



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649  
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

### **REPORT ON DESIGNATION**

LPB 422/10

Name and Address of Property: **Bel-Roy Apartments**  
**703 Bellevue Avenue East**

Legal Description: Lots 1, 16, 17 and 18, Block 5, East Park Addition to the city of Seattle, according to the Plat thereof, recorded in Volume 8 of Plats, pages(s) 83 in King County WA; except that portion of said lots 16, 17 and 18 conveyed to the State of Washington for primary State Highway No. 1, Seattle Freeway, by deed recorded under recording number 5060053.

At the public meeting held on October 6, 2010, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Bel-Roy Apartments at 703 Bellevue Avenue East as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

*D. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction; and*

*E. It is an outstanding work of its designers, Bain and Pries.*

*F. Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the City.*

### **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

#### **Setting**

The Bel-Roy Apartments has a distinctive setting on a 19,749 square foot (.49 acre) lot on the northwest corner of Bellevue Avenue E. and E. Roy Street. It is surrounded primarily by other apartment buildings, both those from the 1920s and earlier and more modern buildings. A number of small early-20<sup>th</sup> century residences remain nearby. The west edge of the property slopes steeply down to Melrose Avenue E., which is, at this location, a bicycle trail along the edge of the bluff high above the I-5 freeway.

## **Exterior Description**

The Bel-Roy has a generally L-shaped plan with three stories plus a daylight basement. The building is of wood frame construction with brick facing and a concrete basement. The site slopes steeply to the west, exposing the concrete basement on the south façade. The garage entry is on the south side, off of E. Roy Street. The basement extends beyond the footprint of the upper stories, topped with a deck at the west side of the building.

From Bellevue Avenue E. the building appears much smaller than it actually is, because the west wing on the rear is hidden behind a row of houses and extensive vegetation. This wing, above the freeway, is 131 feet (north-south) by 31 feet. The south wing extends 130 feet along E. Roy Street and is 46 feet wide at the street end. The southwest façade is the most visible and the most distinctive, with a zigzag facade with V-shaped bays (see photos and Attachment B). The façade steps back in seven irregular steps, from east to west. This unique design has the practical value by providing a greater proportion of units with views, corner windows and cross ventilation.

All elevations are clad with brick. At each story the area between the windows is predominantly dark red brick with lighter accent bricks. Between the floors and at the cornice, wide bands of brick are painted light gray. The dramatic contrast of the broad bands of light gray with the dark red provides a strong horizontal element. A zigzag effect is created by alternate protruding bricks along the upper and lower borders of the gray bands, enhancing the horizontality. The cornice is capped with metal coping and a simple motif of regularly-spaced protruding vertical bricks.

The windows are the other major decorative element. They are predominantly ten-light steel sash with operable casements below fixed transoms. On the southwest façade, each of the V-shaped bays has a pair of the 15-light windows with operable center casements. The center of each elevation has a bay of similar 20-light sash.

Approaching the building from the street one enters a walkway along the north side of the south wing. Marking the entry is a red brick pillar with a zigzag pattern reflecting the building ornamentation; it is topped by an Art Deco cast stone ornament. Past this pillar is a screen of decorative concrete block that was added later to separate the walkway from the property to the north. The walkway and front courtyard are narrow because of the proximity of the nearby houses. There is additional open space on the rear, a fenced lawn on the southwest side of the building that is not visible from the street. A secondary entry goes from the basement to the garden. Another secondary entry to W. Roy Street is on the south side just west of the garage. A stairway ascends from the steep street, with doors into the garage and the basement.

The building has a point-block arrangement with the units in seven stacks, each accessed by its own primary entry and staircase and secondary entry and staircase. The primary building entry (although it only serves one stack of apartments) is at the east end of the south wing, closest to the street. It is distinguished by a recessed entryway with a painted brick surround and a small lobby. The entry has flooring of decorative black and red clay tile and stairs with dark red pavers, and curving metal handrails. The other entries are not recessed but are each sheltered by a flat-roofed Moderne-style hood of steel supported by brackets with a zigzag pattern. The glazed entry doors are the original stained wood. Each stack of apartments also has a secondary staircase and simple entry, most of which also open onto the main walkway.

