



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 9, 2014 REPORT NO. HRB-14-007
ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of January 23, 2014
SUBJECT: **ITEM #13 – Dr. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House**
APPLICANT: John and Patricia Ravits represented by Scott A. Moomjian
LOCATION: 1614 Torrance Street, Uptown Community, Council District 3
DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Dr. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House located at 1614 Torrance Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Dr. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House located at 1614 Torrance Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Spanish Eclectic style architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits flat and gable clay tile roofs; overhanging eaves; exposed rafter tails; stucco over wood frame construction; a stucco chimney at the gable end; arched openings, including two large arched windows; and fenestration consisting of wood frame and sash windows, most in 6-lite casement configurations.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Lester Olmstead and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource reflects his early residential work in the Spanish Eclectic style, and is a fine example of his craftsmanship as a builder.

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 is a one and two story single family home located in the residential subdivision of Middletown Addition. The 2007-2012 Draft Uptown Survey has assigned a status code of 5S3, "Appears to be individually eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation."

The historic name of the resource, the Dr. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the owner who constructed the house as their personal residence and the name of the Master Builder who constructed the home.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Scott A. Moomjian which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D; 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 located at 1614 Torrance Street was constructed in 1927 in the Spanish Eclectic style and features one and two story massing with side gable clay tile roofs; overhanging eaves; exposed rafter tails; stucco over wood frame construction; a stucco chimney at the gable end; and a concrete foundation. Set on a sloping lot, the garage is tucked under the house and accessed via two pairs of arched barn doors. A two-part, L-shaped concrete staircase with wrought iron railing leads from the street up to the house. The arched wood entry door with obscured glass and wrought iron is recessed under a stucco arch and is flanked by two large arched window openings. To the left, a tri-partite window with 6 panes each sits below a divided lite upper. To the right sits a very large single pane window with wrought iron accents. Smaller divided lite windows sit to either side of the large picture window. At the upper level, a flat roof projecting bay sits at the north end of the house. Fenestration consists of wood frame and sash windows, most in 6-lite casement configurations. Modifications are minimal and consist of a replacement rear door. In addition, some of the wrought iron is not original, including the railing at the lower stair. Overall, the resource retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, location, setting and feeling.

Hugely popular following the 1915-1916 Panama-California Exposition which revived the romantic ideal of Spanish and Latin American architecture; the Spanish Eclectic style 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, an 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.

The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Spanish Eclectic style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including flat and gable clay tile roofs; overhanging eaves; exposed rafter tails; stucco over wood frame construction; a stucco chimney at the gable end; arched openings, including two large arched windows; and fenestration consisting of wood frame and sash windows, most in 6-lite casement configurations. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property 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.*

Lester Olmstead's experience stems from serving in the United States Army as a Quartermaster Corps service sergeant as well as working as a supervisor of a carpentry shop in San Francisco during WWI. After being discharged in 1918 Olmstead joined C.H. Martinez and Charles W. Brown to form Brown-Olmstead Building Company in 1924. One of his earliest works was a "pacific ready cut model home" built as a Spanish style bungalow. He then bought out Brown in 1928 and created the Olmstead Building Company.

Olmstead is most known in San Diego for his work on the DeWitt C. Mitchell American Legion Hall Post 201, constructed in the Spanish Revival style. The building was designated as HRB Site #525 in 2002, at which time Olmstead was established by the Board as a Master Builder. Other Olmstead buildings include the 1920's Naval Training Center in Point Loma; the Naval Air Field on North Island; the old Lindbergh Field Terminal and Ryan Aeronautical buildings which were located on Pacific Highway; as well as numerous residences in Point Loma, Kensington, Mission Hills, and East San Diego, although few of his buildings still survive. The subject property reflects his early residential work in the Spanish Eclectic style, and is a fine example of his craftsmanship as a builder. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS


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. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House located at 1614 Torrance Street be designated with a period of significance of 1927 under HRB Criterion C as resource that embodies the character defining features of Spanish Eclectic style architecture, and Criterion D as the work of Master Builder Lester Olmstead. 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.



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Interim Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

KS/cw

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 1/23/2014

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 1/23/2014, to consider the historical designation of the **Dr. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House** (owned by John and Patricia Ravits, 1614 Torrance Street, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **1614 Torrance Street, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **451-141-09-00**, further described as BLK 69 LOTS 9 & 10 ST CLSD ADJ ON SW & 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. Charles Brown/Lester Olmstead House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Spanish Eclectic style architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1927 period of significance. Specifically, the resource exhibits flat and gable clay tile roofs; overhanging eaves; exposed rafter tails; stucco over wood frame construction; a stucco chimney at the gable end; arched openings, including two large arched windows; and fenestration consisting of wood frame and sash windows, most in 6-lite casement configurations. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a resource that is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Lester Olmstead and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource reflects his early residential work in the Spanish Eclectic style, and is a fine example of his craftsmanship as a builder. 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: N/A

BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney