



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: October 15, 2020 REPORT NO. HRB-20-051

HEARING DATE: October 29, 2020

SUBJECT: **ITEM #10 – Helen Copley/Henry Hester House**

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

APPLICANT: Rohm Family Trust represented by Johnson & Johnson

LOCATION: 7932 Prospect Place, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 350-122-16-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Helen Copley/Henry Hester House located at 7932 Prospect Place as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Helen Copley/Henry Hester House located at 7932 Prospect Place as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1987 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 the Mansard style with Postmodern influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1987 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features standing-seam metal mansard roofs; arched, "through-the-cornice" windows; a setback entryway; and reinterpretations of traditional design elements through distortions in proportions and scale.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Henry Hester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a notable example of Hester's work because it illustrates his willingness late in his career to break from his modernist mode of design to accommodate an important client.

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 in the middle of a block in the La Jolla Park subdivision of the La Jolla Community. The property slopes down to the northeast, towards the front of the parcel.

The historic name of the resource, the Helen Copley/Henry Hester House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Helen Copley, who constructed the house as a guest house and the name of Henry Hester, a Master Architect.

The subject resource was built in 1987, making it 33 years old. While 45 years of age is used as the threshold for the potential historic resource review laid out in SDMC Section 143.0212, there is no required minimum age for a resource to be designated by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. A resource simply needs to have significance under one or more of the HRB Criteria for designation. The "Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria" states that "the significance of a historic property can be judged and explained only when it is evaluated within its historic context." In general, as more time passes after a resource's date of construction or period of significance, our understanding of its historic context improves, making it more likely that a resource can be adequately evaluated under the HRB Criteria. However, the age at which a resource can be adequately evaluated in its historic context can vary between resources. Staff finds that the subject resource can be sufficiently evaluated in its historic context as an example of recognized architectural styles and in relation to the entire body of work of Henry Hester, an established master architect.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Johnson & Johnson Architecture, 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 resource was constructed in 1987 as a single-family residence. The house is clad in brick veneer and reddish-brown stucco and features two standing-seam copper mansard roofs. One of the mansard roofs encircles the entirety of the highest section of the house. The second mansard roof sits lower and spans a narrow bumpout that wraps around part of the northwest (side) and southwest (rear) elevations. The second mansard roof is about twice the height of the first one, spanning the height of the house's upper story. It is intersected by two tall, arched "through-the-cornice" windows. The house's doors and windows are wood and multi-lite. Many of them are arranged in groups of two or three.

The house is split-level, standing three stories tall at the front and two stories at the back. The front façade faces northeast towards the street and features two garages at the ground floor, with two floors of living space above. These upper floors are each fronted by a balcony. The balconies are edged by wrought iron railings that curve outwards at the base of each rail. Three symmetrically arranged stucco columns extend from the ground to support the balconies and form the corner posts of the railings. The columns are notched in with a right angle at each corner, creating additional vertical lines that emphasize the posts' verticality. Identical columns are used to support the rear balcony and the frontmost end of the lower, larger mansard roof, between the chimney and the main entrance. The main entrance of the house is positioned about halfway back on the northwest side elevation.

The building has undergone few alterations since its 1987 date of construction. An integrated porch at the south (rear) corner of the house was enclosed with aluminum windows at an unknown date. Additionally, there are some discrepancies between Hester's elevation drawings plans and the building's existing conditions: in Hester's drawings, the garage doors are different, the windows and doors are shown as single-light, there is no spiral

staircase leading from the rear balcony to the roof, the balcony railings are shown as straight rather than curved, and globe lights are shown at the top of each balcony column. The enclosure of the porch and the discrepancies with the drawings do not impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to Criterion C.

According to Virginia McAlester in *A Field Guide to American Houses* (2015), the Mansard style was most popular from about 1940 to 1985. The style is primarily characterized by a mansard roof, often clad in composition shingles, wood shingles, or standing-seam metal. Examples of the Mansard style frequently feature windows in the lower slope of the mansard, segmental or rounded arches over entrances, windows or dormers, brick veneer exteriors, and quoins. Later examples (from c. 1975 onwards) typically have "through-the-cornice" windows. Houses built in this style are typically one story with a second story contained in the mansard roof. Most examples are asymmetrical, with the entrance not located on the frontmost wall plane. The style also sometimes features wall chimneys, and a projecting ledge at the base of the mansard. Front doors are typically paired wood doors and sometimes feature curvilinear panels as well as tall arched surrounds that extend through the mansard's cornice.

As a late example of the Mansard style, the subject resource was built in the Postmodern era and reflects Postmodern influences. The Postmodern style became popular in the 1960s. It developed as a reaction to Modernist styles, which advocates of Postmodernism considered to be sterile and even boring due to their lack of ornament. Postmodernism is characterized by reinterpretations of more traditional design elements, such as pediments, columns, archways, and gables. These reinterpretations are often achieved through distortion of proportions and scale, simplification, and the use of modern materials.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Mansard style with Postmodern influences by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including standing-seam metal mansard roofs; arched, "through-the-cornice" windows; a setback entryway; and reinterpretations of traditional design elements through distortions in proportions and scale. 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.

Henry Hartwell Hester was born in Oklahoma in 1925. He graduated from USC in 1947 with a bachelor's degree in architecture. After graduation, he moved to La Jolla. Some of his early mentors were William F. Cody and Lloyd Ruocco. Over the course of his career, he formed partnerships with several other architects, including Cody, Ronald K. Davis, Robert E. Jones and Fred Liebhardt.

Hester designed mostly custom single-family houses and commercial structures. His modernist architectural designs won local and national AIA awards. In 1958, he was commissioned to design a luxury apartment building at 3200 6th Avenue, overlooking Balboa Park. Hester created an airy and free-flowing atmosphere with floor-to-ceiling doors and windows to take advantage of the views. Each of the apartment floor plans was unique. Distinguishable block-like balconies functioned like outside rooms, enhancing privacy from neighboring tenants. The apartment building was one of the most acclaimed luxury apartment buildings of its day: it was showcased in a 1960 edition of *San Diego Magazine* and won an AIA Award of Merit. The HRB's designation of this apartment building (the Colonel Irving Salomon/Henry Hester Apartments, HRB #801) established Hester as a Master Architect in 2007. One other of his works, the Martin and Enid Gleich/Henry Hester House (HRB #1143), has been designated as a historical resource by the HRB.

Architectural photographer Julius Shulman observed that Hester's career peaked during "a good period of architecture when San Diego was just beginning to express itself in favor of modernism... in the early years...the International Style was not accepted... Hester and others warmed up the work quite a bit and edited it in a way that clients would accept."

In the mid-1970s, Hester entered semi-retirement by limiting his work to custom residential projects. Helen Copley asked him to design the subject resource in 1986. According to the Historical Resources Research Report, Hester broke from his typical modernist design mode to accommodate Copley's desire for more traditional design elements. The subject resource is his last known work and his only Postmodern Mansard design.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Henry Hester's original design, intent and aesthetic. It is a notable example of Hester's work because it illustrates his willingness late in his career to break from his modernist mode of design to accommodate an important client. Therefore, staff recommends 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 Helen Copley/Henry Hester House located at 7932 Prospect Place be designated with a period of significance of 1987 under HRB Criteria C as a good example of the Mansard style with Postmodern influences and D for its association with Master Architect Henry Hester.



Gemma Tierney
Associate Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner
Development Services Department

GT/ss

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Eberhard H. Rohm dated September 15, 2020
3. Letter from Lorraine Hester Dyson, undated
4. Letter from La Jolla Historical Society dated September 3, 2020
5. Letter from Save Our Heritage Organization dated October 1, 2020
6. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 10/29/2020

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 10/29/2020, to consider the historical designation of the Helen Copley/Henry Hester House (owned by Rohm Family Trust 09-03-14, 7932 Prospect Place, La Jolla, CA 92037) located at **7932 Prosepct Place, La Jolla, CA 92037**, APN: **350-122-16-00**, further described as PAR 2 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 Helen Copley/Henry Hester House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Mansard style with Postmodern influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1987 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features standing-seam metal mansard roofs; arched, "through-the-cornice" windows; a setback entryway; and reinterpretations of traditional design elements through distortions in proportions and scale. 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 notable work of Master Architect Henry Hester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a notable example of Hester's work because it illustrates his willingness late in his career to break from his modernist mode of design to accommodate an important client. 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:

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney