



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 8, 2021 REPORT NO. HRB-21-044

HEARING DATE: July 22, 2021

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – 1773 Torrance Street**

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

APPLICANT: Chan Family Trust represented by Landmark Historic Preservation

LOCATION: 1773 Torrance Street, Uptown Community, Council District 3  
APN 451-111-0200

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of 1773 Torrance Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 1773 Torrance Street 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 subject property is located in the Mission Hills community on a narrow hillside lot.

The property was located within the boundary of the [2016 Uptown Historic Resources Survey Report](#) but was not identified in the survey because it was not evaluated.

### 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. Staff disagrees and finds that the site is not significant under any HRB Criteria. 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.*

The consultant report does not propose designation under Criterion B. The subject property was the personal residence of Master Architect Homer Delawie from 1958-1963. Personal residences

associated with Master Architects, Builders, or Designers are typically not significant under HRB Criterion B; resources associated with a Master would not be significant under B unless the resource was the office of the Master. Delawie partnered with Lloyd Ruocco in 1958 until 1961, where Delawie rented a space on Harney Avenue in Old Town and started his own firm. After designing and constructing their new office, Delawie and his team moved into 2827 Presidio Drive in 1962, which is still extant today. No evidence indicated that the 1773 Torrance Street property was used as his personal office. While the report provides information that demonstrates Homer Delawie's contribution to San Diego's modernist architectural development, it does not ascertain whether the subject property is best associated with Delawie for his significance as an individual. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion B at this time.

*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 property is a 1958 two-story single-family home constructed originally in the Post and Beam style atop a graded lot. The original structure was remodeled by Delawie in 1991 when a second story addition in the Shed style was constructed. In its current condition, the building features a rectangular footprint, horizontal massing, vertical siding, wooden structural posts, and rectangular casement windows. The rear façade of the house consists of a floor-to-ceiling glass wall on the first floor and a covered balcony on the second floor. A "slipped" Shed style roof adorns the top of the home. Along the northwest elevation, the front door is recessed from the façade. The property also features a chimney clad in vertical wood siding. The basement level of the property contains a carport and storage rooms.

Nicknamed the "Boxcar House", the original 1958 Delawie home demonstrated the Post and Beam design through its exposed repeating wooden structural posts, low horizontal rectangular massing, slender vertical windows, and vertical siding. There were four windows in total, one along each elevation. The otherwise scant fenestration contrasted the two quasi-interior garden courts enclosed by glass walls that were open to the elements above. This design integrated indoor and outdoor spaces and introduced light into the center of the property.

The subject property has undergone a significant amount of alterations since its original 1958 date of construction. Between 1958 and 1991 a deck was added to the rear of the building, which was further modified in 1991. The 1991 remodel included adding a second story to the existing house, a shed style roof, a second story covered balcony, and a chimney on the southeast elevation. The walls of the addition are flush with the existing façade on three sides except for the rear, where a covered balcony is present. The project also infilled the original street-facing, slender vertical window and added four new windows in vertical alignment on that same elevation. Between 1991 and 2008, the exposed structural wooden posts along the northwest and southeast façades of the first-story level were trimmed or otherwise obscured by new vertical wood siding.

Post and Beam is a method of construction in which the structural framing consists of load bearing beams supported by columns rather than solid bearing walls. From the 1950s through the 1970s this method of construction became popular because it allowed for the expansive use of glass which facilitated the indoor/ outdoor connection so important to modern design. Structures designed in the Post and Beam style generally have a rectilinear shape with open floor plans and a layout based on a consistent module. Roofs are usually flat with wide overhanging eaves emphasizing the structure's

horizontal massing. A defining characteristic of Post and Beam design is the direct expression of a building's structural system on its façade. Other important features of this style include repetitive façade geometry; the absence of applied decoration; and the use of wood, steel, and glass on the building's exterior. In San Diego, residential examples of Post and Beam architecture can be found in established neighborhoods such as Mission Hills, La Jolla and Point Loma on sloping lots that were previously unused. According to the [San Diego Modernism Context Statement](#), the style is relatively rare and any extant examples should be considered for historic designation.

The 1991 Delawie remodel was a comprehensive redesign of the entire structure. The second story addition gave the property a multi-direction Shed style roof. This shed roof is "slipped" from a gable-end form and slid upward, producing two sloping planes. The Shed style roof design is inconsistent with the Post and Beam style. Additionally, the massing of the upper story detracts from the original low, horizontal building form of the 1958 design. Furthermore, the original repeating structural posts along the side elevations of the first floor have been either trimmed or concealed, which is inconsistent with the 1991 construction plan drawings. In total, these alterations significantly impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling as it relates to the resource's 1958 design. Therefore, staff cannot recommend designation under Criterion C as a good example of the Post and Beam style.

The Shed style architecture style originated in the 1960s from Charles Moore and Joseph Esherick through their design of the Sea Ranch Lodge condominium complex in Sonoma County. This architecture spread throughout the United States and is expressed in both commercial and residential structures. Typically, Shed style buildings are clad with wood board siding, T-11 plywood siding, wood shingles, or brick veneer and contain no roof overhangs. Character-defining features include asymmetry and juxtaposition of forms; recessed front door; varied massing; long narrow windows; and clerestory windows to provide ventilation. While common in one or two-story houses, the Shed style can also be seen in more elaborate custom homes or apartments. This form of architecture was short-lived, and in the 1980s the Shed style slowly became replaced by more traditional designs.

The property displays several features typical of the Shed style such as vertical wood siding, shed roof with no eave overhang, and long narrow windows but lacks other character-defining features such as clerestory windows and a bold, asymmetrical form. The resource is only able to convey the style in a limited way and does not rise to the level of significance to be individually eligible as a good example of the Shed style. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Shed style.

*CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist, or craftsman.*

Established Master Architect Homer Delawie constructed 1773 Torrance Street in 1958 and constructed the remodel in 1991. Delawie was born and raised in Santa Barbara, California and after serving in the Navy, he enrolled in the California Polytechnic College in San Luis Obispo, becoming an architect in 1951. While working in Northern California, he took a vacation in San Diego and discovered the Design Center, designed by Lloyd Ruocco. Intrigued by the building, Delawie decided to contact Lloyd Ruocco. Shortly later, Ruocco invited Delawie to work for his firm. One of Delawie's first projects in San Diego was to design the headquarters building for Channel 10. After working with Ruocco for a number of years, Delawie started his own firm in 1961. He designed homes overlooking Mission

Valley, Mission Hills, and Point Loma. Three of these homes were built for his family, and many of his designs reflect the Post and Beam architecture.

Delawie served on several local boards for many years, including the Museum of Man, the Children's Museum, and the UCSD Board of Overseers. From 1969 to 1982, Delawie served on the City's Planning Commission. He also served on the Historical Resources Board for eight years and was involved with the San Diego Historical Society. Delawie's career was diverse, and his list of works includes the Reuben H. Fleet Space Theater expansion, the James R. Mills Building, the Shark Exhibit at SeaWorld, and the Scripps Ranch High School.

Projects designed by Delawie and his firm have received over 65 design awards. In 1973, Delawie received the Cal Poly School of Architecture Distinguished Alumni Award. The National Urban Land Institute and the California and San Diego chapters of the AIA have awarded Delawie their highest honors. From the AIA, Delawie received Service Citations in 1972 and 1973, a Presidential Citation in 1997, and a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997. Twice, the Department of Defense awarded Delawie its highest award. In 2003, Save Our Heritage Organization presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award for his work in preserving the works of local Modern architects.

The subject resource was designed by Delawie as his family's personal residence in 1958 and it quickly became known as the "Boxcar House" for its innovative design. In 1960, The San Diego Chapter of the American Institute of Architects awarded Delawie with an Award of Excellent for his design of the subject property. It praised the interior design of the home and Delawie's ingenuity in designing the property within the challenging narrow confines and steep grade of the hillside lot. Later in 1962, The *Sunset* Magazine awarded Delawie the "Western Home Award" for design excellence. Between 1989 and 1990, Delawie was retained by the then-owners of the subject property to design and construct a second-story addition. In a personal letter, Delawie stated that the upper-level addition utilized "post and beam mid-century modernist construction with a juxtaposition of forms."

It is undisputed that the subject property is a product of Homer Delawie. However, due to the 1991 remodel, most of the character-defining features of his original design and intent of the 1958 "Boxcar House" have been removed, resulting in a severe impact to the resource's integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling. Additionally, the building in its current condition is not a notable example of Homer Delawie's residential work. Delawie's earlier works were constructed in the Post and Beam style with simple floorplans. His later residential work evolved to more complex examples, featuring H-shaped floorplans with higher quality exterior details and designs. Delawie's use of the Post and Beam style transferred over into larger, commercial construction in the 1970s and 1980s which expressed strong horizontal emphasis, exposed structural beams, and large repetitive glass windows and doors along the primary façades. Compared to his overall body of work, the subject property located at 1773 Torrance Street in its current condition does not represent a notable example of Delawie's craftsmanship or design. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under 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

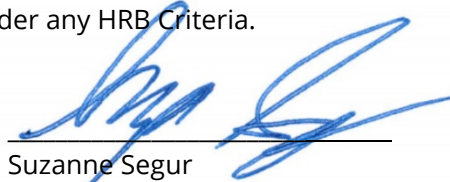
in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration 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 1773 Torrance Street not be designated under any HRB Criteria.



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AL/EH/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover