



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: May 9, 2019 REPORT NO. HRB 19-023

HEARING DATE: May 23, 2019

SUBJECT: **ITEM #7 – Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May House**

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

APPLICANT: Arthur and Martha Reynolds Trust represented by Seonaid McArthur

LOCATION: 6004 Avenida Cresta, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 357-152-07-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May House located at 6004 Avenida Cresta as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May House located at 6004 Avenida Cresta as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1936 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation includes the olive tree located in the central courtyard planted at the time of the property's construction. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch house and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1936 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a "U" Shaped plan form; fully enclosed central courtyard; low-pitched gable and hipped roof sheathed in irregularly laid red clay tile; wide eaves that are open with exposed rafter tails; hand textured stucco cladding with rounded edges; fixed wood shutters and grills; tile vents; wood plank front door; stucco chimneys capped with terra cotta flues; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-light wood casement windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Cliff May and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a well-executed representation of his integration of indoor/outdoor living in the Spanish Colonial Revival/ California "Hacienda" style ranch architecture.

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 one story, single-family residence constructed in 1936 in the Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch on the east side of Avenida Cresta in the Lower Hermosa area of the La Jolla Community.

The property was identified in the 2004 Draft La Jolla Survey and given a Status Code of 3S, "Appears eligible for NR as an individual property through survey evaluation."

The historic name of the resource, the Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Virginia Nuckolls, who constructed the house as her personal residence and the name of Cliff May, a Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Seonaid McArthur 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 located at 6004 Avenida Cresta was constructed in 1936 is a one-story, U-shaped, stucco on wood frame, Spanish Colonial Revival/ California "Hacienda" style ranch house built on a concrete slab foundation by Master Architect Cliff May. The resource has a low pitched, heavily mudded red tile roof with open eaves and exposed rafter tails that overhang its hand textured white stucco walls with rounded corners. Fenestration consists of wooden casement windows flanked by decorative wood shutters and wood window grilles. There are five white stucco chimneys on the roof capped with terra cotta flues.

The house sits on a prominent corner lot and is turned west and southwest to afford maximum views from of the ocean. The asymmetrical east facing front facade is approached from the north end of the lot, along a curved brick path. The recessed front entry contains a wood plank door that is deeply set under a wide exposed wood lintel and faces Avenida Cresta. While at the far north end corner of the front elevation is an open grill that offers a view into the main central courtyard. The courtyard is flanked on the south and southwest facing elevations with a covered corridor opening directly into the living areas. A two-car garage, with the original stucco arches surrounding the plank doors, sits under the terrace on the southeast corner.

A main feature of the courtyard is the large olive tree that Cliff May selected and planted as part of his design in 1936. Staff is recommending the olive tree be included as part of the designation.

Modifications to the home include the enclosure of the covered open corridor which extended west and northwest from the main entrance with aluminum windows, and one aluminum sliding door; and a sliding door was placed to the right of the main entry door in 1967. In 1973, May was

contracted by the owners to work on the home, this included changing the aluminum windows and doors to wood on the west and northwest enclosed corridor and enclosing the south to north end of the corridor with wood windows; he also enlarged the opening from the living room to the enclosed corridor, replaced a window on the northwest elevation with a fireplace, a window seat was added to the west-facing window; and a window on the south east facing elevation was removed and replaced with a door. These modifications do not significantly impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling and the building retains integrity as it relates to architectural significance.

In the days of early California, ranch houses were built around a center courtyard both as a convenience and protection against invaders. A student of old adobe Hacienda construction, May sought to combine the designs of early California history with modern home building. May designed both custom and speculative ranch houses that touted quality craftsmanship, practicality, and idyllic charm. Throughout his career, May maintained that his designs could "restore the romance and charm of early California design to modern living," which he accomplished not only through indoor-outdoor living and the notion of the Ranch house lifestyle, but with the integration of modern efficiency.

May's early houses clearly represent the Spanish Colonial revival style. However, to differentiate his houses from other Spanish style houses in the area, May copied elements from the Estudillo and Las Flores adobes to give them a much more crude appearance. In addition, he created his own signature details: chimney pots, wooden window grilles with flower pot boxes, tile doorbells, painted flower decorations on wooden beams, doors, shutters, and cupboards, and landscaping with yucca, cacti, and olive trees. His San Diego designs prompted nostalgia for the old Spanish Colonial Revival style so popular a century earlier, but on a smaller, more low-key scale that became May's California Ranch style.

Significance Statement: The resource continues to convey the historic significance of the Spanish Colonial Revival/ California "Hacienda" style ranch by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style including a "U" Shaped plan form; fully enclosed central courtyard; low-pitched gable and hipped roof sheathed in irregularly laid red clay tile; wide eaves that are open with exposed rafter tails; hand textured stucco cladding with rounded edges; fixed wood shutters and grills; tile vents; wood plank front door; stucco chimneys capped with terra cotta flues; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-light wood casement windows. 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.

Master Architect Cliff May, undisputed father of the modern ranch house, was a sixth-generation San Diego native and a descendant of the pioneering Estudillo family. He did not have formal architectural training, but learned his craft on the job, finding inspiration in his personal connection and detailed knowledge of the region's Spanish colonial architectural heritage.

May built his first house with the help of engineering contractor Orville U. Miracle in 1931. Its successful sale encouraged him to build additional speculative houses. Between 1931 and 1937, May designed approximately fifty houses in San Diego. Most of his houses reflect traditional adobe hacienda architecture, but featured the newest materials and construction techniques. They are typically low in scale and spread out on the parcel to create definition between the street and the

private courtyard space for the resident. The result was a new informal suburb style with understated luxury and stressing his belief that a house should be integrated with nature.

In 1938, May moved to Los Angeles where he became internationally known through published designs in Sunset Magazine. May sold the subject property in 1939 following his move to Los Angeles. In addition to Cliff May's prolific architectural career in San Diego and Los Angeles, he also designed buildings in over forty U.S. states, Mexico, South America, Australia, the British West Indies, and Ireland, proving that his ranch style had an international appeal as well as an adaptability to various climates. Over the course of his life May designed more than one thousand buildings including the headquarters of Sunset Magazine, the Los Angeles home of Zubin Metha, music director for the New York Philharmonic, and a house for Gianni Agnelli, founder of Fiat, the Italian car company.

Throughout his career, May maintained that his designs could, "restore the romance and charm of early California design to modern living," which he accomplished not only through indoor-outdoor living and the notion of the Ranch house lifestyle, but with the integration of modern efficiency.

The property located at 6004 Avenida Cresta is one of three homes built by May on Avenida Cresta within the Lower Hermosa area between 1935 and 1938. There are currently eleven May designed homes listed on the San Diego Historic Register:

- HRB #355- Alexander and Nancy Highland House, 2400 Presidio Drive
- HRB #387- The Lindstrom House, 4669 East Talmadge Drive
- HRB #416-Violetta Horton Spec House #1, 6303 La Jolla Scenic Drive South
- HRB #417- Violetta Horton Speculation House #2, 7447 Hillside Drive
- HRB #479- Colonel Arthur J. & Francis O'Leary House, 4725 Norma Drive
- HRB #679- Violetta Horton/Cliff May Spec House #3, 7477 Hillside Drive
- HRB #731- Violetta Lee Horton Spec House #4, 7575 Hillside Drive
- HRB #1031- John R. and Florence Porterfield Beardsley House, 3130 Shadowlawn Street
- HRB #1053- Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House #1, 4777 Avion Way
- HRB #1139- Cliff May House, 4338 Adams Avenue
- HRB #1194- Ammen and Henrietta Farenholt/Cliff May House, 3626 Hyacinth Drive

Significance Statement: The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Cliff May and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a well-executed representation of his integration of indoor/outdoor living in the Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch architecture. 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 Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May House located at 6004 Avenida Cresta be designated as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1936 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the character defining features of the Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch architecture, and Criterion D as a resource that is reflective of the notable work of established Master Architect Cliff May. The designation includes the olive tree located in the central courtyard planted at the time of the property's construction.


Shannon Anthony
Junior Planner


Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner

SA/ss

Attachments:

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 5/23/2019

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 5/23/2019, to consider the historical designation of the **Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May House** (owned by Arthur B and Martha T Reynolds Trust, 6004 Avenida Cresta, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **6004 Avenida Cresta, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **357-152-07-00**, further described as BLK 5 LOT 7 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 Virginia Nuckolls/Cliff May 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 Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch house and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1936 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a "U" Shaped plan form; fully enclosed central courtyard; low-pitched gable and hipped roof sheathed in irregularly laid red clay tile; wide eaves that are open with exposed rafter tails; hand textured stucco cladding with rounded edges; fixed wood shutters and grills; tile vents; wood plank front door; ;stucco chimneys capped with terra cotta flues; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-light wood casement windows. 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 Cliff May and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a well-executed representation of his integration of indoor/outdoor living in the Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch architecture. 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 include the olive tree located in the central courtyard planted at the time of the property's construction.

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

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney