



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 13, 2018 REPORT NO. HRB-18-044

HEARING DATE: September 27, 2018

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House # 3**

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

APPLICANT: Benjamin E Saltman and Rebecca Bellingham represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 4130 Lark Street, Uptown Community, Council District 3  
APN 443-484-11-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #3 located at 4130 Lark Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #3 located at 4130 Lark Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1916 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the 1929 addition at the southern portion of the house, and the 2000 kitchen addition at the western portion of the house, constructed outside of the period of significance. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character-defining features of the Prairie Style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource displays a low-pitched, hipped roof with deep overhangs, two-story massing with single-story porch, horizontal design details, wood windows, and rectilinear wall caps.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Joel Brown and retains integrity as it relates to the original 1916 design. Specifically, the resource was built on speculation by Brown in addition to other nearby properties he designed on Lark Street in the Prairie style that express a high quality of craftsmanship of Brown's work.
3. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn and retains integrity as it relates to the original 1916 design. Specifically, the house is notable as a good example of Melhorn's period of early work in the Prairie style approximately between 1911-1916.

## 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 resource is a two-story single-family Prairie Style residence built in 1916 on the west side of Lark Street, between West Montecito Way and West Lewis Street in the Arnold & Choate's Addition of the Uptown Community.

The property was identified in the *2016 Uptown Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey Report* and given a Status Code of 5D3, "Appears to be a contributor to a district that appears eligible for local listing."

The historic name of the resource, the Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #3, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Master Builder Joel Brown, who constructed the house as a speculation house, and the name of Martin V. Melhorn, the Master Builder who built the residence.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by IS 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 is a two-story single-family residence constructed in 1916 in the Prairie Style. It faces east onto Lark Street and is accessed by a concrete driveway and walkway. The building is clad in stucco siding, and is covered by asphalt-composite shingle hipped roof forms with deep-board finished boxed eaves. The overhanging eaves are supported below by paired decorative beam ends connected by a wide wood fascia. A stucco chimney projects from the right side of the roof. Fenestration consists of fixed wood windows and groupings of single-light wood casement windows. Concrete stairs ascend to a partially recessed front porch, with the second story overhang supported by rectangular piers. The porch is surrounded by a low, stuccoed wall with a rectangular cap.

A number of modifications have been made to the property since its construction in 1916. In 1929 a one-story wing with hipped roof and boxed eaves was added to the southern portion of the house. This wing is slightly stepped back from the original construction. Although this addition bears slightly differentiated wood windows from the original residence, the addition carries over the same design of the decorative beam ends and decorative brackets of the original residence. In 2000, a kitchen addition was built at the rear of the property that is not visible from the public right of way, and also that year the front sidewalk and driveway were replaced in-kind. At an unknown date, the property was re-stuccoed with a period-appropriate texture and finish. The noted modifications have not significantly impacted the integrity of design, workmanship or feeling, and as such, the building retains integrity as it relates to architectural significance.

The Prairie style originated in Chicago and was popular primarily in the Midwest for the early part of the 20th century. An indigenous American style, the Prairie School shared the ideals of the British Arts and Crafts movement and was popularized by architects including Frank Lloyd Wright, George Maher and others. Character-defining features of Prairie style architecture include low-pitched, usually hipped roofs, wide overhanging eaves, cornices and façade detailing emphasizing horizontal lines. Prairie style houses are typically two stories and often feature casement windows, one-story wings, porches, porte cocheres and inconspicuous entries. Pattern books and popular magazines spread vernacular examples widely to suburbs throughout the country, with most being built between 1905 and 1915.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Prairie style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a low-pitched, hipped roof with deep overhangs, two-story massing with single-story porch, horizontal design details, wood windows, and rectilinear wall caps. 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.*

Joel Brown was born in Indiana in 1870. In the late 1890s and until around 1906-1908, Brown worked for the Indiana Architecture firms of Powers & Kibele and Brown & Houck, and designed such locally prominent buildings as the Hartford City Public Library and the Hartford City High School built between 1902-1904. Brown moved to San Diego with his wife Edith between 1908 and 1909 and quickly became a prominent building contractor and architect. Brown was responsible for the development of a number of properties throughout San Diego, particularly in Mission Hills. His designs were primarily high-quality residences in the Craftsman and Prairie styles.

Joel Brown's status as a Master Architect was established with the 2003 designation of HRB Site # 593 at 2124 Sunset Boulevard under Criterion D. Currently there are six properties individually listed on the local register that are attributed to Joel Brown:

- The Kirkland Apartments built in 1912 at 2309 5th Avenue (HRB Site #483)
- The J. L. Brown Spec House built in 1912 at 2858 Evergreen Street (HRB Site #575)
- The Katherine H. Wagenhals/Joel Brown House built in 1913 at 2124 Sunset Boulevard (HRB Site #593)
- The Joel L. and Edith M. Brown House built in 1916 at 4141 Lark Street (HRB Site #777)
- The Clara Champlin House built in 1912 at 1445 Granada Avenue (HRB Site #1255)
- The Joel Brown Spec House #2 (HRB Site #1267)

The subject resource was designed and built on speculation by Brown and served as an early model for other nearby properties he designed on Lark Street in the Prairie style. The residence expresses a high quality of craftsmanship seen in Brown's other known works that are historically designated. Brown's distinctive Prairie style is readily conveyed in the building's massing, details, and decorative features with horizontal emphasis.

Martin V. Melhorn was born in Indiana in 1866. He lived and worked in Falls City, Nebraska and Denver, Colorado before moving to San Diego in 1911 with his wife, Alberta, and their son William.

Melhorn established the Alberta Security Company in 1913 which focused primarily on the financial aspects of building construction. Melhorn built the subject property residence under the Alberta Security Company property in 1916. Melhorn and his affiliates were prolific builders in the City of San Diego – particularly in the areas of Mission Hills, Hillcrest, University Heights, North Park and South Park – and numerous Melhorn-built homes have been listed on the San Diego Register. Melhorn’s status as a Master Builder was established in 2003 with the designation of the Neil Brown/Martin V. Melhorn House at 4195 Palmetto Way (HRB Site #583).

The subject property was constructed in 1916 in the Prairie style, and is representative of Melhorn’s earlier works in the style as he began to transition away from Craftsman styled homes.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Joel Brown’s original design, intent, and aesthetic as a Master Architect. The resource was built on speculation and served as an early model for other nearby properties he designed on Lark Street in the Prairie style that express a high quality of craftsmanship of Brown’s work. The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Marin V. Melhorn’s original design, intent, aesthetic, and craftsmanship as a Master Builder. The house is notable as an example of Melhorn’s work in the Prairie style during a period when he began to move away from the familiar Craftsman house. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as being representative of the notable work of Master Architect Joel Brown, and as being representative of the notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn.

#### 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 Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House #3 located at 4130 Lark Street be designated with a period of significance of 1916 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that exhibits the distinctive characteristics of the Prairie style; and HRB Criterion D as a resource that is representative of the notable work of Master Architect Joel Brown, and is representative of the notable work Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn. The designation excludes the 1929 addition at the southern portion of the house, and the 2000 kitchen addition at the western portion of the house, constructed outside of the period of significance.



---

Sonnier Francisco  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison

SF

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 9/27/2018

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 9/27/2018, to consider the historical designation of the **Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House # 3** (owned by Benjamin E Saltman and Rebecca Bellingham, 295 Prospect Place, Brooklyn, NY, CA 11238) located at **4130 Lark Street, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **443-484-11-00**, further described as PAR 1 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 Joel Brown/Martin V. Melhorn Spec House # 3 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 Prairie style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1916 period of significance. Specifically, the resource retains a low-pitched, hipped roof with deep overhangs, two-story massing with single-story porch, horizontal design details, wood windows, and rectilinear wall caps. 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 Joel Brown, and as a notable work of Master Builder Martin V. Melhorn. Specifically, the resource is representative of Brown's notable work as it served as an early model for other nearby speculation properties he designed on Lark Street in the Prairie style that express a high quality of craftsmanship of his work. The resource is also representative of Melhorn's earlier works in the Prairie style as he began to transition away from building Craftsman styled homes. 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 1929 addition at the southern portion of the house, and the 2000 kitchen addition at the western portion of the house.

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: N/A

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
JEREMY JUNG,  
Deputy City Attorney

DRAFT