



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: July 9, 2020 REPORT NO. HRB-20-026

HEARING DATE: July 23, 2020

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – Max and Louise Gross/ Russell Forester House**

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

APPLICANT: Venus Shahmiri and Kaveh Elahi represented by Brian F. Smith and Associates, Inc.

LOCATION: 5911 Folsom Drive, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 357-251-06-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Max and Louise Gross/Russell Forester House located at 5911 Folsom Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Max and Louise Gross/Russell Forester House located at 5911 Folsom Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1962 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the garage and the 1979 addition 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 Post and Beam style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance. Specifically, the resource features direct expressions of the building's structural system, floor-to-ceiling glass, horizontal massing, a flat roof with no parapet, repetitive façade geometry, wood cladding, and the absence of applied decoration.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Russell Forester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a notable example of Forester's Modernist designs for large, single-family residences in the 1960s.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. The subject resource is a single-family residence

located in the La Jolla Hermosa Unit No. 2 Subdivision. The parcel slopes downwards to the east, towards Folsom Drive.

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 Max and Louise Gross/Russell Forester House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Max and Louise Gross, who constructed the house as their personal residence and the name of Russell Forester, a Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Brian F. Smith and Associates, Inc., which concludes that the resource is not significant under any HRB Criteria. Staff disagrees and finds that the site is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

Research into the history of the property at 5911 Folsom Drive did not reveal any information to indicate that the property exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's or La Jolla's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion A.

CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.

Research into the owners and tenants of the property at 5911 Folsom Drive did not reveal any individuals who could be considered historically significant in local, state or national history. Furthermore, no events of local, state or national significance are known to have occurred at the subject property. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion B

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 was originally constructed in 1962 as a one-story, single-family residence in the Post and Beam style with an attached carport. The resource is clad in vertical redwood siding and features metal sliding and louvered windows and wood fixed windows. The south elevation features floor-to-ceiling glass and visible posts and beams, the two key features of the Post and Beam style. This elevation includes the house's main entrance and provides the primary visual focus, and therefore serves as the primary façade of the house. The west elevation of the house, which faces the street, features a series of 3 long windows, each topped by cantilevered roofs. This series of identical windows creates a repetitive façade geometry, a character-defining features of the Post

and Beam style. The cantilevered roofs also reflect the Post and Beam style because they appear to be held up by extended roof beams.

The Post and Beam style was popular between 1950 and 1970. The style is primarily characterized by direct expression of the structural system, which is usually wood or steel, and floor-to-ceiling glass. Other character-defining features include horizontal massing, flat or shallow pitch roofs with deep overhangs or no parapet, repetitive façade geometry, minimal use of solid loadbearing walls, absence of applied decoration, strong interior/exterior connections, open interior floor plans, and the frequent use of wood, steel and glass as exterior finish materials.

The subject resource features several modifications since its 1962 period of significance. An addition on the lower level of the west façade was first built in 1979 and was expanded in 1992. This work was part of a larger project to convert some of the lower level into living space, changing the house from a one-story residence to a split-level residence, and the addition includes windows to provide light into the living space. The addition is clad in vertical wood siding that matches the rest of the house. The foundation/lower level of the house was originally clad in stucco but was also covered in vertical redwood siding at an unknown date. In 1986, the carport was enclosed and expanded, and new window openings were added to it. Despite these modifications, the integrity of this property was evaluated under the San Diego Modernism Historic Context, which states that, "due to the relative rarity of this [Post and Beam] sub-style and high degree of individualization any extant examples should be considered for historic designation." Due to the relative rarity of examples of the Post and Beam style in San Diego, these impacts to integrity of design, materials workmanship and feeling do not rise to the level of significance to impair eligibility for designation under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Post and Beam style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including direct expressions of the building's structural system, floor-to-ceiling glass, horizontal massing, a flat roof with no parapet, repetitive façade geometry, wood cladding, and the absence of applied decoration. 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.

Russell Isley Forester was born in Idaho but moved to La Jolla as a child. He graduated from La Jolla High School in 1938. He began his architectural career in the mid-1940s, as a draftsman for Lloyd Ruocco in the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1948, Forester opened his own offices in La Jolla as a freelance architectural designer. During this period, he designed at least four houses, all in a relatively traditional style. In 1950, Forester was inspired by Ruocco to begin his formal study of architecture at the Institute of Design in Chicago. Here, he was mentored by Mies Van Der Rohe, who was popularizing the International style in the United States. When Forester returned to San Diego around 1951, he began designing in Modernist styles. He is credited with helping to introduce the International style to San Diego.

During the 1950s, Forester designed several modernist structures in La Jolla and participated in the design of airports, a naval base, hospitals and California First Bank buildings. He also designed the first Jack-in-the-Box restaurant, which opened in 1951. He went on to design several more of the restaurants in the Googie/Futurist style, and these are his best-known commercial projects. He also

worked in numerous other Modernist styles, including Streamline Moderne, Minimal Traditional, Custom Ranch, Organic Geometric, and Post-and-Beam. As his career progressed, Forester shifted from working on relatively modest houses to larger houses and commercial projects. He received his architectural license in 1960.

Seven of Forester's works are currently designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. They include the Dr. Harold C. & Frieda Daum Urey/Russell Forester House (HRB #528), which established him as a Master Architect by the HRB in 2002, the Park Prospect Condominiums/Russell Forester Building (HRB #992), and the Edmund and Elsie Herman/Russell Forester House (HRB #1042).

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Russell Forester's original design, intent and aesthetic. It is a notable example of Forester's Modernist designs for large, single-family residences in the 1960s. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

CRITERION E - Is listed or has been determined eligible by the National Park Service for listing on the National Register of Historic Places or is listed or has been determined eligible by the State Historical Preservation Office for listing on the State Register of Historical Resources.

The property at 5911 Folsom Drive has not been listed on or determined eligible for listing on the State or National Registers. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion E.

CRITERION F - Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character, historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.


The property at 5911 Folsom Drive is not located within a designated historic district. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

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 Max and Louise Gross/Russell Forester House located at 5911 Folsom Drive be designated as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1962 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation excludes the garage and the 1979 addition constructed outside of the period of significance.



Gemma Tierney
Associate Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner
Development Services Department

GT/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 Max and Louise Gross/Russell Forester House (owned by Venus M Shahmiri and Kave Elahi, PO Box 22813, San Diego, CA 92192) located at **5911 Folsom Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037**, APN: **357-251-06-00**, further described as BLK 41 LOT 6 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 Max and Louise Gross/Russell Forester 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 the Post and Beam style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance. Specifically, the resource features direct expressions of the building's structural system, floor-to-ceiling glass, horizontal massing, a flat roof with no parapet, repetitive façade geometry, wood cladding, and the absence of applied decoration. 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 Russell Forester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a notable example of Forester's Modernist designs for large, single-family residences in the 1960s. 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 garage and the 1979 addition constructed outside of the period of significance

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