## **Interior Description**

The Bel-Roy has 51 units with 27 studios and 24 one-bedroom units, averaging 553 square feet. Each

of the three upper floors is 9,646 gross square feet (8,260 net square feet) with the basement level somewhat larger (10, 675 gross square feet including the garage, or 3,991 net square feet). The total area is 39,613 gross square feet (28,771 net square feet). The daylight basement has living units on the west side and a garage accommodating 14 cars in the southeast section. It also contains the laundry room, the mailboxes, a boiler room with the hot water boiler that provides heat to the radiators, and a corridor that connects most of the individual stairwells. This, the only corridor in the building, has plaster walls and a carpeted floor; each doorway has clipped corners. Most stacks have two units on each floor, with no connection between stacks except the basement corridor. The first stack, with the primary entry, has a small lobby space with an open staircase, but the others have only a landing with stairs going up to the second floor and down to the basement level.

The interior of the building appears to be highly intact with few alterations; the updates that have been made are compatible with the building. The apartment doors are a notable feature, of stained fir with original Art Deco-style hardware. Finishes throughout are generally original, including plaster walls in the stairwells and the units and hardwood floors in the living rooms and bedrooms. The Art Deco details include doorways with clipped corners within each unit. Many of the apartment light fixtures also appear to be original, although those in the stairwells are newer. The bathrooms have newer fixtures but some appear to have their original tile floors. In others, compatible replacement tile has been installed. Kitchens have also been updated but many appear to have the original cabinetry and some original tilework; others have newer counters and flooring (originally linoleum).

### **Building Alterations**

The building appears to be highly intact with few alterations. No exterior alterations are apparent or are noted in the permit record. The interior alterations consist of updates to bathroom and kitchen fixtures and finishes, as described above.

## **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Neighborhood Context: Capitol Hill and the East Park Addition**

The Bel-Roy is located in the East Park Addition at the northwest corner of Capitol Hill. This is one of the city's older plats, having been platted by David and Louisa Denny in May of 1886. The northern portion of the plat enjoyed spectacular views over Lake Union, and was settled just after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by many of the city's wealthiest families. Much of the area north of Belmont Avenue E. now comprises the Harvard-Belmont Historic District. This area south of Belmont Avenue E. was developed at about the same time, but with more modest homes, some of which still remain. It has been a mixed-use neighborhood with apartment buildings and some commercial buildings since at least 1910. Its topography slopes from Broadway down toward the west, with a steep bluff just west of Bellevue Avenue E., below which is the I-5 freeway. The northern area (the historic district) has several streets that curve with the topography, but to the south the grid system of streets predominates.

### **Apartment Development in Seattle and Capitol Hill**

Early Seattle residents had several multifamily living options, depending on their income, social level and family structure. A family who could not afford its own home might rent a duplex or triplex. Those who were in transition often moved into apartment hotels, which catered to the middle and upper classes by providing rooms and suites with bath facilities and meals served in central dining rooms. Single people who could not afford this option might live in a boarding house, with meals

provided, or a rooming house, where residents relied on restaurant meals. A step up from the rooming house was the workers' hotel, which catered largely to single men (and some couples and families) with rooms without private bath or cooking facilities.

However, the city's growth in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and changing social and economic forces, soon made these choices inadequate. From the beginning of the Klondike gold rush in 1897 to 1910, Seattle's population increased 400%, from 55,000 to 237,000, and then to 315,312 in 1920. The city's role as a trade and manufacturing center solidified and downtown and neighborhood business districts boomed, with offices, stores and restaurants. Streetcar lines spread throughout the city, allowing people to travel easily between neighborhoods. This extremely rapid growth brought an acute need for housing, and builders and developers responded with a variety of housing types. The apartment block as it is known today, with a single primary entrance and living quarters, including kitchens, suitable for middle class residents, appears to have first been constructed in Seattle around the turn of the century. The first such building is believed to have been the St. Paul, constructed in 1901 on First Hill.

Between 1900 and 1910, land uses became more separated, with people of all income levels moving out of downtown. It was in this decade that Capitol Hill began to develop into a dense apartment district, largely because of its excellent transportation connections to downtown. No regulations controlled the location of apartment buildings, but economics dictated that they were typically built on higher-value land close to downtown or near streetcar lines. Therefore, they generally appeared near neighborhood commercial districts and streetcar lines in Capitol Hill, First Hill, Queen Anne and the University District. Many of the commercial buildings on the main streets had apartments above first-floor businesses.

World War I and a subsequent recession slowed new development, leading to a pent-up demand for housing and a period of very intensive development in the mid-to-late 1920s. By this time apartments were well established as a viable and acceptable housing option for the middle class, typically for single people or for those saving to buy a single-family home. Social conditions also encouraged apartment development, particularly the increasing role of women in the work force. Single women working in shops, offices and factories needed respectable and affordable housing, something that could not be obtained at the workers' hotels.

