



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 9, 2020 REPORT NO. HRB-20-020

HEARING DATE: July 23, 2020

SUBJECT: **ITEM #12 – Oswald and Gladys Trenchard/ Cliff May House**

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

APPLICANT: Baratz Family Trust; represented by Meredith C. Baratz

LOCATION: 6126 Avenida Cresta, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 357-142-11-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Oswald and Gladys Trenchard/Cliff May House located at 6126 Avenida Cresta as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Oswald and Gladys Trenchard/Cliff May House located at 6126 Avenida Cresta as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1936 to 1985 under HRB 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 the Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch house and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 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; fixed wood shutters grills; tile vents; carved wooden gates and door; wood windows; and a stucco exterior.
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 has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

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

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research was prepared by Meredith C. Baratz, 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 6126 Avenida Cresta was constructed in 1936 and is a one-story, U-shaped Spanish Colonial Revival/ California "Hacienda" style ranch house built on a concrete slab foundation by Master Architect Cliff May. The resource has a stucco exterior and a low pitched, irregular tile roof with open overhanging eaves and exposed rafter tails. Fenestration consists of wooden casement windows flanked by decorative wood shutters and wood window grilles.

The house sits on a prominent corner lot and is turned southwest to afford maximum views of the ocean for the living room and bedrooms. The covered entrance with carved wood doors is on the corner of Avenida Cresta and Avenida Cortez. Extending out is a retaining wall that makes up the exterior of the Northeast façade along Avenida Cresta and connects the gate to the house on the Northwest façade along Avenida Cortez. Along the Northwest façade the retaining wall connects several feet into the house. Inside the retaining wall is a wood-shuttered window, and outside facing the street is an eight lite window with wood shutters, a single door entry with a short wood covering painted white to match the stucco, and a few feet further to the west, the façade steps back about four feet creating a corner fronted by casement windows with wood grills that join in the corner. Between the corner window and the living room wing is another eight lite window with wood shutters. The living room wing has large, twelve lite fixed windows, one on the southwest and southeast façade and on the corner between is a stucco chimney. Along the south east façade are four additional windows. The first, a six lite casement window is flanked by carved wooden shutters. The second and third windows appear to be a matched set, separated by two feet of wall, each flanked by a single wooden shutter and with three lite patterns. The last window is recessed into the wall, has an eight lite pattern and is covered by a non-projecting wooden grill.

The northeast façade is close to the neighbors. It is formed by the windowless end wall of the west wing and the rear of the garage, with a tile-capped wall connecting the two, creating the interior courtyard. A double-door wooden gate provides access to the courtyard mid-way along the connecting wall. Two windows appear in the rear wall of the garage. A six lite casement window set

six inches into the wall and a six lite casement window protected by a projecting wooden grill. Between them rises a false chimney column.

A main feature of a Cliff May' house is the courtyard. At 6126 Avenida Cresta the courtyard is divided into two separate areas. Upon entering the main covered entrance with carved wood doors, to the left is the garage, and straight forward is an eight lite window covered with a wood grill and a door-less entry to the other courtyard where there 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. Inside the courtyard and along the house is an open corridor with rafter exposed roof coverage. The walkway follows the north wing and has eight lite French doors and solid wood plank doors, and a projecting wood grill covers a window at the maid's quarter/pantry. Throughout the house, large picture windows and frequently placed casement windows to bridge the indoor-outdoors boundary.

Modifications to the home include two skylights added above the kitchen at an unknown date, and an addition to the garage in 1985. The garage addition was designed by Cliff May to keep with the original look and intent of his design and is included in the designation. Additionally, the roof tiles have recently been replaced in kind. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, materials workmanship or feeling as it relates to Criterion C.

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" ranch style 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; 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 6126 Avenida Cresta is one of three homes built by May on Avenida Cresta within the Lower Hermosa area between 1935 and 1938.

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 Oswald and Gladys Trenchard/Cliff May House located at 6126 Avenida Cresta be designated with a period of significance of 1936 and 1985 under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Spanish Colonial Revival / California "Hacienda" style ranch architecture, and Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Cliff May. The designation includes the olive tree located in the central courtyard planted at the time of the property's construction.

Megan Bacik

Megan Bacik

Suzanne Segur

Senior Planner
Development Services Department

MB/ss

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 7/23/2020

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 7/23/2020, to consider the historical designation of the **Oswald and Gladys Trenchard/Cliff May House** located at **6126 Avenida Cresta, La Jolla, CA 92037**, APN: **357-142-11-00**, further described as BLK 4 POR 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 Oswald and Gladys Trenchard/Cliff May House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics... 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... 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:

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney