



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 8, 2021 REPORT NO. HRB-21-026

HEARING DATE: April 22, 2021

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1**

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

APPLICANT: Clark and Janice Smith; represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 3551 Garrison Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2  
APN 530-660-0800

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1 located at 3551 Garrison Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1 located at 3551 Garrison Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1955 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the 1957 bedroom and 1976 garage additions. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Custom Ranch style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1955 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a single-story massing with a horizontal emphasis, sprawling floor plan, low-pitched roof with deep eaves, prominent brick chimney, attached garage and custom designed sidelites at the primary entry.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of proposed Master Architect Richard George Wheeler, a prominent and accomplished architect responsible for designing many of the City's significant modern buildings, and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is significant as a residential example of Wheeler's work in the Custom Ranch style during the early phase of his career.

## 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 consists of a one-story, single family residence with attached garage located in the Peninsula community.

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

The historic name of the resource, the Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of the company owned by Ralph Monsees and Leonard Bell, who constructed the house as a speculation house and the name of Richard Wheeler, a proposed Master Architect.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Landmark Historic Preservation, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion 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 is a one-story, single family residence constructed in 1955 and designed in the Custom Ranch style by proposed Master Architect Richard Wheeler. The resource sits at the top of a hilly lot and is accessed by a steep driveway. The house exhibits a wide street façade with a projecting bay at the center, large expanses of windows and a prominent brick chimney. Exterior cladding includes stucco and vertical siding and the resource features a low-pitched roof with a wide eave overhang. Entrance to the house is gained through a long, covered breezeway on the south façade. The brass covered front door is flanked by sidelights that display a geometric pattern. Fenestration includes fixed and sliding wood and steel windows as well as large sliding glass doors.

Several modifications have been made to the property since its 1955 date of construction. In 1957, a bedroom addition was constructed at the rear of the house. The plans for this addition do not include an architect and it cannot be confirmed that Wheeler was involved. A five-foot extension was added to the rear of the garage in 1976. In 2005, the wood roof was replaced with composite shingle. Additionally, the current property owners recently removed a wooden deck over the original concrete patio and reconstructed the low site wall at the front of the house. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to Criterion C.

The Custom Ranch style of architecture was popular between 1950 and 1975 and is differentiated from Tract Ranch homes because they were typically custom-designed with a specific client in mind. The Ranch style became the era's most prevalent type of residential construction in San Diego. Custom Ranch homes are generally more lavish than their tract counterparts, but like Tract Ranch housing, materials and detailing are generally traditional. Primary character defining features

include horizontal massing, wide to the street; usually single story; custom details; and prominent low-sloped gabled or hipped roofs with deep overhangs. Secondary character defining features include a sprawling floor plan frequently "L" or "U" shaped around a central courtyard; large attached carports or garages; and expensive building materials such as wood shingle roofing, wood siding, brick, stone, and adobe which are usually much more generous in materials and craftsmanship than tract homes.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Custom Ranch style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a single-story massing with a horizontal emphasis, sprawling floor plan, low-pitched roof with deep eaves, prominent brick chimney, attached garage and custom designed sidelites at the primary entry. 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.*

Richard George Wheeler, the son of Master Architect William Henry Wheeler, was born on June 30, 1917. Following his graduation from San Diego High School in 1935, Wheeler attended San Diego State University (SDSU) for three years before transferring to UC Berkeley where he received a degree in architecture in 1941.

Only months after his graduation, Pearl Harbor was attacked and the US entered World War II. Wheeler applied for a commission in the Navy, which was granted in 1942. After the war, Wheeler returned to work for his father at Wheeler & McGowan, Architects and Engineers. In 1947, he received his architectural license and left Wheeler & McGowan to open his own firm.

The office started out with primarily residential commissions, but quickly diversified to include commercial and medical buildings. At his young firm Wheeler mentored locally acclaimed architects Tom Tucker, Hal Sadler, Ed Bennett, Gayne Wimer and Roger Matthews. In the late 1950s, the firm changed its name to Richard G. Wheeler, AIA, & Associates, A Division of Charles Luckman Associates (later the Luckman connection was dropped). The firm grew to eventually employ forty architects, engineers and support staff. Wheeler retired in January of 1989 and passed away in May of the next year. At retirement, Wheeler estimated that his firm designed approximately 400 buildings in his 41 years of practice.

There are currently no Richard Wheeler designed buildings on the San Diego Register; however, many of the City's most recognized modern structures can be attributed to him. These buildings include:

- Mr. and Mrs. Dean Hansen Residence, 2455 Poinsettia Drive (1950)
- William and Ruth Dick Residence, 2354 Pine Street (1952)
- The Flame Restaurant, 3780 Park Boulevard (1954)
- Horizon House/ RGW Associates Office Building/ Rosecrans Professional Building, 3276 Rosecrans Street (1958)
- The Gross Center, 3045 Roscrans Street (1959)
- Shelter Island Restaurant/ Hotel, 2051 Shelter Island Drive (1960)
- San Diego Gas & Electric Company, 101 Ash Street (1968)

- Humanities and Social Science Building, UCSD John Muir College (1969)
- The Westgate Plaza Hotel, 1055 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (1970)

The subject resource was designed in 1955 by Richard George Wheeler in the Custom Ranch style. The house is representative of Wheeler's custom residential buildings designed during the early phase of his career. His firm would later go on to design significant commercial and institutional buildings throughout San Diego.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Wheeler's original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as a residential example of Wheeler's work in the Custom Ranch style during the early phase of his career. Therefore, staff recommends the establishment of Richard Wheeler as a Master Architect, and the 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 Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1 located at 3551 Garrison Street be designated with a period of significance of 1955 under HRB Criteria C as a good example of the Custom Ranch style and Criteria D as a notable work of proposed master architect Richard George Wheeler. The designation excludes the 1957 bedroom and 1976 garage additions.



Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
Development Services Department

SS/ss

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 4/22/2021

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 4/22/2021, to consider the historical designation of the Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1 (owned by Smith 1999 Family Trust, PO Box 81466, San Diego, CA 92138) located at **3551 Garrison Street, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **530-660-08-00**, further described as LOT 78 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 Guild Company/ Richard Wheeler Spec House #1 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 Custom Ranch style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1955 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a single-story massing with a horizontal emphasis, sprawling floor plan, low-pitched roof with deep eaves, prominent brick chimney, attached garage and custom designed sidelites at the primary entry. 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 proposed Master Architect Richard George Wheeler, a prominent and accomplished architect responsible for designing many of the City's significant modern buildings, and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is significant as a residential example of Wheeler's work in the Custom Ranch style during the early phase of his career. 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 designation shall exclude the 1957 bedroom and 1976 garage additions.

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