2 and 3 for protected landmark designation.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by [Planner Name], Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

	S	NA		S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		(4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		(5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		(6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;			

**EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTO**

MARTHA SCHUHMACHER PERLITZ HOUSE
503 AVONDALE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006



PHOTO BY PRESERVATION HOUSTON

**EXHIBIT B
HISTORIC PHOTO C. 1911**
MARTHA SCHUHMACHER PERLITZ HOUSE
503 AVONDALE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHARLES J. STAVA

**EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTO**

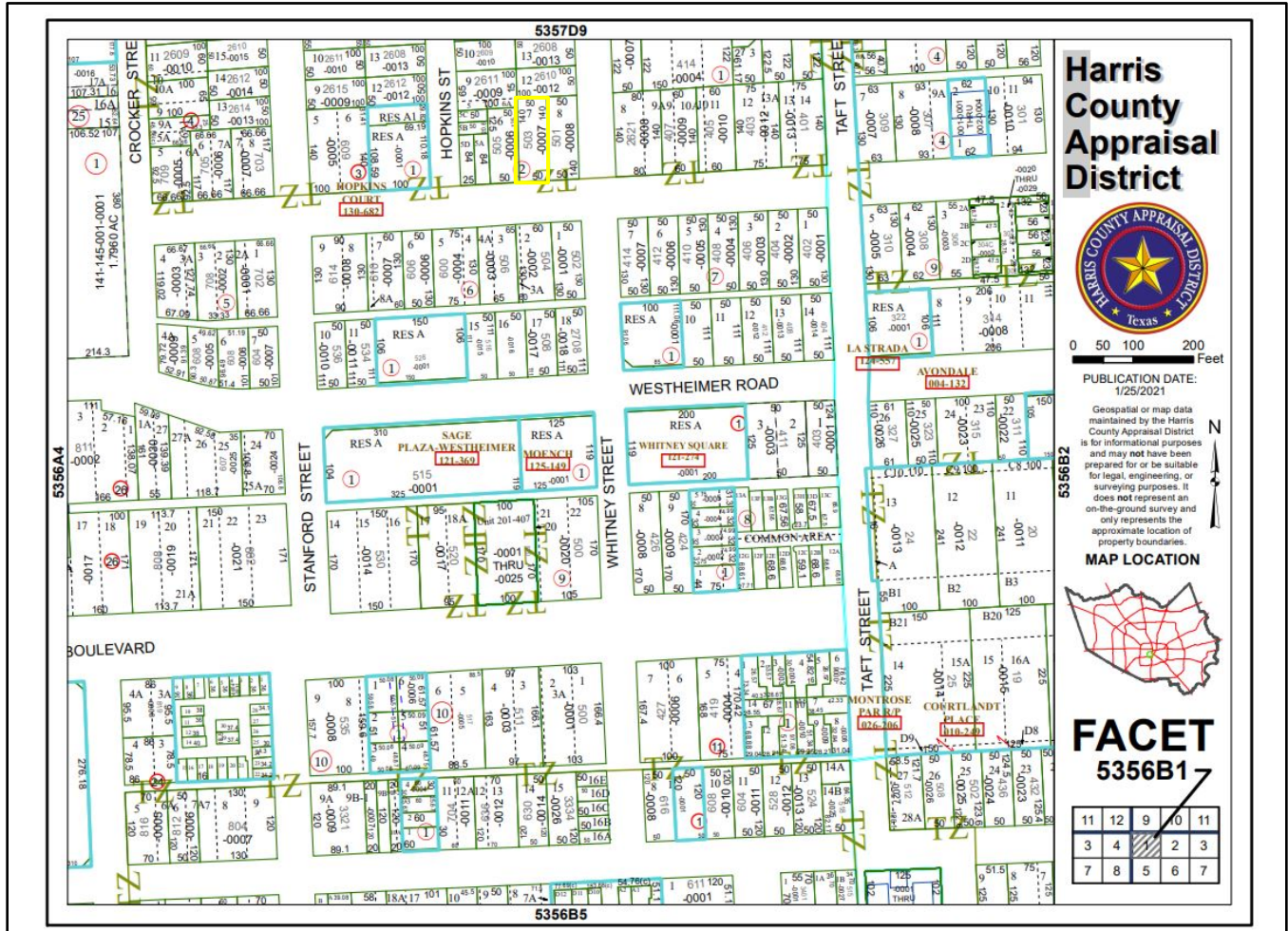
ORIGINAL OWNER, MRS. MARTHA SCHUHMACHER PERLITZ
MARTHA SCHUHMACHER PERLITZ HOUSE
503 AVONDALE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CHARLES J. STAVA

EXHIBIT D SITE MAP

MARTHA SCHUHMACHER PERLITZ HOUSE
503 AVONDALE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006



CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston's Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

EXHIBIT E
SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP
Houston 1924-1950 vol. 5, 1925, Sheet 542
MARTHA SCHUHMACHER PERLITZ HOUSE
503 AVONDALE STREET, HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006

