

CITY OF SAN DIEGO
M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: December 4, 2013

TO: Historical Resources Board and Interested Parties

FROM: Jodie Brown, AICP, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: **ITEM 11 — George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House**

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board pursuant to the Office of Historic Preservation requirement that the local jurisdiction be provided 90 days to review and comment on the nomination. The property is being nominated to the California Register under Criterion 3 for representing the work of a noted master architect and for possessing high artistic value.

Criterion 3 requires that a resource “*Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values.*” A California Register of Historical Resources Nomination Report was prepared by Diane Kane stating that the property at 7727-7729 and 7813 Lookout Drive is significant for its association with Cliff May (Attachment 1 and 2). The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a California Ranch (style), courtyard single family residence (type), early Cliff May-1936 (period) and method of custom construction of a rustic California rancho. HRB staff concurs that the property is significant under Criterion 3.

Based on the information submitted, it is recommended that the Historical Resources Board forward a positive recommendation for the George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House to the Office of Historic Preservation for listing on the California Register of Historical Places.



Jodie Brown, AICP
Senior Planner

Attachments:

1. Staff Report HRB-13-057 dated December 4, 2013
2. Applicant's California Register of Historical Resources Nomination Report under separate cover



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: December 4, 2013 REPORT NO. HRB-13-057

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of December 11, 2013

SUBJECT: **ITEM #10 – George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House**

APPLICANT: Diane Kane

OWNER: Lookout LLC represented by Scott A. Moomjian

LOCATION: 7727-7729 and 7813 Lookout Drive, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House located at 7727-7729 and 7813 Lookout Drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House located at 7727-7729 and 7813 Lookout Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1936 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 California Ranch style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1936 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a hollow square and enfilade plan form; fully enclosed central courtyard; hipped roof sheathed in irregularly laid Mission clay tile; stucco cladding with rounded edges; inset entries with exposed wooden lintels; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-light wood casement windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Clifford 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 custom California Ranch style.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board at the request of neighboring property owners to have the site designated as a historical resource. The property is located on several lots within a single family neighborhood in La Jolla.

The historic name of the resource, the George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of George and Marion Cottrell, who constructed the house as their personal residence and the name of Cliff May, an established Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Diane Kane, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, B, C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria C and D, but not HRB Criteria A and B. 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.

The applicant has proposed the subject property be designated under HRB Criterion A as a palm arboretum and special element of the La Jolla community. The subject property's third owners, Mr. and Mrs. Yianilos, purchased the property in 1963. Their fascination with palm trees resulted in the property's landscape developing into a veritable grove of many varieties of palms. While the Yianilos were active in the palm tree cultivation and provided consultation on the trees to other property owners, there is no documentation in the report to indicate that the subject property exemplifies special elements of the neighborhood's development. The palm trees were limited to the subject property without impacting the landscape in the neighborhood, surrounding properties, or the city as a whole. Additionally, the palm trees and most of the vegetation at the site are no longer extant. 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.

In 1963, Spero and Theresa Yianilos moved to the subject property. Formerly of Buffalo, NY, they moved to La Jolla in 1958 and operated a toy shop on Girard Avenue. As a self-taught horticulturist, Mr. Yianilos soon owned and operated Green World in Encinitas. His company handled commercial palm specimens and other tropical plant stock. As a couple they co-authored a book named after their business which was companion reading to a local television show on gardening. In the mid-1980s, Mr. and Ms. Yianilos, along with five other growers, founded the San Diego Plant and Flower Auction in Carlsbad. The collaborative effort served as a wholesale clearing house for fresh flowers and potted plants. In addition to their fondness for cultivating palm trees, Ms. Yianilos was active in the fight to preserve local palm trees

throughout San Diego County. She lobbied various public agencies to preserve the trees. Aside from their business interests, the Yianilos were active members of the La Jolla community and participated in various committees.

