

Dewella Apartments

232-236 E. Wilshire Avenue

1929

Spanish Colonial Revival

**Status: Local Landmark;
Listed on the National Register**



In this apartment complex, the Spanish Colonial style is used in an exceptionally graceful fashion. Particularly pleasing is the visual appearance of the sweeping staircases, the symmetrically disposed apartment wings, and the formal layout of the garden area in front. The use of the two-story structures on the sides and a single-story building at the rear is an unusual reversal in the pattern of the bungalow court. The use of smooth stucco walls with Mission-style forms for the second-story at the front and Monterey-style balconies at the back is an effective combination.

The Dewella Apartments were designed and constructed by Santa Ana builder Ora Vinton Noble for Herman and Edna Bruns, who moved out from the Midwest to Orange County around 1910. The couple built the apartments as a business investment; during the 1920s Fullerton had a serious “housing accommodation” problem, and the city was seen as an ideal location for rental properties. When completed, the Dewella Apartments cost the couple \$36,400: \$11,000 for the complex, \$24,000 for the land (four lots), and \$1,400 for the furniture and other furnishings.

The development was named for Dewella Bruns Seaburg, the daughter of the Bruns’ who had passed away during birth of her son eight years before the apartments were built. As a remembrance, the family named the apartments after her.

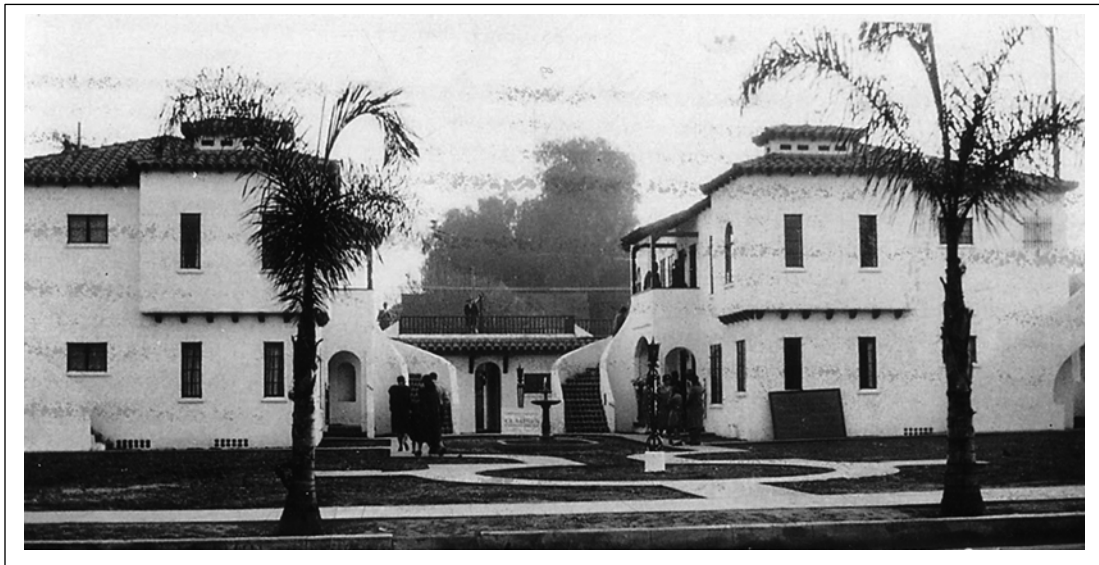
The Dewella opened for public viewing on a Sunday in December; the eight, four-room units were completely rented in twenty-four hours. The Fullerton News Tribune called the Dewella “One of the most artistic apartment houses in Orange County, yes, in Southern California.”

When the apartments opened in December, 1929, the fountain and cement walkways were in place, but formal landscaping was not added until the spring of 1930. The Bruns’ had made plans to erect two more identical units north along Wilshire Avenue, but with the 1929 stock market crash and ensuing depression, those plans were abandoned. The economic downturn allowed the front area to be turned into

an open garden spot, and the complex's large setback made the Dewella Apartments even more striking from the street. The dramatic setback from Wilshire Avenue adds to the welcoming nature of the courtyard while making the apartment complex one of the most recognizable properties in Fullerton.

When the complex opened in December of 1929, the fountain and cement walkways in the front area were in place, but landscaping and signage were not added until the following year. Placed just behind the fountain is a twelve-foot tall neon sign, which spells out Dewella. Added a few months after the complex opened, the Dewella neon sign is now the oldest extant neon sign in Fullerton; restoration work was completed on the sign in 2006.

The Bruns family held on to the Dewella Apartments until 1947; there have been only three other owners of the property since then. Stable ownership and low tenant turnover have contributed to the complex's excellent condition.



Dewella Apartments, 1929