



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 15, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-078

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of November 29, 2012

SUBJECT: **ITEM #14 – 560 San Grogonio Street**

APPLICANT: Robert Ellis represented by Marie Burke Lia

LOCATION: 560 San Grogonio Street, 92106, Peninsula Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the 560 San Grogonio Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 560 San Grogonio Street under any adopted HRB Criteria.

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 property is a single family residence in the Modern Organic Geometric style located in Point Loma.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research was prepared by Marie Burke Lia, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff does not concur that the site is a significant historical resource under any HRB Criteria. 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.

Constructed in 1953, the subject property is a one story, asymmetrical, irregularly shaped, Modern Organic Geometric style house. Originally constructed as a 3,009 single family residence by Sim Bruce Richards, the house was expanded in 1973 by the architect. The expansion enlarged the dining and east side deck addition.

The main east façade of the house features a low pitch gable roof with deep overhangs supported by decorative rafter ends. This elevation contains a wide bank of floor to ceiling windows that wrap around the façade. The windows are wood framed fixed with some openings to provide access to the deck area. The central section of the east façade protrudes out similar to a bow of a ship. The east elevation also features a wrap around deck area.

The south elevation features the main entrance and the attached two car garage. The main entrance is accessed via a set of flagstone stairs that lead to a small landing protected by the roof overhang. The entrance has fanciful carved wooden door. The door features a nature themed design with a stained glass sidelight. The door was designed by noted San Diego artist James Hubbell. Access to the two car garage is provided via a geometrically designed door. The exterior wall surface of the garage is sheathed with flagstone to match the entrance steps. The second floor over the garage cantilevers out and is sheathed with board and batten siding. The second floor features three evenly spaced windows.

The west façade features a bank of windows similar to the east that allows visibility through the house. The façade provides access to the rear yard via several sets of doors. The rear yard features a large pool that was added in 1973. The north and south facades have diminished detailing and primarily serve the utilitarian needs of the house.

There have been several modifications to the house. The house was original constructed in 1953 by Sim Bruce Richards and then expanded in 1973 to accommodate more livable space and a deck. The original deck followed the exterior lines of the house leaving the natural slope relatively untouched. The wood railing was horizontal in nature and appeared to splay outward. The railing had three continuous rails with the uppermost rail being a flat surface. In 2007, the deck area was significantly altered. The deck was enlarged and essentially squared off. The railing was modified to square wood post and upper rail with glass inserts.

Organic Geometric architecture is a philosophy of design which promotes a harmonious relationship between buildings and nature. Organic Geometric designers made use of natural building materials such as wood and stone and designed building respectful to the site. Like their Post and Beam Modern contemporaries, Organic Geometric architects also used glass to minimize the separation between interior and exterior and encourage indoor/outdoor living. 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 facades, unusual rooflines, and angular shapes. Primary character-defining features of an Organic Geometric style house are: exposed structure and materials; square, diamond and

polygon design motifs; natural materials. Secondary features are: sharp angular massing; asymmetrical facades; complex roof forms; and site specific design.

The modification of the deck has adversely impacted the main façade and a character-defining feature of the house. The squared off deck has eliminated the angular massing, pointed and triangular design typical to the Organic Geometric style. Staff does not recommend designation under 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 consultant has also recommended that this house is nominated under Criterion D as a notable work of established Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. Richards was previously established as a Master Architect with HRB Site #615—the Richard Olney/Sim Bruce Richards House at 1644 Crespo Drive.

Richards was born in 1908 in Oklahoma. In 1920, the Richards family moved to Phoenix and learned about Frank Lloyd Wright. Richards studied architecture UC Berkley in 1930, but soon transferred to the art department. While studying art, he honed his abstract weaving skills. Prior to his graduation in 1934, Frank Lloyd Wright had an opportunity to view one of Richards' rug designs in an art show in San Francisco. Following correspondence with Wright, Richards was invited to join the Taliesin Fellowship and studied there from 1934 to 1936.

After leaving Taliesin, Richards arrived in San Diego in 1938. Richards was drafted into the US Navy and remained with the Navy until 1946. In the same year, Richards began working for William Templeton Johnson. In 1949, Richards started his own office and practiced architecture for nearly three decades until his passing in 1983. Richards designed over 200 projects not including his work in weaving, painting and furniture design.

While the subject house and the expansion were designed by Richards, the significant change to the main façade and a character-defining feature has significantly altered the house. The deck is contemporary in its execution and does not reflect the open character or sharp angular design of the house. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under Criterion D.

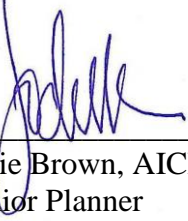
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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.

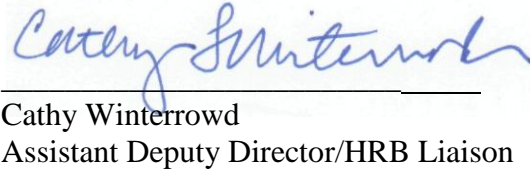
CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is not recommended that the 560 San Geronio Street be designated under any HRB Criteria due to a lack of integrity. 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.



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JB/cw

Attachment(s):

Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover