



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: June 21, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-037

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of June 28, 2012

SUBJECT: **ITEM #5 – Jacob Bronowski House**

APPLICANT: Douglas A. Roberts Trust represented by Marie Lia

LOCATION: 9438 La Jolla Farms Road, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Jacob Bronowski House located at 9438 La Jolla Farms Road as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Jacob Bronowski House located at 9438 La Jolla Farms Road as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1964-1974 under HRB Criterion B. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource is identified with Jacob Bronowski, a historically significant person, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource served as the only San Diego home of Bronowski, a distinguished mathematician and humanist with a long career in which he researched, lectured, published, produced, served as a founding fellow of the Salk Institute, and wrote and produced his highly acclaimed series and book, *The Ascent of Man*.

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 building is a one story single family home located on a bluff-front property overlooking the ocean in the residential subdivision of La Jolla Farms.

The historic name of the resource, the Jacob Bronowski House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the historically significant individual who owned and resided at the home between 1964 and his death in 1974.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Kathleen Crawford of the Office of Marie Burke Lia, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion B. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion B. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows:

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

Jacob Bronowski was a Polish-born mathematician and humanist and a naturalized British citizen. In 1933 he received his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and began teaching mathematics. In 1942 he entered the service of the British Government to undertake such assignments as the evaluation of the bomb damage and the development of operational research methods. As a scientific deputy to the British Chiefs of Staff Mission to Japan in 1945, he wrote the classical British Report: "The Effects of the Atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki." Dr. Bronowski served as head of projects with UNESCO in 1948 and in 1953 came to the United States as Carnegie Visiting Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In the 1950s, Bronowski began his career as a broadcaster, frequently appearing on the BBC program, *The Brains Trust*. In the early 1960s, he presented a series for BBC television called *Insight*.

In 1960 Bronowski was recruited by Jonas Salk to serve as one of the five "founding fellows" of the Salk Institute, a group of internationally renowned researcher-scholars from a wide variety of disciplines who formed the core of the Institute in its earliest days. Bronowski served as a non-resident fellow until he and his family relocated to La Jolla in 1964. Bronowski was a master at communicating science, which he did extensively in the community and through his internationally acclaimed BBC television series, *The Ascent of Man*, for which he is best known. The series received acclaim for Bronowski's highly informed but eloquently simple analysis, his long unscripted monologues and its extensive location shoots. Over the series' thirteen episodes, Bronowski travelled around the world in order to trace the development of human society through its understanding of science. He developed much of the material for the series through the many conversations he had with scientists at the Salk Institute.

Bronowski published seventeen books during his career, including nine while living at the subject residence. At the time of his death in 1974, he was a Research Professor and Fellow at the Salk Institute and Director of the Council for Biology in Human Affairs there. During this time his field of research was "human specificity", that is, the analysis of those functions which characterize humans and make them unique among animal species. Bronowski had a long and distinguished career, in which he researched, lectured, published and produced. The subject house is the only San Diego home which he owned and resided in while serving as a founding fellow of the Salk Institute and working on his highly acclaimed series and book, *The Ascent of Man*. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the property under HRB Criterion B, with a period of significance extending from his construction of the home in 1964 through his death in 1974.

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 building located at 9438 La Jolla Farms Road is a one story single family home constructed in 1964 in the International style. The building is set back over 100 feet from the street along the bluff edge, with a footprint measuring 75 feet wide to the street and 63 feet deep. The house appears largely square in plan-view, with the exception of a central recess at the rear façade measuring 33 feet wide and 12 feet deep. Overarching features include a flat roof, textured stucco walls over wood frame construction and a concrete foundation. The plain walls, which exhibit no windows along the east, north or south facades, are accented by an orthogonal wood frame consisting of columns at regular spacing that support a continuous horizontal beam at the same height as the building, and of the same width as the columns. The distance from the orthogonal frame to the exterior wall of the house varies, ranging from an applied treatment at most of the north and south elevations, to 12 inches at the remainder of the north and south elevations and the entire east elevation, to 6 feet at the west elevation.

The entry door is set just right of center, recessed 6 feet from the façade plane and leading to an entry corridor 15 feet long flanked on each side by an interior courtyard open to the sky. This is the only opening along the east façade that is visible from the exterior of the building. No openings are present along the north façade. The south façade features only a garage door opening with a wood tilt-up door at the east end of the façade. The west façade looking out to the ocean presents the most distinctive features of the building, which include two projecting bays and the orthogonal frame set 6 feet out from the building face, which frames the terrace. Full-height aluminum framed fixed windows, some with jalousie windows above, are present along the majority of the façade. There are no modifications to the building noted in the report or evident during site inspection.

The theory and character defining features of the International style, a significant world-wide architectural trend of the 1920s and 1930s, is discussed at length in the applicant's report. Although the International style originated in Western Europe, it transcended any national or regional identity because International style architecture made no reference to local vernaculars or traditional building forms. The style quickly migrated to the United States as architects from Europe fled prior to WWII. The emergence of International style architecture in San Diego came later with most examples built after 1935.

There are three founding principles of International style that are expressed in the building's form and aesthetic. First, "Architecture as Volume" – the architecture is most importantly the volume created, rather than the physical forms that enclose the volume. Second, "Concerning Regularity" –honest expression of structure, presenting structural elements in their structural location and configuration in proportion to the forces acting upon them without finishes or stylistic elements, is the most common area where regularity is needed. Third, "Avoidance of Applied Decoration" – the language of the style must transcend local application of styles and decoration.

The subject building reflects some of these principles to varying degrees, but not all principles and not in a manner reflective of good International style design. This is discussed in detail in the applicant's report. With minimal use of glass beyond the west façade, and the extensive use of

stucco-covered frame walls, there is little direct expression of the structure itself. The exterior orthogonal frame is non-structural in nature and serves purely as applied ornament on an otherwise plain façade, which is entirely inconsistent with one of the founding principles of the style.

In addition to the principles discussed above, the San Diego Modernism Context Statement identifies the primary and secondary character defining features of the International style. Primary features include flat roofs; lack of applied ornament; horizontal bands of flush windows; and asymmetrical facades. The building does feature a flat roof. As discussed above, the orthogonal frame serves only as applied ornament, and so the building does not possess this feature. While one could consider the full-height windows at the west façade a horizontal band of flush windows, this feature is present only on one façade, and the horizontality is diluted by the full height of the windows. Lastly, while the entry door is technically off-center, it appears largely symmetrical, as do the north and west facades. In regard to secondary character defining features, the house does possess square corners, stucco and corner windows (along the west façade), but does not feature steel casement windows.

As the subject building lacks significant character defining features of the International style and does not embody all of the founding principles of the style that are critical to a successful and significant expression of the style, staff does not recommend 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.

Russell Forester began his architectural career in the mid-1940s as a draftsman in the Army Corps of Engineers, where he worked for Lloyd Ruocco. In 1948, Mr. Forester opened his own establishment as a freelance architectural designer. In 1950, Mr. Forester was inspired by Lloyd Ruocco to begin his formal study of architecture at the Institute of Design in Chicago, where he was mentored by Mies Van Der Rohe. Forester opened his first office at 633 Pearl Street at the time his Rushville Street home was chosen by a distinguished jury as one of the top residences in the United States for *Progressive Architecture* magazine. Forester's second home on Hillside Drive was displayed in an international architecture exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1952. By the time he obtained his architectural license in 1960, Forester had already completed a wealth of modernist structures. Known for not compromising his designs for clients, he was among the first wave of practicing architects to push Mies Van Der Rohe's brand of steel & glass modernism on commercial and residential clients across San Diego. From his La Jolla practice Forester is credited with many high profile commissions for individuals such as Bob Peterson, for whom he designed the first Jack-in-the-Box.

In 1976, Forester's lifelong passion for art became his full-time career, and he became a distinguished painter and sculptor in Europe and the United States. Russell Forester's career melding art and architecture was honored by his unusual FAIA recognition. Rather than his career of progressive building designs being honored, he was recognized by his AIA colleagues for his contribution to art and architecture aesthetics. His architectural designs varied in material and style over the decades while always retaining central design principles – the problems the client needed solving; and how the whole project was vastly more than the sum of its parts. Forester was established as a Master Architect in 2002 with the designation of HRB Site #528, a

Custom Ranch home. Since then, an additional three sites have been designated reflecting his work in the Organic Geometric, International and Post-and-Beam styles.

The HRB Designation Criteria Guidelines require that a resource eligible under Criterion D must express a particular phase in the development of a master's career, an aspect of his/her work, or a particular idea or theme in the craft. Not all examples of a Master's work are eligible for designation under Criterion D. The applicant's report provides a detailed discussion of the building within the context of Forester's overall body of work, and finds that the house is not representative of his notable work. The International style and most of Forester's work provide a sense of structural clarity, in which the various functioning structural elements do more – they are composed to define interior and exterior spaces, and they provide an aesthetic for the detailing and the overall composition of the structure. While other examples of Forester's work, including 800 Prospect Street (HRB Site #992) and 2323 Camino Del Oro provide this structural clarity and embody the International style; the subject building, with its highly limited expression of the structure and use of applied ornament, does not. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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 Jacob Bronowski House located at 9438 La Jolla Farms Road be designated with a period of significance of 1964-1974 under HRB Criterion B for its association with Bronowski, a distinguished mathematician and humanist with a long career in which he researched, lectured, published, produced, served as a founding fellow of the Salk Institute, and wrote and produced his highly acclaimed series and book, *The Ascent of Man*. 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
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

KS/cw

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 6/28/2012

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 6/28/2012, to consider the historical designation of the **Jacob Bronowski House** located at **9438 La Jolla Farms Road, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **342-091-04-00**, further described as LOT 24 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 Jacob Bronowski House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B as a resource associated with historically significant individual Jacob Bronowski between the years 1964 and 1974 and retains associative integrity to that period of significance. Specifically, the resource served as the only San Diego home of Bronowski, a distinguished mathematician and humanist with a long career in which he researched, lectured, published, produced, served as a founding fellow of the Salk Institute, and wrote and produced his highly acclaimed series and book, *The Ascent of Man*. 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: _____
KEITH BAUERLE
Deputy City Attorney