



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

# Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: June 12, 2009 REPORT NO. HRB-09-042

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board  
Agenda of June 25, 2009

SUBJECT: **Item #7 – James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House**

APPLICANT: Roger K. and Jolinda H. Marr, owners  
Represented by Scott Moomjian, consultant

LOCATION: 1433 Puterbaugh Street, Uptown Community, Council District 2

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House as a historical resource.

## STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House at 1433 Puterbaugh Street as a historical resource under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies distinctive characteristics through retention of character defining features of the Modern Contemporary style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1948 period of significance; and
2. The resource is a notable work of established Master Architect, Lloyd Ruocco.



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## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board at the owners request to have the property designated as a historical resource. The house at 1433 Puterbaugh Street is a single family home that was constructed in 1948 and exhibits character defining features of Modern Contemporary style architecture including a strong, flat roof form; large windows; mixed exterior finishes; horizontal orientation; and a multi-level design, integrated into the sloping site.

The house was designed by Lloyd Ruocco, an established Master Architect, for James Don and Rita H. Keller, the property owners at the time of construction and residents of the property until 1958. The historic name James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House is consistent with the adopted HRB naming policy as it recognizes the first owners and residents of the house as well as the name of Ruocco, a Master Architect.

## ANALYSIS

A historical nomination report was prepared by Scott Moomjian, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff concurs with the determination that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C as a good example of the Modern Contemporary style and Criteria D as a notable work by Master Builder Lloyd Ruocco, 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 1948 and designed in the Modern Contemporary style, the subject house is two stories, with a 1,797 square foot grade level main living area and a 944 square foot finished basement level, and is built on a concrete foundation. The house is located on a sloping lot and reads as single story due to the low, horizontal, massing and site specific design. The flat composition roof has a wide boxed eave and integrated rain gutters. Skylights are present near the entry, and a brick chimney is visible above the roof toward the eastern end of the structure. An attached two-car garage with a non-historic roll up garage door is present on the western end of the house.

Ruocco was known for honest expression of structural materials, and employed redwood as a favorite material. The Keller residence is a departure from his usual use of exposed redwood; the exterior finish is a mixed palette of painted brick, stucco, and glass. The front and eastern side elevations are designed for privacy, with painted brick walls and a ribbon of transom windows with obscured glass running the length of the front elevation and approximately halfway down the east elevation. A stucco boxed eave with a wide overhang is present above the transom windows. The intersection of these elevations is characterized by unusual brickwork. Rather than mitering the ends of the brick to create a smooth corner, Ruocco designed the corner to incorporate the whole brick resulting in an alternating, zig-zag, appearance. The front entry door is oriented toward the diagonal at the intersection of the front elevation and side wall of the garage. The front door is constructed of a single pane of obscured glass and a wood frame, and is flanked by matching sidelights set at a 45 degree angle to the door. The front and eastern side elevations are the only elevations visible from the public right of way. The rear elevation is made

up of large fixed pane windows and sliding glass doors, and features a balcony over the finished basement level.

Alterations to the house have been minimal, especially on the street visible elevations. The homeowner indicated that sections of the stucco boxed eave and drip edge have been repaired in kind. The consultant report documents several other alterations, including the finished basement addition in 1961; and the removal of original shiplap balcony siding to create an open balustrade. Additionally, the consultant report mentions minor changes to the windows; however specific window changes are not identified in the report and were not noticed by staff in the field as only the front and east elevations are visible from the street.

*CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.*

Lloyd Ruocco was born in 1907 in Portland, Maine. While Lloyd was still a baby, the Ruocco family moved to Canada. In 1923, his family moved to southern California, first to Los Angeles then to Long Beach and finally ending up in San Diego. While attending San Diego High School, Lloyd entered a contest run by Richard Requa for an original home design. Ruocco's design was so unusual that he was awarded a special third prize and a chance to meet Requa. After attending San Diego State College for one term, Ruocco obtained a job with the office of Requa and Jackson. Then he decided to attend the University of California at Berkeley and graduated in 1933. While at Berkeley, Ruocco was exposed to the Beaux Arts tradition but favored the designs of Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright. Returning to San Diego after graduating from Berkeley, Ruocco worked for Requa again on the County Administration Building.

Lloyd Ruocco has been called, after Irving Gill, the second most significant Modernist architect in San Diego architectural history. A proponent of the Modernist Style, Ruocco, is one of the most innovative and community minded architects that San Diego has ever produced, regarded as San Diego's "No. 1 designer and thinker" during the 1950's and 1960's. Ruocco, along with several other San Diego Modernist architects was instrumental in establishing a regional subset of the Modern style known locally as the Post and Beam style. This style is characterized by minimization of solid load bearing walls; horizontal orientation; minimal applied decoration; strong interior and exterior connection, usually through the extensive use of glass; open interior floor plans; and direct expression of the structural system, usually wood or steel.

In 2000, Ruocco was established as a Master Architect with the designation of HRB #434, The Design Center at 3601-3635 Fifth Avenue. This building served as the architectural office for his firm and for his wife Ilsa's interior design firm and as a place for Ruocco to mentor young architects, including Homer Delawie with whom he formed a partnership in 1958.

Ruocco was also an advocate for social change and sound city planning. In 1961, Ruocco founded Citizens Coordinate for Century 3, an organization which continues its leadership role in promoting strong city planning today. Ruocco was also a founding member of the San Diego County Creativity Research Committee and a member of the San Diego City Urban Renewal Commission. In 1974, he was elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects. Ruocco passed away in 1981.

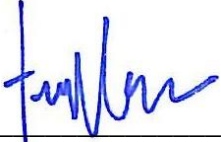
The property is a rare, and intact, example of Ruocco's work in the Modern Contemporary style, and is a departure from his work in the medium of exposed redwood. As such it is a notable example of Ruocco's work and staff recommends designation under Criterion D.


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 recommended that the Historical Resources Board designate the James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House at 1433 Puterbaugh Street as a historical resource under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Modern Contemporary style, and HRB Criterion D as a notable example of the work of Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco. 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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Tricia Olsen  
Associate Planner

  
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Cathy Winterrowd  
Senior Planner/Program Coordinator

TO/cw

- Attachments: (1) Draft Resolution  
(2) Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 6/25/2009

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 6/25/2009, to consider the historical designation of the **James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House** (owned by Roger K. & Jolinda H. Marr 2001 Trust, 1433 Puterbaugh Street, San Diego, CA 92103) located at **1433 Puterbaugh Street, San Diego, CA 92103**, APN: **451-244-01-00**, further described as Portion of Lots 4 & 5, Block 6, Marine View, Map 1182 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 James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its embodiment of distinctive characteristics of the Modern Contemporary style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1948 period of significance. Specifically, the building retains a strong, flat roof form; large windows; mixed exterior finishes; horizontal orientation; and a multi-level design, and is integrated into the sloping site. 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 for its representation of a notable example of the work of Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco. Specifically it is a rare intact example of Ruocco's work in the Modern Contemporary style, and a departure from his work in the medium of exposed redwood. 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: \_\_\_\_\_  
NINA FAIN  
Deputy City Attorney