By the 1920s the district west of Broadway, from Madison to Belmont Avenue E. had numerous apartment buildings. Scattered apartments were also built in residential areas. Western Capitol Hill's future as an apartment district was confirmed in 1923, when Seattle adopted a comprehensive zoning ordinance. Those areas that already had apartment development were zoned for future apartments, while new apartments were prohibited in single family zones.

With the economic prosperity of the 1920s, apartments often had amenities and luxuries (such as refrigerators) that made them worthwhile alternatives to a single-family house. While this had been true to some extent in the preceding years, it became more common in the 1920s. The *Journal of Commerce* reported record amounts of construction in 1925, including "thousands of houses and scores of apartment houses." Multifamily development peaked in 1925 and continued strongly until 1930. The majority of the city's pre-World War II apartments were built during this period, with apartment blocks and mixed use buildings appearing along arterials in nearly every neighborhood. It was at the end of this period of growth that the Bel-Roy was built.

Apartment features and sizes were targeted to the potential tenants that developers expected in a particular location. Because of western Capitol Hill's location close to downtown, many of its apartments were designed for downtown workers, either singles or couples without children. Thus,

there were a large number of inexpensive efficiency units, or studios. Some buildings also had one-bedroom units, which would accommodate a couple, and even a few two-bedroom units, which could potentially accommodate a roommate or a child.

The apartment buildings themselves typically had small lobbies, often clad with marble or other luxurious materials. Buildings up to three stories were unlikely to have elevators, so a central staircase ascended from the lobby area, with a second staircase at the rear. Shared facilities such as laundry rooms and storage areas were in the basement. Apartments were usually arranged along double-loaded corridors with windows opening onto either the street or an inner courtyard or light well. The typical efficiency apartment was between 400 and 550 square feet in size and consisted of a living room, a full bath, and a kitchen with appliances and cabinets. Often a large closet or dressing room (which could contain the bed) opened off the living room. Wall beds and built-in cabinets and dinettes enhanced the usefulness of the small space. In many cases, leaded glass, oak floors and tile bathrooms added elegance. A one-bedroom unit would have most of the same characteristics, but with a separate bedroom rather than just the dressing room.

The Bel-Roy is an excellent example of a single-purpose apartment building of this period, with a mixture of studio and one-bedroom units. However, it differs from the typical building in that it does not have a single main entry and a lobby, but has seven entries, each accessing small groups of apartments without long corridors. This approach was highly favored at this time by Frederick Anhalt, who used corridors in only one of his numerous buildings. The Bel-Roy's studio units had large closets and wall beds (none of which remain). In keeping with the modern style (and perhaps its year of construction, 1930) its ornamentation and materials are simple, of brick rather than marble or terra cotta.

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought a precipitous drop in construction as apartment financing disappeared. Little large-scale construction (other than defense-related projects) took place during the 1930s and the early 1940s, until federal financing revived apartment construction after World War II. West Capitol Hill saw its most drastic change in the 1950-1960s. Zoning changes in the 1950s encouraged the development of larger buildings in certain areas, including much of Capitol Hill. Numerous small houses were demolished for large new developments. The new regulations also required on-site parking for vehicles. This requirement led to open parking areas in front of and below the new buildings—significantly changing the streetscape by making it more car oriented. The second significant change was the completion of the I-5 freeway below the bluff at the west side of Capitol Hill, directly below the Bel-Roy. This wide, noisy barrier separated the neighborhood from downtown. The eastern side of the freeway quickly developed with large apartment buildings to take advantage of the new height allowances and the views to the west. One of these, the five-story Mark Spencer, is just to the north of the Bel-Roy. Mid-rise development has continued; the 7-story Hillsborough was built in 1981 across the street to the east of the Bel-Roy.

### **Building History**

The Bel-Roy was designed in 1930 (permit #295656) by the firm of Bain and Pries. Construction began in September of that year and was completed in April 1931. The project's owner/ developer was the Bel-Roy Housing Corporation, whose partners were: architect William J. Bain; his younger brother, David Bain; Dr. Hubbard T. Buckner, an orthopedic surgeon; William St. Clair, president of Frederick and Nelson Department Store; and Edward W. Allen, an attorney. David Bain also served as the general contractor for the project and lived in the building for some time after its completion. The Bain family later bought out the other partners, and sold their interest following David Bain's

death in 1952.<sup>1</sup> The building was purchased by Arthur Riehl and remained in the Riehl family until 1988. Kenneth and Cheryl Cohan owned it from 1988 until 1992, when it was sold to the Belroy Apartments Partnership. In October 1998 it was sold to John Moffat and the Wyco Limited Partnership and then later that year to the current owners, Belroy Apartments LLC.

City directories indicate that the building has been a popular one with tenants and has generally been fully occupied. The first reverse directory after its construction, in 1938, shows that the tenants were primarily men or married couples with only 14 single women in the 49 occupied units. There was a considerable range of occupations, with a dentist, the owner of a ski equipment company, store clerks and telephone company workers. Most of the women had office or laboratory jobs; others were teachers or students. The percentage of women was only slightly higher in 1948, but some of them had jobs with more responsibility, including a director of a medical placement firm and a librarian. The men, most of whom were married, included the vice-president of an insurance agency, government workers and store clerks. This trend continued in 1958, with more women (50%). The women were in sales and office jobs; one owned a hat design studio; the men were primarily in sales or were students.

### **The Architects: Bain and Pries**

Both Lionel Pries and William J. Bain, Sr. had long distinguished careers after the brief but productive partnership (1928-1932) that produced the Bel-Roy. Bain (1896-1985) was one of the city's best-known and most prolific architects for much of the 20th century. He came to Seattle in 1915, apprenticing with W. R. B. Willcox and Arthur Loveless before serving in the U. S. Army in World War I. In 1921 he received a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania, receiving further training in the Beaux-Arts tradition. He opened his own practice in 1924, specializing in residences in the French and English Revival styles.

Lionel Pries (1897-1968) was born in San Francisco and studied initially at the University of California. He later attended the University of Pennsylvania at the same time as Bain, receiving his master's degree in architecture in 1921. After further study in Europe, he opened a private practice in San Francisco. The practice was relatively successful, focusing on residential and small commercial buildings. His commissions were in the Bay Area and Santa Barbara (which suffered a severe earthquake in 1925), usually in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. In late 1927, however, Bain's practice was growing and he invited Pries to join him in Seattle. By February of 1928 Pries had closed his California practice and moved to Seattle to work with Bain.<sup>2</sup>

The partnership continued to focus on residential projects, as each had been doing independently. They also had a number of commissions for apartment buildings and small commercial and industrial buildings. The residential designs were in an eclectic mix of revival styles, notably the French Provincial and Tudor styles, as well as some with Spanish Colonial influences. The partners also designed fraternity and sorority houses, also using revival styles: Alpha Tau Omega (now Delta Kappa Epsilon, 1800 NE 47<sup>th</sup> Street, 1928-30); Kappa Delta (4524 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE, 1929-30); and Sigma Phi Epsilon (1930-31, not built).

More than forty projects designed during the four-year partnership were built. Several of these were

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<sup>1</sup> William J. Bain, Sr. and Mildred C. Bain, *Building Together: A Memoir of Our Lives in Seattle*, Seattle: Beckett Publishing Company, 1991, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, *Lionel H. Pries, Architect, Artist, and Educator*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007, pp. 71-73.

apartment buildings owned by the Bain family: Lombardy Court (1928-29, 421 Summit Avenue E.); the Viceroy (1928-30, 505 Boylston Avenue E.); the Envoy (1929, 821 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue); and the Consulate (1619 Belmont Avenue). Another building was completed on Yale Avenue, but was later demolished for freeway construction.<sup>3</sup> These are typical apartment houses of the era, brick-clad boxes with ornament reflecting Revival influences. However, the Bel-Roy departs significantly from the typical “decorated box” with its unique zigzag form as well as its Art Deco ornamentation. This difference in style suggests that Pries was involved in the design.<sup>4</sup> The design is also a very good example of accommodation to the steep site, highlighting the views toward the west and stepping down the hillside.

The firm prospered for the first two years, but as the effects of the stock market crash of 1929 became increasingly felt, commissions declined. Seattle building permits dropped drastically from \$30 million in 1930 to \$2 million in 1933, severely affecting every architectural firm.<sup>5</sup> Following the partnership's dissolution, Bain continued with residential and apartment commissions and added more commercial and institutional work. Toward the end of the Depression, Bain joined other local architects in working on the Yesler Terrace public housing project. By this time his office was so busy that he sought Pries' help, and the two worked together on residential commissions for about nine months in 1941. During World War II Bain served as state camouflage director and Pries assisted in training for that effort. In 1943 Bain formed a partnership with three other architects (Floyd Naramore, Clifton Brady and Perry Johanson), with whom he remained until his death. This firm, now known as NBBJ, has grown into one of the largest architectural firms in the world. He also continued with residential designs with two other partners, Harrison Overturf and Edwin T. Turner, combining traditional and modern idioms.<sup>6</sup>

After the partnership with Bain dissolved in 1932, Pries devoted himself to teaching. He had begun teaching at the University of Washington School of Architecture in 1928, rising to full professor in 1948. He continued to practice independently while teaching, designing a number of residences. He remained there until 1958. He is best known for his brilliant teaching and lasting influence on his students.<sup>7</sup> However, the Bel-Roy is one of several extant buildings that show his design influence.

### **Architectural Context: The Art Deco Style**

The Bel-Roy has been called “one of the best examples of Art Deco design in Seattle,” by architect Peter Staten.<sup>8</sup> Although other apartment buildings of the period had applied Art Deco motifs, this is unusual in its expression of Art Deco on the zigzag façade.

“Art Deco” is a term applied retroactively to a style that came to the world's attention at the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris in 1925. The exposition was a celebration of modernity, things that were new, exciting and unorthodox for the jazz age—a reaction to both the excesses of the Victorian Age and the handmade simplicity of the Craftsman. Art Deco architecture is “a particularly hard concept to define as it refers to a decorative style at once

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<sup>3</sup> Ochsner (2007), pp. 372-75.

<sup>4</sup> Ochsner (2007), p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Ochsner (2007), p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Ochsner, editor, *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Guide to the Architects* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), pp. 216-219.

<sup>7</sup> Ochsner, (1998), pp. 228-233.

<sup>8</sup> Bain, p. xi.

traditional and innovative, which absorbed influences from a variety of sources and movements and introduced a whole range of new or improved materials into the vocabulary of architecture.”<sup>9</sup>

Art Deco fused modern concepts and the latest industrial materials and techniques into a distinctive but eclectic style. The new design vocabulary drew from both nature and diverse historical sources. Influences included Art Nouveau, the Vienna Secession movement, the new Cubist artists, the Bauhaus architecture of Germany, American industrial design, and ancient forms such as American Indian, Celtic, Egyptian, African, Assyrian and Mayan patterns. Stylized flowers, plants, animals, sea creatures, sunbursts and waves, and geometric forms such as chevrons and zigzags, were seen frequently. Here in the Pacific Northwest nature was the strongest influence, while the more austere zigzag motif seen in the Bel-Roy is less common..

The Art Deco spirit was expressed in all forms of design, from the ocean liner *Normandie*, the glassware of Lalique and the fashions of Erté to innumerable Hollywood movie sets. However, Art Deco’s longest lasting influence has been in architecture. The style’s popularity coincided with a period of strong growth and development in both the United States and Europe in the late 1920s. Although construction was largely curtailed during the Great Depression, Art Deco was the style of choice for the major structures that were built during this period, including the Chrysler Building (1928-30), the Empire State Building (1930-32), Rockefeller Center (1932-40) and the Miami Beach hotels of the 1930s.

The most typical expression of Art Deco in architectural form is the stepped back form seen in large buildings. This form has become synonymous with the Art Deco skyscraper, but it was initially dictated by the New York zoning code of 1916, in order to encourage height while allowing light and air to the streets below. The new building forms and ornaments meant that, more than ever before, an architect could make a building recognizable from a distance. Bold bands of ornament were used at building tops and along the sidewalk, with materials such as marble, terra cotta, cast stone and bronze. The style was the building itself– not just applied ornament, but vertical emphasis achieved through massing and tall piers. The massing was most effective in the hillside setting, rising above the city like a beacon proclaiming the importance of its mission. Local examples include Harborview Hospital (Harlan Thomas, 1930-31), the Northern Life Tower (A. H. Albertson, 1927-29), the Exchange Building (John Graham, Sr., 1929-31) and the U. S. Marine Hospital (Bebb & Gould with John Graham, Sr., 1930-32).

The Bel-Roy, while not a skyscraper, takes advantage of its location and the Art Deco form to make itself a landmark. Rather than setting back stories vertically, the prominent southwest façade, sitting above the city, is set back horizontally with dramatic triangular bays giving it a zigzag plan. Just as on larger buildings, the zigzag motif is repeated in the bands of bricks between floors.

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<sup>9</sup> Patricia Bayer, *Art Deco Architecture: Design, Decoration and Detail from the Twenties and Thirties*. London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd. 1992, p. 7.



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*The features of the Landmark to be preserved include:* The exterior of the building and the site.

Issued: October 19, 2010

Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: Belroy Apartments LLC  
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