



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 16, 2014 REPORT NO. HRB-14-060

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of September 25, 2014

SUBJECT: **ITEM #6 – 303 Vista De La Playa**

APPLICANT: Joseph Limber represented by Scott A. Moomjian

LOCATION: 303 Vista de la Playa, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the property located at 303 Vista de la Playa as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 303 Vista de la Playa under any adopted HRB Criteria.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a proposed building modification or demolition of a structure of 45 years or more, consistent with San Diego Municipal Code Section 143.0212; and in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The building is a two story single family home located in the residential subdivision of the Fern Glen Colony.

The building is located on APN 351-132-03-00. The property, which was constructed in 1963, was located within the boundary of the 2004 Draft La Jolla Reconnaissance Survey, but was not identified in the survey, as the Context addressed only resources constructed up through the year 1962 (covering resources 40 years old or older at the time the work was undertaken in 2002.)

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Technical Report was prepared by Scott A. Moomjian, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. The report also concludes that the building is eligible for listing on the California State Register under Criterion 3 and the National Register under Criterion C. Staff disagrees, and finds that the building is not eligible for

designation under any Criteria, due to a lack of integrity. 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 303 Vista De La Playa 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 303 Vista De La Playa 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 property at 303 Vista de la Playa was constructed in 1963 in the Modern Contemporary style and features a long front facing broken-pitch gable roof with asphalt shingles; wide overhanging eaves; exposed rafter tails; wood frame construction clad in wood lap, board and batten, and T-111 siding; and a concrete block foundation with pilings. The narrow street frontage is dominated by a detached two-car garage with a gable roof and wood lap siding, also constructed in 1963. The lot widens as it extends back and down toward the beach frontage at the rear. Behind the garage, in the front courtyard is a rectangular swimming pool, originally constructed in 1963, but altered in 1972 and 1991. From the courtyard, the house presents as one story, with a tall projecting glass entry under clerestory windows set under the gable end. To the left is an 8' wide brick projection. To the right is a small window set high on the wall. Fenestration consists primarily of wood frame fixed, and metal frame sliding and jalousie windows.

Review of the building and existing floor plans against the original plans prepared by Loch Crane reveal numerous alterations of prominent and character defining features and elevations. Furthermore, the dates of many of these alterations are unknown. The materials in the report include not only the original Crane plans, but copies of the plans with hand-marked changes from an unknown individual at an unknown date. Façade-by-façade, the modifications (many of which are documented by comparing the original plans to the current conditions) are as follows:

Main (east) Façade:

- On the south end of the east façade, the original plans show a small wood frame and sash sliding window. The window is currently a large jalousie window.

- On the north end of the east façade, the original plans show a masonite panel to the right of the window. This panel is not present.
- Also on the north end of the east façade, a long, short window has been added to provide light to the partially sub-grade area below.
- At the northeast corner of the building, a fiberglass sunshade was added in 1965.

North (side) Façade:

- On the main (second) floor, the original window and door on the east end of the north façade has been removed.
- On the main (second) floor at the kitchen, the plans show two wood frame and sash sliding windows. These windows are currently pop-out windows with arched tops.
- On the main (second) floor at the dining room, the plans show a fixed window next to a masonite panel on the west-facing wall. This window has been enlarged and the masonite panel removed.
- On the main (second) floor at the living room, the plans show a larger wood frame and sash sliding window to the left and a smaller wood frame fixed window to the right, both over roughly 2-foot high fixed plate glass windows. All of these windows have been replaced with a narrow fixed window to the left and a large fixed window to the right, with no smaller fixed panes below.
- On the lower level, the recessed door on the east end of the façade has been removed and this area bumped out.
- On the lower level, the west-facing wood frame and sash window at bedroom has been enlarged into a sliding door.

West (rear, beach-facing) Façade:

- On the main (second) floor at the living room, the plans show two large fixed wood frame plate glass windows of equal size, both over roughly 2-foot high fixed plate glass windows. These windows have been combined into two larger fixed wood frame plate glass windows, with no smaller fixed panes below.
- On the lower level, the plans show a wrap-around porch which extends around to the south façade. Three-quarters of the original porch was enclosed by adding windows in the openings and demolishing the original wall behind. The remaining one-quarter was left open, a new sliding glass door was added to provide access to the enclosed porch, and a new staircase was added from the porch down to the terrace.

South (side) Façade:

- On the lower level, the porch that wrapped around from the west façade was enclosed by adding windows in the openings and demolishing the original wall behind.
- On the main (second) floor at the living room, the plans show a fixed wood frame plate glass window over a roughly 2-foot high fixed plate glass window. These windows have been combined into one larger fixed wood frame plate glass window, with no smaller fixed pane below.
- On the main (second) floor, an addition was added at the southwest corner of the house.
- On the main (second) floor, the original second floor balcony openings were in-filled with glass, and the original exterior wall was demolished.

- On the main (second) floor a 21.5-foot long section of wall was bumped out two-feet, resulting in a pop-out at the second floor.
- On the lower level, windows were added toward the east end of the façade.

