



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: January 15, 2010 REPORT NO. HRB-10-002

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of January 28, 2010

SUBJECT: **ITEM # 9 – Cecil Roper House**

APPLICANT: Greg Strangman, represented by Marie Burke Lia

LOCATION: 5147 Cape May Avenue, Ocean Beach Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Cecil Roper House located at 5147 Cape May Avenue as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Cecil Roper House located at 5147 Cape May Ave as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1963 under HRB Criterion C. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource embodies distinctive characteristics of the Modern Organic Geometric architectural style and retains a high level of integrity from its period of significance, the construction date of 1963. Specifically, character-defining features of Modern Organic Geometric architecture reflected in the building include the use of natural materials, exposed structure, the composition of an asymmetrical façade, the use of complex roof forms, and angular massing.



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## 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 house was designed by Loch Crane and built in 1963 in a Modern Organic Geometric architectural style.

The historic name of the resource, the Cecil Roper House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and includes the name of the individual who commissioned the home and was its first owner.

## ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by the Office of Marie Burke Lia, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion C, but not HRB Criteria D. 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 Modern Organic Geometric home is located adjacent to Ocean Beach and can be accessed from the alley behind Cape May Avenue. A contemporary condominium complex blocks the view of the residence from Cape May Avenue.

The central section of the home features a gable roof with wide overhanging eaves and exposed, pointed rafter tails. Due to the layout and floor plan of the home, sections in the rear and at the front have flat roofs. The front (southwest facing) façade is characterized by its asymmetrical composition, recessed (alcove) entryway, use of natural materials including board and batten siding and stone (appears to be lava rock). The board and batten wood siding is unfinished and has weathered with the ocean environment. An attached garage is located on the east side of the southwest façade; the garage door is camouflaged into the board and batten wall as there is practically a seamless construction between the garage door and the wall.

The recessed entryway features a few steps to the main (front) door, a small planting area, and is finished with a travertine tile floor. The travertine was used on the interior of the home as well as the back patio surrounding the pool, creating a unified appearance between the exterior and interior spaces. The front wood framed door is flanked by a large, fixed pane glass window. The use of a large glass window at the main entry allows a view through the home to the backyard.

The backyard features a swimming pool surrounded by the same travertine tile used in the front entryway and living spaces. Along with a visual connection between the front and back of the home, the use of the same material on the floor on the inside and outside creates a connection

between the spaces. In addition, the use of wood and lava rock continues in the interior, serving to integrate and blend indoor and outdoor living. The interior of the home was divided into multiple levels to separate different functions and take advantage of the site and ocean view. Staff understands that the owner is not interested in designation of the interior of the home.

The Modernism Historic Context Statement (City of San Diego, 2007) establishes the character-defining features and evaluation criteria for examples of Organic Geometric architecture. Primary character-defining features include exposed structure and materials, square, diamond and polygon design motifs, and the use of natural materials. Secondary character-defining features include sharp angular massing, asymmetrical facades, complex roof forms, and site specific design. Examples of this sub-style of Modernism are rare in San Diego, and typically associated with a master architects. Eligible resources should retain the majority of their character defining features, though some loss of character-defining features may be acceptable. The Cecil Roper House exhibits several of the primary and secondary character-defining features including exposed structure and materials, the use of natural materials (wood and stone), an asymmetrical facade, angular massing, complex roof forms, and site specific design. Though the setting of the home has been compromised by adjacent contemporary construction, the building reflects the majority of the primary and secondary character-defining features of Modern Organic Geometric architecture. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the Cecil Roper House 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 Cecil Roper House was designed by Loch Crane, a prominent architect in San Diego. Crane is not an established master architect and the applicant's report does not provide sufficient documentation or analysis to establish Crane as a master architect. In addition, the applicant's report does not clearly document how the building is a *notable example* of Crane's work. While the report does provide a good deal of information on Crane, it stops short of providing an analysis of Crane's work and whether or not he could be considered a Master Architect.

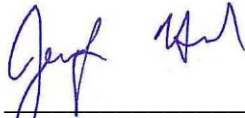
The *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria* state to establish a master architect several items need to be provided beyond a list of projects and biographical information. Information and documentation to provide includes, but is not limited to, examples of articles on the architect from trade journals, scholarly journals, acknowledgement of designs through awards, photographs of other projects by the proposed master, and an analysis of other works by the proposed master with identification of features that match stylistic characteristics of the master's development. Though biographical information and a list of Crane's projects were provided, the applicant's report did not demonstrate how the Cecil Roper House fits into Crane's larger body of work. Therefore, at this time staff does not support the establishment of Loch Crane as a master architect and does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D. With further research and analysis it may be possible to establish Crane as a master architect, at which time the Cecil Roper House could be reconsidered for its association with Crane.

## 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 recommended that the Cecil Roper House located at 5147 Cape May Avenue be designated under HRB Criterion C as an example of Modern Organic Geometric architecture. 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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Jennifer Hirsch  
Senior Planner



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Cathy Winterrowd  
Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

JH/cw

Attachment(s): Draft Resolution

Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

Map for 5147 Cape May Avenue

Article from December 2008 *San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyle Magazine*

Letter dated December 7, 2009 from Keith York, Founder of

ModernSanDiego.com

Tour program from December 2009 Mingei International Museum Mid-Century  
Modern Home Tour

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 1/28/2010

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 1/28/2010, to consider the historical designation of the **Cecil Roper House** (owned by Gregory B Strangman Revocable Trust, 852 5th Avenue, San Diego, CA 92101) located at **5147 Cape May Avenue, San Diego, CA 92107**, APN: **448-021-08-00**, further described as Lots 33 and 34, Block 78, Ocean Beach, Map 279, 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 Cecil Roper House on the following findings:

(1) The resource embodies distinctive characteristics of the Modern Organic Geometric architectural style and retains a high level of integrity from its period of significance, the construction date of 1963. Specifically, character-defining features of Modern Organic Geometric architecture reflected in the building include the use of natural materials, exposed structure, the composition of an asymmetrical façade, the use of complex roof forms, and angular massing.

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: N/A

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
JOHN LEMMO, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND  
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
NINA FAIN  
Deputy City Attorney