



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: February 12, 2009 REPORT NO. HRB-09-014

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of February 26, 2009

SUBJECT: **ITEM #11 – Baron X. Kouch and Norma Meyer Schuh Spec House #2**

APPLICANT: Gerard and Jennifer Widmer, owners; represented by Legacy 106

LOCATION: 4643 El Cerrito Drive, College Community, Council District 7

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Baron X. Kouch and Norma Meyer Schuh Spec House #2 located at 4643 El Cerrito Drive as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Baron X. Kouch and Norma Meyer Schuh Spec House #2 located at 4643 El Cerrito Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of c. 1931 under HRB Criterion C. 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 c. 1931 period of significance.



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## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board at the owner's request to have the site designated as a historical resource. The house is a two story Spanish Eclectic style home built c. 1931 by Baron X. Kouch and Norma Meyer Schuh as a speculation house in the residential subdivision of El Cerrito Heights in the College community. The house was largely completed in October 1931; however, financing issues may have delayed completion of the house until 1932 or even possibly 1933. Without a definite date of completion, staff has identified the date of construction and period of significance as circa (c.) 1931.

The historic name of the resource, the Baron X. Kouch and Norma Meyer Schuh Spec House #2, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and includes the names of Baron X. Kouch and Norma Beyer Schuh, who worked together and constructed the house as a speculation house. This is the second speculation house built by Baron X. Kouch and Norma Beyer Schuh to be considered by the Board. The first, located at 3519 Dove Court, was designated by the Board in September 2008.

## ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Legacy 106, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B and C. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion C, but not HRB Criterion B, as follows:

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

The applicant's report states that the house at 4643 El Cerrito Drive is significant under HRB Criterion B for its association with Roderick "Dick" Hortie, who owned and lived in the house from 1939-1959. Hortie was a contractor who worked largely in infrastructure construction and worked on Highway 80, 101 and 163. He served as a superintendent of construction on at least several of these projects. In addition to infrastructure, Hortie worked for military base construction during World War II, including Oxnard Naval Base at Port Hueneme, Barstow Marine Corps Base, and portions of NTC. Following the War he worked on custom designed homes in Kearny Mesa and Clairemont as well as commercial projects such as the Willy's Jeep dealership on El Cajon Boulevard and a commercial building on Home Avenue. Hortie served as the president of the San Diego Chapter of Associated General Contractors in 1958 and 1962 and was bestowed Honorary Life Member in 1964. Although clearly active in local construction and large construction projects, there is no evidence that Hortie had any significant influence on those projects in anyway. At this time there is insufficient evidence to support the contention that Hortie is a historically significant individual. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion B.

*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 resource at 4643 El Cerrito Drive is a one and two story house built c. 1931 in the Spanish Eclectic style and features hipped and gable clay tile roofs; slightly overhanging eaves; exposed

rafter tails; generally smooth stucco walls; and a concrete foundation. The first floor consists of a single story front gable bay which projects forward of the main house and contains a large single pane picture window flanked by decorative stucco buttresses and a small stucco planter below. To the left is a smaller, more steeply pitched front gable with three clay pipe vents over a small arched opening which provides a view of the entry door. A long, narrow side gable intersects with the smaller front gable and extends across the front façade of the house and over a porte cochere on the north side of the house. The porte cochere and covered walkway leading to the front door are supported by thick stucco columns. A pair of French doors, used for ventilation rather than access, is located behind wrought iron security bars adjacent to the entryway. At the second floor, a hipped roof bay containing a recessed balcony accented by a wood lintel with corbels and a distinctive low sculpted stucco wall projects forward over the entryway below. To the left of the balcony is a small single pane window set in a deep recess; and to the right is a long narrow single pane window with a decorative wrought iron grill. To the right of and set back from the hipped roof bay is a side gable bay over the front gable bay below. The side gable bay features two 1-over-1 double hung aluminum frame and sash windows, which replaced the original 2-lite wood casement windows.

A historic photograph from 1945 provided in the report illustrates that the house is largely intact, with a few exceptions. A small, decorative tile-roofed feature which resembles a chimney top can barely be seen behind the peak of the hipped roof, and is no longer present. This feature can also be found on the other Kouch-built home on Dove Court. The date of removal is unknown, and the current owner plans on reconstructing this element in the future. Less clear is the original appearance of the wall on either side of the upper balcony. A recess or opening of some type is clearly visible to the left, but it is not known whether this was in fact a window as seen today, or whether it was simply a recess or niche in the stucco. The wall to the right of the balcony does not appear to show any window; however, the photo is very whitewashed and detail is lost. The consultant's report speculates that the windows may have been painted white. Staff feels that it is more likely that either the photo quality is too poor to show the detail, or that one or more of the windows were added at a later date. However, if these windows were in fact added at a later date, staff's position is that the addition of these rather small windows does not adversely impact the resource to any great extent. Finally, the photo does not clearly show the circular detail above the picture window at the ground floor; but again, staff feels that in all likelihood the photo quality is simply too poor to show this detail.

A nearly wholesale replacement of the original wood frame and sash windows with aluminum frame and sash windows has been largely reversed by the current owner, who has commissioned custom wood frame and sash window replacements under the guidance of their historic consultant. A few restorations remain, including the two double-hung windows on the upper level of the main façade (the new wood windows have been purchased and await installation), and a handful of windows along the north and east elevations, which are not readily visible to the public. Other modifications include the enclosure of a balcony at the rear of the house; the installation of a small tile mural adjacent to the entry; replacement of the original entry door with a door somewhat in keeping with the style of the house; and the installation of a wrought iron grill over the French doors along the entryway. A detached accessory structure was built at the rear of the property in 1976 and will not be included in the designation. With the exception of the window replacements, the modifications do not significantly impair the integrity of the

resource. The restoration of the house through the reconstruction of the wood frame and sash windows has significantly improved the architectural integrity of the building.

Therefore, staff recommends designation of the house at 4643 El Cerrito under HRB Criterion C as a very good example of Spanish Eclectic architecture retaining a good degree of integrity from its c. 1931 period of significance.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

If the two small windows on the upper level of the main façade have not been replaced with the wood frame and sash windows by the time a Mills Act agreement is applied for, the replacement of these windows will be incorporated as a condition of the agreement. In addition, any future Mills Act agreement will be conditioned to require replacement of the remaining metal frame and sash windows with wood; and the reconstruction of the small, decorative tile-roofed feature seen in the historic photograph which resembles a chimney top. Additional 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 Baron X. Kouch and Norma Meyer Schuh Spec House #2 located at 4643 El Cerrito Drive be designated under HRB HRB Criterion C as a very good example of Spanish Eclectic architecture retaining a good degree of integrity from its c. 1931 period of significance. The detached accessory structure built in 1976 shall be excluded from the designation. 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.



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Attachment(s):           Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover