



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 14, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-031

HEARING DATE: September 28, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #4 – Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher House**

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

APPLICANT: Driscoll Family Trust 06-18-20; represented by Nexus Planning & Research

LOCATION: 485 San Gorgonio Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2
APN 532-441-05-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher House located at 485 San Gorgonio Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher House located at 485 San Gorgonio Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1967-2015 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a strong roof form with deep overhangs; large aluminum framed windows including floor-to-ceiling glass; and sunshades in the form of slat wood pergola overhangs. Organic Geometric features include a site-specific design; the use of natural materials of cedar wood shingles; the presence of large balconies; rectilinear building geometry; asymmetrical façades; and unusual projecting roof pergolas with wood slats.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Robert Mosher and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is significant as a residential example of Mosher's work in Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences and received Mosher's continued attention to improvements decades after the property was constructed. The property is also reportedly Mosher's self-proclaimed favorite residential project from his entire body of work. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of established Master Architect Robert Mosher.

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 two-story residence built on a sloped lot within the La Playa neighborhood. 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 Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Lucile E. Hamilton, who constructed the house as their personal residence, and the name of Robert Mosher, an established Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Nexus Planning & Research, 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 property was designed and built in the Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences. It is a two-level single-family residence situated on a sloping grade and oriented diagonally against the street, featuring views towards San Diego Bay. The roof is flat with copper flashing at the cornice and is further elaborated with deep pergola overhangs on some elevations. The building is clad with multi-width cedar shingles. The property also contains an original "lath house" planter area along the north elevation. The existing landscape contains brick walls, stone walkways with metal handrails, and a meandering path with various plants.

The primary elevation is along the south, featuring most of the character-defining features. This two-story façade contains two wooden decks/balconies with wood picket railings. Three slatted wood trellis project from this elevation, affixed by tapered decorative beams which project southward from the roof. A projecting wood plane at the upper finished floor level runs along the entire span of this façade and continues to the west and east elevations. The west, street-facing elevation contains an attached garage with a wooden garage door, and an entry deck leading to front doors with reeded glazing. This entry deck also includes descending wooden stairs with brick walls leading to the landscaped area below. This elevation also contains an upper-story deck with a shingle-clad solid balustrade. The east elevation, facing towards San Diego Bay, features a set of cascading facades. The north elevation contained a brick patio and planter area with a wooden trellis. Windows on this building include slider, fixed, casement, and floor-to-ceiling types.

Modifications to the property include a 1991 interior remodel and roof replacement, a 2006 garage repair, and a 2015 solar panel addition. Alterations at unknown dates include a 5 ft basement level deck extension. The historical resource research report also notes two windows are differentiated, although it does not state whether these windows are original or not. One of these windows at the

basement at the south façade appear to have been added since the 2003 photo was taken. Overall, these modifications do not impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

The consultant report identifies the subject property as a restrained example of modernist principles, most resembling Post and Beam. However, staff finds the property better defined as a Contemporary style building with Organic Geometric influence. The [San Diego Modernism Context Statement](#) identifies critical elements that conveys the Post and Beam style: the expression of the structural system through expansive floor-to-ceiling glass, and wood or steel framing. However, the subject property, while containing many large windows that include floor-to-ceiling glass, does not in fact, feature expansive use of glass forming glass walls. Instead, windows are in their individual openings and not continuously installed to achieve transparency, and the use of solid walls is still dominant. Similarly, the direct expression of the structural system is lacking as it is only exhibited in a restrained manner at the south elevation deck and minimally under roof overhangs (unenclosed eaves). Therefore, staff does not recommend that the property be designated under HRB Criterion C as a representative style of Post and Beam.

Instead, staff recommends that the property be designated under HRB Criterion C as an example of the Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influence. This property was built during the approximate “ca. 1955-1965” period of significance defined by the [San Diego Modernism Context Statement](#). The building displays character-defining features of the Contemporary style, including a strong roof form with deep overhangs, large aluminum framed windows, and sunshades (in the form of slat wood pergola overhangs).

The property also contains several Organic Geometric character-defining features. The [San Diego Modernism Context Statement](#) describes that Organic Geometric buildings were “carefully sited to take advantage of views and other site features, often built on steep slopes and boasting large balconies. In terms of shape, architects designed these buildings with an emphasis on rectilinear geometry, and the designs are characterized by asymmetrical façades, unusual rooflines, and angular shapes.” The subject property features all these characteristics except for “angular shapes.”

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a strong roof form with deep overhangs; large aluminum framed windows including floor-to-ceiling glass; and sunshades in the form of slat wood pergola overhangs. Organic Geometric features include the use of natural materials of cedar wood shingles; site specific design; use of large balconies; rectilinear building geometry; asymmetrical façades; and unusual projecting roof pergolas with wood slats. 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.

The property's landscape was originally designated by Harriet Wimmer, ALSA, of the landscape architecture firm Wimmer, Yamada, and Associates. Harriet Wimmer has not been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Architect, Designer or Builder, and there is insufficient information to designate her as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D for Harriet Wimmer.

Robert Mosher, FAIA, was born in Greeley, Colorado in 1920 and moved to Los Angeles at a young age. While living in LA, his family spent summers in La Jolla. He obtained a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Washington and later apprenticed with the distinguished Los Angeles firms of Myron Hunt and H. C. Chambers. In 1947, he received a California architectural license and moved to La Jolla, where he partnered with architect William Templeton Johnson. One year later, Mosher established his own office in La Jolla and was soon joined by architect Roy Drew, forming a productive practice and close friendship that lasted more than 55 years. The Mosher/Drew partnership is the longest continuous architectural partnership in San Diego. Post World War II, Mosher and Drew responded to a vacuum in the building industry, filling a demand for new talent and new ideas to meet the housing needs of returning veterans and others; they designed various structures in the Modernist style of architecture. In 1955, Mosher took a sabbatical leave from his firm to serve as Building Editor for House Beautiful magazine, where he wrote extensively about Frank Lloyd Wright and visited many of his sites in the Midwest. Wright's work influenced and reinforced Mosher's own Modernist principles. In 1966, the California State Division of Bay Toll Crossing commissioned Mosher to serve as a co-design consultant for the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, and Mosher's influence led to the bridge's sinuous, clean-lined modern design. Mosher was also the principal designer for Aztec Center at SDSU, several projects at UCSD, the NBC Tower on Broadway Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets, the Golden Door Health Spa in Escondido, his office, and many residences. In 1970, Mosher was elected to the AIA College of Fellows. He retired in 1998, although he continued to design projects of his choosing in his home studio. Robert Mosher's body of work illustrates that he was an early, prolific, and superior proponent of the Modernist style of architecture. A partial list of Mosher's notable works is below.

- HRB #715- Herbert Kunzel/Robert Mosher House (3250 McCall Street), 1951
- Aztec Center, San Diego State University (Demolished)

At least one of Mosher's works has been designated as historical resource by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. The designation of the Herbert Kunzel/Robert Mosher House established him as a Master Architect by the HRB in 2005 (HRB #715). Mosher designed the subject residence, which features custom features and elements representative of his Modernist designs. It is comparable to other Mosher-designed private residences which received recognition. The property is notable for being among a list of projects that Mosher personally curated as representative of his body of work. Residents and owners John and Jan Driscoll, who were close friends with Robert Mosher before his passing in 2015, purport that Mosher claimed 485 San Gorgonio as his favorite residential project from his entire body of work. Furthermore, Marie Burke Lia, a close personal friend of Mosher, claim that Mosher personally supervised and approved all improvements made to the property until 2015, including all the interior remodels and landscaping but excluding the solar panels and a reroofing project.

Significance Statement: The subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Robert Mosher's original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as a residential example of Mosher's work in the Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences and received Mosher's continued attention to improvements decades after the property was constructed. The property is also reportedly Mosher's favorite residential project from his entire body of work and received Mosher's continued attention to its improvements until his death in 2015. Therefore, staff

recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of established Master Architect Robert Mosher with a period of significance of 1967-2015.

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 Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher House located at 485 San Geronio Street be designated with a period of significance of 1967-2015 under HRB Criteria C and D.



Alvin Lin
Assistant Planner



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 9/28/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 9/28/2023, to consider the historical designation of the Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher House (owned by Driscoll Family Turst 06-18-20, 485 San Gorgonio Street, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **485 San Gorgonio Street, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **532-441-05-00**, further described as LOT 3 SLY 10 OF ELY 10FT OF NICHOLS ST CLSD ADJ TO LOT 3&ALL OF 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 Lucile Hamilton/Robert Mosher 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 Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1967-2015 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a strong roof form with deep overhangs; large aluminum framed windows including floor-to-ceiling glass; and sunshades in the form of slat wood pergola overhangs. Organic Geometric features include a site-specific design; the use of natural materials of cedar wood shingles; the presence of large balconies; rectilinear building geometry; asymmetrical façades; and unusual projecting roof pergolas with wood slats. 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 Robert Mosher and retains integrity as it relates to the original design with a 1967-2015 period of significance. Specifically, the resource is significant as a residential example of Mosher's work in Contemporary style with Organic Geometric influences and received Mosher's continued attention to improvements decades after the property was constructed. The property is also reportedly Mosher's self-proclaimed favorite residential project from his entire body of work. 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 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: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

485 San Geronio Street, San Diego, CA 92106

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **532-441-05-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**