While the Yianilos were successful entrepreneurs and active in the community, they do not rise to the level of significance necessary for designation. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under 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 is a one story California Ranch style single family residence constructed in 1936 by Master Architect Clifford May. Built of wood frame-on-slab construction, the building exhibits a hollow square, enfilade plan form with a fully enclosed central courtyard that is accessible from nearly every room surrounding it. The building's varied roof is predominantly hipped, sheathed in irregularly laid Mission clay tile, and presents wide eave overhang with exposed rafter tails. Exterior stucco cladding is set with a light undulating finish and rounded edges. Accented entrances are deeply inset and feature broad, exposed wooden lintels. Fenestration consists generally of multi light wood casement windows with wide rail, stile and muntin profiles (highly characteristic of May-designed homes).

The building is set on a gently sloping lot above Lookout Drive and presents a north-facing primary elevation with distant ocean views. This primary elevation is centrally marked by a massive single pane of floor to ceiling glass opening to the living room and interior courtyard beyond. A deeply inset entry door with exposed wooden lintel is placed to the left of the living room. A single, battered stucco chimney is seen above and to the right of the entry.

The west portion of the structure contains the utilitarian quadrant of the house, including the kitchen, service yard, and attached two-car garage with substantial custom wood door. Adding to the indoor/outdoor living theme, covered terraces outline the south (rear) and east (side) elevations where four of the five bedrooms are located.

The applicant has also requested that the interior of the property is included as part of the designation. The property owner is not amenable to the interior designation. Therefore, staff does not recommend that the interiors are included as part of this designation.

While the Residential Building Record was not provided (the owner would not authorize its release from the County) as part of the nomination report, staff believes that the modifications to the house are adequately noted in the report. A visual review of the property identifies modifications based on newer materials, building permits, and comparison with the historic photos. Modifications to the subject structure do not impact the building's character defining features or significantly detract from its integrity. A pair of multi light casement windows that originally flanked the living room picture window has been replaced by a pair of glass doors. At the dining room, to the right of the picture window ensemble, a set of multi light casement windows and shutters has been replaced by single light French doors as evidenced by a circa 1960 photograph. To the left, at the east end of the north elevation, a bedroom window set

matching what was originally seen at the dining room has been replaced by a single paned fixed window set in the original opening – one shutter of that window set remains in place. The north entry door has been replaced by a single light French door.

The limited modifications to the subject building do not alter its character defining features or significantly impair the integrity as it relates to the 1936 date of construction. The house continues to convey the historic significance of California Ranch style architecture by embodying the character defining features of the style including the hollow square and enfilade plan form; fully enclosed central courtyard; hipped roof sheathed in irregularly laid Mission clay tile; stucco cladding with rounded edges; inset entries with exposed wooden lintels; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi light wood casement windows. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property 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 Clifford May 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.

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 space for the resident. The result was a new informal suburban 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*. Over the course of his life May designed more than one thousand buildings including the headquarters of *Sunset Magazine*, and the homes of many notable individuals.

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.

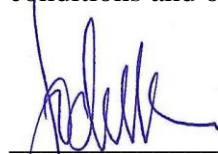
According to the Notice of Completion, George Cottrell commissioned May to construct the subject resource in 1936. In less than five months, May constructed the custom home to reflect his particular design sensibilities and indoor/outdoor living standards. The property is a notable work of Master Architect Clifford May and retains integrity to its original design. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property under HRB 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 recommended that the George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House located at 7727-7729 and 7813 Lookout Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1936 under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the California Ranch style of architecture; and HRB Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Clifford May. 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.



Jodie Brown, AICP
Senior Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Interim Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

JB/cw

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 12/11/2013

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 12/11/2013, to consider the historical designation of the **George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May House** (owned by Lookout LLC, 7510 Pepita Way, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **7727-7729 and 7813 Lookout Drive, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **352-012-16-00, 352-012-17-00, 352-012-19-00 and 352-012-20-00**, further described as PAR 1; PAR 2; PAR 4; and PAR 5 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 George and Marion Cottrell/Cliff May 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 California Ranch style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1936 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features a hollow square and enfilade plan form; fully enclosed central courtyard; hipped roof sheathed in irregularly laid Mission clay tile; stucco cladding with rounded edges; inset entries with exposed wooden lintels; and fenestration consisting primarily of multi-light wood casement windows. 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 Clifford 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 custom California Ranch style. 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: N/A

BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

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

BY: _____
CORRINE NEUFFER,
Deputy City Attorney