



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 10, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-028

HEARING DATE: July 24, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM #2 – 7747 Whitefield Place**

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

APPLICANT: Michael & Lisa Miller; represented by BFS Environmental Services

LOCATION: 7747 Whitefield Place, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 350-252-15-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the 7747 Whitefield Place as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 7747 Whitefield Place under any adopted HRB Criteria.

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

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on

certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 7747 Whitefield Place is a two-story, single-family residential building with a basement, constructed in 1979 in the La Jolla Community Planning Area. Other buildings and structures present on the site include a detached shed. The property is located near the end of a cul-de-sac in a neighborhood of similarly scaled residences. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1979, the property has been modified as follows: the garage door was replaced c. 2019-2024, the unpainted exterior wood shingle siding was painted c. 2019-2024, and a detached shed was constructed in the rear yard c. 2022.

A Historical Resource Research Report (HRRR) was prepared by BFS Environmental Services, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff disagrees and finds that the building is not eligible under any HRB Criteria. 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 property was designed by architect James Rodney Youngson in 1979. This single-family home is sited on a narrow lot perpendicular to the street. The lot slopes downward toward the east. The property has a principal flat roof with generally limited eave overhang, and the roof is elaborated with different height parapets, creating corners that resemble crenelation or pilasters. The south facade contains a covered and open patio, enclosed on all sides by the subject property itself and the neighboring house. An attached garage is placed prominently at the front elevation, facing the street. The primary entry is obscured from the street, and it is accessible from the north elevation through a gate; it is recessed, covered by a solid roof projection and a lean-to skylight above. A secondary entry into the garage is located on the opposite façade, along the south elevation. The building has asymmetrical geometry, and building facades feature various recessions, steps, and right-angle turns. The exterior of the building is clad in multi-width wood shake shingles throughout, and walls are generally unornamented. Brick pavers cover portions of the front, north, and south yard grounds.

When viewed from the street, the second floor is deeply set back from the ground floor façade. Its massing is rectilinear but irregular, forming a series of cascading facades. Window and door openings are limited, and the building facades are mostly solid. However, four full-height glass doors are located at the southern patio facades, opening out to the covered patio. Above the covered patio, a prominent, steeply pitched metal roof is present. Two circular windows are present on the property at the east and north facades. At the east façade, facing the rear yard, the building features a concrete masonry chimney, a projecting 2nd-floor balcony with full-height sliding glass doors, and a living room with a large floor-to-ceiling corner window set.

The HRRR concludes that the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Organic Geometric style. Staff disagrees, finding that although the property most closely resembles the Organic Geometric Style, it lacks primary character-defining features associated with that style, and therefore is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion C.

Organic Geometric architecture is a philosophy of design that promotes a harmonious relationship between buildings and nature. Organic Geometric designers used natural building materials such as wood and stone. Like their Post and Beam Modern contemporaries, Organic Geometric architects also used glass to minimize the separation between the interior and the exterior and encourage indoor/outdoor living. Buildings were carefully sited to take advantage of views and other site features. Designs emphasize rectilinear geometry, asymmetrical facades, unusual rooflines, and angular shapes. According to the [2007 San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement](#), primary character-defining features of the Organic Geometric style are exposed structure and materials, polygon design motifs including squares and diamonds, and natural materials. Secondary features are sharp angular massing, asymmetrical facades, complex roof forms, and site-specific design.

Out of the three primary character-defining features, the property only possesses one – “natural materials.” While the HRRR states that the property possesses the feature “exposed structure and materials” because of an exposed header beam at the north façade, staff finds that this expression is limited in scope, and the property does not readily reveal an exposed structure anywhere else. Additionally, all the original wood shake shingles were painted, which altered the exposed wood texture and color. Therefore, staff finds that the property does not retain this primary character-defining feature.

The HRRR states that the property possesses the primary character-defining feature “square, diamond, and polygon design motifs” through its “square windows” and “square massing.” Staff disagrees with this analysis, finding that the HRRR may have conflated the building’s massing with design motif. In the context of Organic Geometric architecture, polygonal design motifs refer to the thematic or repeated use of polygonal patterns, often through square, diamond, or other geometric shapes, visible on the exterior of the building. The property’s boxy appearance, formed by sharp 90-degree wall returns and cascading facades, is in fact a characterization of its rectilinear form and massing, not “polygon design motifs.” Additionally, the dimensions of each of the rectilinear walls are irregular and inconsistent, and a clear pattern or repeated geometry is not legible. Therefore, staff finds that the property does not possess this primary character-defining feature.

Out of the four secondary character-defining features, the property possesses three: “sharp angular massing,” “asymmetrical facades,” and “complex roof forms.” While the report determines that the property features a “site-specific design” defined by its building form, the orientation of windows, and room placement, staff disagrees. In the context of Organic Geometric architecture, a site-specific design is typically expressed through the careful siting of the property to take advantage of views and other site features, and often boasts large balconies. The subject property, in contrast, is restrained in its use of glazed openings or balconies on the north, west and east elevations where views to the Pacific Ocean are opportune. The only balcony is small and is located at the northeast corner of the house; the property’s large floor-to-ceiling glazing is also generally confined to the east facade, providing limited views to the northeast. The property possesses a defined south elevation patio. The private and inward design of the covered and open patio directly contradicts the Organic Geometric philosophy to emphasize and take advantage of site-specific views. Therefore, staff finds

that the property exhibits only one of three primary character-defining features and three of four secondary character-defining features of the Organic Geometric style, and therefore does not embody the distinctive characteristics of the style.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Organic Geometric style. Although staff's position is that the building was never a resource that embodied the distinctive characteristics of the Organic Geometric style as required under Criterion C, the painting of exterior shake shingles is a significant impairment of the property's design and material integrity under the proposed Organic Geometric style, because it muted the exposed natural wood texture and altered its color. The [2007 San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement](#) states that eligible Organic Geometric resources should retain the majority of their character defining features, although some impact or loss to character defining features may be acceptable when comparative analysis demonstrates that the resource is a rare example of the type or that the building retains a relatively high degree of integrity compared to other extant examples. The HRRR provides a comparative analysis between the subject property and 14 Organic Geometric residences on the City's Historic Resource Register, finding that the subject property is the "only example of a post-modern Organic Geometric-style residence and the only Organic Geometric-style residence that post-dates the Modernism Context Statement's period of significance for the style, representing the transitional period between modern and post-modern architecture in San Diego." Staff disagrees, finding that this comparative analysis uses a limited, small sample size of Organic Geometric examples, which is not a representative evaluation of Organic Geometric properties in San Diego. Without a complete survey of Organic Geometric properties in the City, it cannot be established that the subject property is a "rare example of the type." The subject property does not retain "a relatively high degree of integrity compared to other extant examples," either. Other extant Organic Geometric examples, such as 5330 Le Barron Road (HRB #1198), noted in the comparative analysis, have no notable alterations and retain a high degree of integrity. Overall, the HRRR fails to demonstrate that the painting of exterior wood shingles is an acceptable loss of a character defining feature. In conclusion, the property does not embody the distinctive characteristics of the Organic Geometric style and does not retain critical aspects of integrity. Therefore, 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.

The property was designed by local architect James Rodney Youngson. In 1961, Youngson graduated from the University of Southern California School of Architecture, obtaining a bachelor's degree in architecture. He moved to San Diego in 1962. After working alongside architects Fred Livingstone and Henry Hester (established Master Architect), Youngson founded his own architectural and interior design firm. By 1965, Youngson was designing condominium buildings. In 1968, he won a San Diego AIA honor award for his design of 7722 Ludington Place, a Contemporary home. In 1969, Youngson's remodel and reconstruction of a 1913 residence located at 7762 Lookout Drive won another Honor Award from the San Diego AIA Chapter. This same year, he designed two large multifamily residential projects – the Plaza and the Collwood Villas – both in the Mediterranean style. Youngson worked alongside other architects, partnering with local architect Stanley Livingston to design a medical building in 1971 in the Contemporary style. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, Youngson designed multi-family residential projects in San Diego in the Contemporary,

Mediterranean, and Organic Geometric styles. From the 1970s through the 1990s, he continued to design single-family residences in various styles. His last known work was in 1994 for a residence in La Jolla with Streamline Moderne characteristics. During his career, he worked for clients in southern California, Mexico, Fiji, Hawaii, Idaho, and France. His designs included Organic Geometric, Contemporary, Custom Ranch, Mediterranean, and Spanish (Neo-eclectic). Youngson's designs were featured in publications including the *Architectural Digest*, *Luxe*, *Veranda*, *Sunset Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times*. In 2019, the San Diego AIA awarded James Rodney Youngson the Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Architecture, the highest award from the local chapter. Placed in context, the subject residence was designed halfway through his overall career.

According to the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), a property eligible under HRB Criterion D must be representative of the notable work of the Master, as demonstrated in the nomination. The work of a Master may be established through a number of considerations. The HRRR demonstrates that the subject property meets certain considerations to be eligible as a Master Architect, i.e., publication of his works in popular press, and acknowledgement by design peers through formal awards and citations. San Diego AIA's various Honor Awards and its Lifetime Achievement Award speak most strongly to James Rodney Youngson's significance as an architect.

In regard to Criterion D, the HRRR concludes, "Youngson is being proposed as a master architect due to an extensive body of work in San Diego from the 1960s until the 1990s that exhibits key features of the Organic Geometric, Contemporary, and Mediterranean styles, as can be seen above...The 7747 Whitefield Place residence is a notable example of Youngson's work as it is his last known Organic Geometric project in San Diego and is a refined version of his work in the Organic Geometric style...Because the residence retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, it is eligible for designation under City of San Diego HRB Criterion D as a notable example of the work of proposed City of San Diego Master Architect James Rodney Youngson."

However, as described in the Criterion C analysis above, the subject property does not readily embody any specific architectural style, and it does not possess critical features of the Organic Geometric Style when evaluated under the [2007 San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement](#). Staff therefore disagrees with the conclusion of the HRRR that the property is "a notable example of Youngson's work as it is his last known Organic Geometric project in San Diego and is a refined version of his work in the Organic Geometric style." Furthermore, staff disagrees with the conclusion of the HRRR that the building retains integrity of design, materials, feeling and association. The painting of exterior shingles significantly impaired the building's original unfinished texture and color, which was a critical character defining feature of the building. Please see Attachment 2 for a comparison of the subject property's current and historical building exterior.

In conclusion, although James Rodney Youngson meets some of the aspects to be established as Master Architect, the subject property does not exhibit key characteristics of Organic Geometric Architecture and does not retain integrity due to alteration of a primary character defining feature. As such, the property does not reflect the potentially notable work of James Rodney Youngson. Therefore, staff does not recommend establishing Youngson as a Master Architect at this time and does not recommend designation of the subject property 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 property located at 7747 Whitefield Place not be designated under any HRB Criteria.



Alvin Lin
Associate Planner
City Planning Department



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

AL/ss

Attachment(s):

1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover
2. 7747 Whitefield Place Historical and Current Photos

Attachment 2

7747 Whitefield Place Historical and Current Photos

March 2019 Condition (via Google Street View)



March 2025 Condition (Staff photo)

