



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: October 12, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-035

HEARING DATE: October 26, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #4 – Dr. Paul Libby House**

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

APPLICANT: Pamela L Fernandez Revocable Trust 05-04-06 represented by Brian F. Smith and Associates, Inc.

LOCATION: 7846 Esterel Drive, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 346-610-0100

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Dr. Paul Libby House located at 7846 Esterel Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Dr. Paul Libby House located at 7846 Esterel Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1967-2017 under HRB Criterion B, and 1967 under HRB Criterion C. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The property is historically significant under CRITERION B as a resource identified with Dr. Paul A. Libby, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association with a period of significance beginning in 1967, the date of construction, and ending in 2017, the year in which Dr. Libby published his last academic writing. Specifically, Dr. Libby, who lived at the residence from 1967 until his death in 2021, was a prominent researcher in aerodynamics who made foundational contributions to the field of supersonic combustion, cofounded UCSD's Department of Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering Sciences, and authored over 200 scientific journals and books. The house was also the site of Libby's home office beginning in 1996 where he wrote many of his later publications.
2. The resource embodies distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Contemporary style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a strong roof form with deep overhanging eaves, large aluminum and wood framed windows, vertical wood siding, angular massing, sunshades in the form of brise-soleil and pergola, attached garage, floor-to-ceiling window walls, obscured entry, and courtyards.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The property was built as a Contemporary style residence with an attached garage in a neighborhood of similarly scaled homes.

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 Dr. Paul Libby House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Dr. Paul A. Libby, who is a historically significant individual.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report (HRRR) was prepared by Brian F. Smith and Associates, Inc., which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, B, C, and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria B and C but not HRB Criteria A and D. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

The subject resource is located in the Azure Coast Estates subdivision, an area of La Jolla that was developed in the 1960 and 1970s. In 1961 Azure Coast, Inc. purchased 105 acres of property between Torrey Pines and Ardath roads on which they planned to build 50 luxury houses and subdivide the remaining land. By 1963, two homes were already under construction, but based on historic aerial photos, most of the development of the subdivision occurred between 1966 and 1978. The HRRR asserts that the resource is eligible for designation under Criterion A as a special element of La Jolla's historical and architectural development as one of the first residences completed in the Azure Coast subdivision and as designed by Lloyd Ruocco is representative of the Contemporary style that characterizes the neighborhood's architecture.

In order to be eligible for designation under HRB Criterion A, a resource must exemplify or reflect a special element of development. Special elements of development refer to a resource that is distinct among others of its kind or that surpasses the usual in significance. There is no research to suggest that the Azure Coast subdivision is distinct from other subdivisions in La Jolla or the City as a whole. While the resource represents the mid-century modern residences characteristic of the subdivision, there is no evidence to suggest that the resource surpasses the other residences in the area in significance. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion A.

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

The subject resource located at 7846 Esterel Drive is associated with Dr. Paul A. Libby, a prominent academic and researcher who made foundational impacts on the field of aerodynamics. Born in

New York, Dr. Libby obtained a bachelor's degree from the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn in 1942 and worked as an apprentice engineer at Chance Vought Aircraft before being drafted to serve in the Navy during World War II. While in the military, he served in the Structures Branch of the Bureau of Aeronautics. After the war, Dr. Libby was honorably discharged as a Lieutenant (Junior Grade), and he returned to his alma mater to acquire a doctorate's degree in 1949. He would later join the university as a tenured professor. Dr. Libby collaborated with Professor Antonio Ferri, an internationally known specialist in supersonic aerodynamics, in the experimental and theoretical research on fluid dynamics, turbulence, and combustion, earning him international recognition as an expert in such fields. In 1964, Dr. Libby, with nine other members, cofounded the Department of Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering Sciences (AMES) at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). In 1967, Dr. Paul Libby and his wife, Petrina Libby, constructed the subject residence at 7846 Esterel Drive, where he resided until his death in 2021. At UCSD, he held positions such as the AMES department chair, Dean, and Association Dean of Graduate Affairs. Throughout his career, Dr. Libby authored several books and published over 200 articles in scientific journals. The UCSD Memoriam states that Dr. Libby "made foundational contributions to the fields of supersonic and hypersonic flight." He also researched shock waves, boundary layers, turbulence, and aerothermochemistry. In 1972, he was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in Applied Mathematics. Beyond his work in academics, Dr. Libby served on various governmental panels, including on NATO's Fluid Dynamics Panel of the Advisory Group for Aerospace Research and Development.

The 7846 Esterel Drive property was constructed for Dr. Libby and his wife Petrina in 1967. The Libby family continued to own the property until Dr. Libby's death in 2021. In order to be significant under HRB Criterion B, a property must be the resource best associated with a historically significant individual's most productive period of work. The period in which Dr. Libby was most productive, as it relates to the history of San Diego, began in 1964 when he cofounded the Department of AMES at UCSD and ended in 2017 when he published his last academic writing. In 1996 Dr. Libby constructed a home office on the lower level of the Esterel Drive property out of which he wrote many of his later publications. Because the resource was Dr. Libby's personal residence from 1967 until his death in 2021 and the site of his home office, staff is recommending designation under HRB Criterion B with a period of significance beginning in 1967, the date of construction, and ending in 2017, the year in which Dr. Libby published his last academic writing.

Modifications to the property are limited and are detailed below in the Criterion C discussion. In 1996, the Libbys converted the crawl space into a recreation room and home office for Dr. Libby. This project included the addition of windows on doors on the rear façade. These modifications do not impact integrity of location, setting, feeling or association as it relates to HRB Criterion B. Specifically, the 1996 modifications contribute to the property's significance under Criterion B because they are associated with the construction of Dr. Libby's home office.

Significance Statement: The subject resource was occupied and associated with Dr. Paul A. Libby, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association with a period of significance beginning in 1967, the date of construction, and ending in 2017, the year in which Dr. Libby published his last academic writing. Specifically, Dr. Libby, who lived at the residence from 1967 until his death in 2021, was a prominent researcher in aerodynamics who made foundational contributions to the field of supersonic combustion, cofounded UCSD's Department of Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering Sciences, and authored over 200 scientific journals and books. The

house was also the site of Libby's home office beginning in 1996 where he wrote many of his later publications.

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 as a single-family house in the Contemporary style in 1967. The house is one-story at street grade but contains a basement level towards the western portion of the building. The building is horizontally oriented to the street, and has a one-story, hipped roof attached garage and driveway that extends towards the street. The garage is attached to the main volume of the residence through a smaller hyphen at an obtuse angle. The main volume of the house is rectangular in plan and has a low-pitched gable roof with composite shingles. The roof exhibits wide eave overhangs throughout. Two courtyards are present at the property – one is located directly west of the garage, and one is located near the obscured entry and enclosed by landscaping. Overlooking the entry courtyard is the northeast façade, featuring a floor-to-ceiling glass wall with a sliding glass door and a vertical brise-soleil at the entry. The obscured entry is also clad in vertical wood siding, as opposed to the stucco siding that is typical throughout the property. The southwest elevation displays two levels. The upper level contains a balcony that projects from a glass wall with an operable sliding glass door. The balcony contains a vertical brise-soleil element, and transitions southward into a projecting pergola that runs the full length of the facade. Large windows, as well as corner windows, are present on this elevation. All windows on the property are either wood or aluminum framed fixed, casement, or louver windows. Newer windows and a sliding door are present on the basement level; these features were added in 1996 as part of a construction permit.

Modifications to the property include the addition of a 1990 swimming pool and deck, a 1996 southwest elevation addition of windows and a door associated with the construction of Dr. Libby's home office, a 2022 in-kind hardscape pavement replacement, a 2023 garage door replacement, replacement of the wood shingle roof with composite shingles, and an undated southeast façade door infill. Overall, these modifications do not significantly impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship, or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

Unlike earlier styles which are generally defined by exterior decorative details, the Contemporary style focused on interior spaces and their relation to the outdoors. Emphasis was placed on integrating the indoors with the outdoors by utilizing windows and exterior living areas such as balconies and courtyards. The style was popular in San Diego in the 1950's and 1960's largely because it could be easily adapted to hillside lots. Character defining features include strong roof forms with deep overhangs and exposed beams; large, aluminum framed windows; non-traditional exterior finishes including vertical wood siding, concrete block, stucco and flagstone; sun shades, screen or shadow block accents; broad masonry chimneys; and distinctive triangular, parabolic or arched forms. Contemporary houses often incorporate angular massing; attached carports or garages; courtyards or balconies; obscured or recessed entries; and split-level designs.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Contemporary style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a strong roof form with deep overhanging eaves, large aluminum and wood framed windows, vertical wood siding, angular massing, sunshades in the form of brise-soleil and pergola, attached garage, floor-to-ceiling

window walls, obscured entry, and courtyards. 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.

Lloyd Pietrantonio Ruocco was born in Maine in 1907 and moved to Canada as a baby. In 1923, he and his family moved to Southern California, first to LA, then to Long Beach, and finally to San Diego. While attending San Diego High School, Ruocco took an architectural drawing class and entered a contest run by Richard Requa for an original home design. Ruocco's design was so unusual that he was awarded a special third prize and a chance to meet Requa. After attending San Diego State College for one term, Ruocco was hired by the office of Requa and Jackson. He then decided to study architecture at UC Berkeley. While at Berkeley, Ruocco was exposed to the Beaux Arts tradition but favored the designs of Le Corbusier, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Wright.

After graduating from Berkeley in 1933, Ruocco returned to San Diego. He worked for Requa again on the County Administration Building, as well as a model town exhibit for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. During World War II, Ruocco worked as an architectural drafter for the US Public Works Office. Ruocco built the Lloyd Ruocco Design Center (HRB #434) in 1950 to serve as the offices for his firm and his wife Ilsa's interior design firm and as a place to mentor young architects, including Homer Delawie. Ruocco and Delawie went on to form a partnership in 1958, which lasted until around 1961.

Ruocco has been called the second most significant Modernist architect in San Diego architectural history (after Irving Gill). Ruocco, along with several other San Diego Modernist architects, was instrumental in establishing the Post and Beam style. Characteristics of Ruocco's work include an economy of materials, extensive use of glass to create the visual effect of transparency; simple wood beams; the inclusion of small, private places with lighting, nooks, and window seats; floor-to-ceiling cabinetry of fine wood; walls and ceilings made from redwood; Masonite floors; intricate landscape relationships; sliding panels; and flat roofs with wide eave overhangs.

Ruocco was also an advocate for social change and sound city planning. In 1961, he founded Citizens Coordinate for Century Three (C-3), an organization that advocates for strong city planning. He was also a founding member of the San Diego County Creativity Research Committee and a member of the San Diego City Urban Renewal Commission. In 1974, he was elected to the AIA College of Fellows. Eight of Ruocco's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board:

- HRB #434 - Lloyd Ruocco Design Center, 1945 (established him as a Master Architect in 2000)
- HRB #911 - James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House, 1948
- HRB #1228 - Jackson Johnson III/Lloyd Ruocco & Homer Delawie House, 1961
- HRB # 1271 - Park Garden Apartments/Lloyd Ruocco & Homer Delawie Building, 1960
- HRB #1297 - Robert and Alma Lard/Homer Delawie & Lloyd Ruocco House, 1965
- HRB #1340 - Ruth Smith & Louise Neece /Lloyd Ruocco & Homer Delawie Duplex, 1960
- HRB #1491 - Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House, 1938
- HRB #1494 - Jerome and Joyce Shaw/Lloyd Ruocco House, 1966

Although the historic resource research report identifies established Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco as the property's designer, staff finds insufficient information to support this assertion. The original plans' title block displays the initial "FM" or "FJM" under "DRAWN" or "DRAWN BY" on nearly every sheet, whereas the initials of Lloyd Ruocco are absent. Ruocco's name does appear on the original building permit as the architect. However, Fred Meyer's name also appears next to Ruocco's, but in parenthesis. This information would suggest Fred Meyer's involvement in the preparations of the plan. Since Ruocco's name and initials do not appear on the original plans as the draftsman, the resource cannot be directly attributed to Ruocco. 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 Dr. Paul Libby House located at 7846 Esterel Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1967-2017 under HRB Criterion B, and 1967 under HRB Criterion C.



Alvin Lin
Assistant Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 10/26/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 10/26/2023, to consider the historical designation of the **Dr. Paul Libby House** (owned by Pamela L Fernandez Revocable Trust 05-04-06, 7846 Esterel Drive, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **7846 Esterel Drive, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **346-610-01-00**, further described as LOT 18 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 Dr. Paul Libby House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B as a resource identified with Dr. Paul A. Libby, a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association with a period of significance beginning in 1967, the date of construction, and ending in 2017, the year in which Dr. Libby published his last academic writing. Specifically, Dr. Libby, who lived at the residence from 1967 until his death in 2021, was a prominent researcher in aerodynamics who made foundational contributions to the field of supersonic combustion, cofounded UCSD's Department of Aeronautical and Mechanical Engineering Sciences, and authored over 200 scientific journals and books. The house was also the site of Libby's home office beginning in 1996 where he wrote many of his later publications.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Contemporary style and retains architectural integrity from its 1967 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a strong roof form with deep overhanging eaves, large aluminum and wood framed windows, vertical wood siding, angular massing, sunshades in the form of brise-soleil and pergola, attached garage, floor-to-ceiling window walls, obscured entry, and courtyards. 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 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:

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

DRAFT

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

7846 Esterel Drive, San Diego, CA 92037

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **346-610-01-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**