As stated previously, it is unknown when most of these modifications occurred, as there are few permits associated with the property. Some of the revisions correspond to the hand-marked Crane plans, but again it is not known when these mark-ups were made or by whom. Some of these modifications, such as the enclosure of the rear porch and balcony and demolition of the original walls behind, have a significant singular impact on character-defining elements of the building that are critical to Modernist architecture – namely the connection between the indoors and the outdoors. Other modifications, including the south pop-out addition and the numerous window alterations also have a cumulative impact on the character-defining features and overall integrity of the building as it relates to design, materials, workmanship and feeling.

As discussed in the San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement, the Modern Contemporary sub-style was a popular design style for tract communities in the 1950s and 1960s. While clusters of Contemporary tracts retaining integrity should be considered for potential designation as districts, custom residential examples like the subject property may be eligible for individual designation. The style is primarily characterized by strong roof forms, typically with deep overhangs; large windows, often aluminum framed; and non-traditional exterior finishes. Secondary characteristics include angular massing; sun shades, screens or shadow block accents; attached garages or carports; and split-level design.

The subject property as originally designed exhibited the primary and most of the secondary character-defining features of the style. However, the extensive alterations noted, including the additions at both sides; the window alterations; and most notably the enclosure of the rear porch and balcony and demolition of the original walls and windows behind, have significantly compromised the original design of the building, resulting in a loss of integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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.

Loch Crane was born in Wyoming and his family moved to Point Loma in 1929. Crane's childhood interest in drawing led to high school drafting classes, after which he worked in the offices of Richard Requa and William Templeton Johnson. In March of 1941 Crane was accepted to Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona. Under Frank Lloyd Wright's tutelage, Crane adopted Wright's credo of "form follows function", borrowed from his own mentor Louis Sullivan, as his most fundamental principle of design. After the attack on Pearl Harbor Crane relinquished his fellowship and joined the Army Air Corps in April 1942. During the postwar period he stayed in Japan and during his travels he was able to explore his love of Japanese culture, lifestyle, housing and architecture, which would influence his design philosophy. Crane appreciated the "human scale" of Japanese architecture, which emphasized flexibility and versatility of spaces. The connection between indoor and outdoor elements and the

blending of the two through the use of natural elements and materials was a value which Crane also shared and would incorporate into his design.

Crane returned to San Diego in 1946 and began an architectural practice. His first project was his own family residence on Udall Street in Point Loma, which was designed to be built in stages and expand as the family grew. Soon Crane was obtaining commissions for various projects, including private residences, business buildings and warehouses. As an unlicensed architect, Crane soon came under pressure from the City of San Diego to obtain his architect's license. Under the G.I. Bill, Crane received his education at the University of Southern California, completing the five year degree program in just three years (1954-1957). Crane worked as an architect designing both residential and commercial buildings in San Diego during the 1950's and 1960's. A partial list of Crane's known work was provided in the applicant's report.

Crane's core beliefs in architecture were influenced by his time spent with Wright at Taliesin, his experiences in Japan, and his early work with Requa and Johnson. In a 2009 interview discussed in detail in the report, Crane stated that his primary design philosophies and principles were:

1. Form follows function.
2. The honesty of the exposed structure.
3. The structure should be open and spacious.
4. Natural materials in texture and color should be used.
5. The modular unit was essential to a sense of scale and proportion.
6. The use of the hexagon as a measure to ensure openness of the interior and allow for different activities within the interior space.

Two of Crane's buildings have been designated by the Historical Resources Board – HRB Site #897, the Industrial Developers/ Loch Crane Office Building located at 3344 Industrial Court (designated under HRB Criterion C, but currently on appeal) and HRB Site #943, the Cecil Roper House located at 5147 Cape May Avenue (designated under HRB Criterion C).

While the report does provide a good deal of information on Crane and his general philosophy, it lacks the detailed analysis of Crane's work needed to determine whether or not he could be considered a Master Architect, although it does appear that he may be designated as such with additional analysis. Furthermore, even if the report did provide the analysis needed to establish Crane as a Master, the subject property lacks sufficient integrity to reflect his notable work. As detailed in the discussion of Criterion C, the building as it currently stands is vastly different from the plans that can be attributed to Crane. With no documentation that any of the alterations were designed by Crane, staff finds that the building no longer retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship and feeling, which are critical to conveying significance under Criterion D, were Crane to be considered a Master Architect. Therefore, staff does not recommend 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 303 Vista De La Playa 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 303 Vista De La Playa is not located within a designated historic district. Therefore, the property is not eligible for designation under HRB Criterion F.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

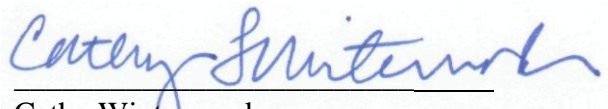
If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the property located at 303 Vista de la Playa not be designated under any HRB Criteria. 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.



Kelley Stanco
Senior Planner



Cathy Winterrowd
Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

KS/cw

Attachment:

1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover