



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 7, 2022 REPORT NO. HRB-22-007

HEARING DATE: January 27, 2022

SUBJECT: **ITEM #05 – Ben Johnson Spec House**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: James B. Finnell & Ryan C. Hunter; represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 4831 Hart Drive, Kensington-Talmadge Community, Council District 9
APN 465-242-03-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Ben Johnson Spec House located at 4831 Hart Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Ben Johnson Spec House located at 4831 Hart Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1926 under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the rear enclosed porch and the original garage. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Eclectic style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1926 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features an asymmetrical front façade; an informal, irregular juxtaposition of flat and shed roof forms; red mission half-barrel tile roof with exposed rafter tails; stucco cladding; the original heavy wood front door with speakeasy; prominent focal, reverse-ogee arched, 18-lite window; and original casement and double-hung wood windows.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. The subject property is a one-story, single-family residence with a detached garage and an enclosed patio located in the Kensington neighborhood.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Ben Johnson Spec house, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Ben H. Johnson who constructed the house as a speculation house.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by IS Architecture, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion C, and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The subject property was constructed in 1926 in the Spanish Eclectic style and includes an original detached garage that is set back from the street. The resource has a flat composite roof with shed slopes covered with red mission half-barrel roof tiles. A rear covered patio has been enclosed. The building is clad in light dash textured stucco.

The north-facing front elevation of the house features an asymmetrical façade with three bays. The east bay contains an easterly sloping shed roof and a projecting rectangular-prism element; two window groupings are present on this bay—one paired casement, and one single casement with turned wooden spindles. The original wooden front door with a speakeasy is along the west side of this projected element. A wood casement window is directly across the front door. The center bay is recessed and includes an open patio with two wings of stucco-clad pony walls; the bay is topped with a northerly sloping clay tile roof with exposed rafter tails. The west bay contains a westerly sloping shed roof. Fenestration on the front elevation consists of two divided-lite inset casement windows on the east bay, a single focal, reverse-ogee arched, 18-lite window and two five-lite casement windows on the center bay, and a wooden casement window on the west bay. The east elevation has a flat wall plane and contains a variety of five original double-hung and casement windows in their original openings. A sixth window was replaced with a vinyl sash. The west elevation of the original building features two wooden casement windows, a paired grouping of two vinyl-sashed double-hung windows, and one aluminum sash double-hung window. A covered patio entry is located along this façade, which leads up to a half-glass door. The west façade shares the same wall plane as the enclosed patio until it reaches the garage. The enclosed patio along the west elevation includes one aluminum sash window. The rear elevation consists of two sections. The western section contains the enclosed patio and features two sets of glass sliding doors. The eastern portion contains two double-hung windows—one with vinyl sash and one with wood sash. The rest of this façade is devoid of fenestration.

The stucco-clad detached garage is physically connected to the residence through the enclosed patio. The garage features a modern sectional garage door facing north, and a single double-hung one-over-one wood window along its east elevation. Due to the lack of character-defining features of the garage and the negative integrity impact of the modern garage door, staff recommends excluding the garage from the designation.

Modifications to the property include the construction of the enclosed porch between 1926-1953 and the undated window vinyl sash replacements on the east, south, and west façade. Additionally, security bars and cloth awnings were installed over some windows. A window opening was infilled along the rear elevation, evidenced by cracking in the stucco, all at unknown dates. Non-original metal handrails were installed along the front stairs. The home received a skim coat of fine dash stucco over the original coarse sand stucco at an unknown date. The original stucco appears to contain larger substrates with a more subdued texture. Large patterns of undulations and unevenness in the stucco appear to be from the brown coat of the original stucco. Although the exterior of the resource was modified with a skim coat of light dash stucco, the current stucco texture closely resembles the original historic texture and it is compatible with the Spanish Eclectic style. Overall, these modifications do not significantly impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship, or feeling related to HRB Criterion C.

Following the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition, the romantic ideal of Spanish and Latin American architecture was revived. What resulted was the Spanish Eclectic style which was the predominant style in Southern California between 1915 and 1940, significantly altering the architectural landscape until the Modernist movement took hold during and after WWII. The style uses decorative details borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture. These may be of Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, or Renaissance inspirations, and unusually rich and varied series of decorative precedents. The style employed a variety of floor plans, as well as gabled, cross-gabled, gabled and hipped, hipped and flat roof forms with parapets. Other character defining features include Mission and Spanish clay tile; focal windows; arched windows and other openings; and accented entries.

Significance Statement: The resource continues to convey the historic significance of Spanish Eclectic style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including the asymmetrical front façade; an informal, irregular juxtaposition of flat and shed roof forms; red mission half-barrel tile roof with exposed rafter tails; stucco cladding; the original heavy wood front door with speakeasy; prominent focal, reverse-ogee arched, 18-lite window; and original casement and double-hung wood windows. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

The subject property at 4831 Hart Drive built by Ben H. Johnson. Ben H. Johnson has not been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect, Designer or Builder, and there is insufficient information to designate them as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to

restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Ben Johnson Spec House located at 4831 Hart Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1926 under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the rear enclosed porch and the original garage.



Alvin Lin
Junior Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
Development Services Department

AI/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 1/27/2022

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 1/27/2022, to consider the historical designation of the **Ben Johnson Spec House** (owned by James B Finnell & Ryan C Hunter, 4831 Hart Drive, San Diego, CA 92116) located at **4831 Hart Drive, San Diego, CA 92116**, APN: **465-242-03-00**, further described as LOT 419 in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the **Ben Johnson Spec House** on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Spanish Eclectic style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1926 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features an asymmetrical front façade; an informal, irregular juxtaposition of flat and shed roof forms; red mission half-barrel tile roof with exposed rafter tails; stucco cladding; the original heavy wood front door with speakeasy; prominent focal, reverse-ogee arched, 18-lite window; and original casement and double-hung wood windows. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the rear enclosed porch and the original garage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

4831 Hart Drive, San Diego, CA 92116

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **465-242-03-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**