



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: May 10, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-035

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of May 24, 2012

SUBJECT: **ITEM #9 – Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House**

APPLICANT: James and Michele Joyce; represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 4777 Avion Way, 92115, College Area Community, Council District 7

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House located at 4777 Avion Way as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House located at 4777 Avion Way as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1966 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 custom designed modern Ranch style architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1966 period of significance. Specifically, the resource has a low-medium pitched gable roof sheathed with wood shake shingles, a wide roof overhang with exposed rafter and finished end-tails, an exterior sheathed with slump stone veneer, smooth stucco, and board and batten siding, “U” shaped floor plan, and two massive chimney with a battered top and finish in a slump stone veneer.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Cliff May and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource features his main design principal of indoor-outdoor living and the notion of the Ranch house lifestyle, but with the integration of modern efficiency. The house also features sprawling one story living, prominent side and cross gabled roof, a roof ridge skylight, a roof covered lanai and extensive use of glass to bring in the outdoors.

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 is located within the Alvarado Estates gated community, a large lot single family residential neighborhood.

The historic name of the resource has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of original owner, Eason Enterprises, who constructed the house as a speculation house and the name of Cliff May, a Master Architect.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research was prepared by IS Architecture which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D and staff concurs. 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 property is located within Alvarado Estates west of San Diego State University, which was subdivided in 1948 to offer large lot homes, a private airstrip, and community horse stables. By 1966 the house at 4777 Avion Way was constructed, the airstrip had been closed and the land was used for 1-acre residential lots.

The house features a "U" shaped floor plan oriented to the rear of the house. The roof is a low-medium pitched cross gabled roof sheathed with wood shake shingles. The roof also features wide overhangs with exposed rafters and curved end-tails. The exterior of the building is finished with a mixture of slump stone veneer, smooth stucco, and board and batten siding. Fenestration consists of aluminum sliding and fixed windows.

The north elevation features a broad gable section of slump block with no windows flanked by two set back wings. The northeast portion of the house has three windows with a raised wood grille on the middle one. West of the main gable is the deeply recessed and slightly angled front entrance with wood double doors. The west wing also features an additional window with a wood grille, a low planter wall, and an attached two car garage.

The east and west elevation both feature three distinct bays each sheathed with different material: slump block, stucco, or board and batten siding. The east façade features evenly spaced sliding aluminum windows on the wall plane.

The south elevation consists of three bays of stucco, slump stone, and board and batten wall finishes. The roof is low pitch and features a cross gable at the midpoint. The cross gable is comprised of post and beam construction from the living room outside over a lanai, pool and pool terrace. Floor to ceiling windows and sliding glass doors open the living room onto the covered lanai and pool. This area creates the "U" shape of the house. Narrow skylights on each side of the ridge span the cross-gable from the interior to the exterior over the lanai, transitioning

into an open roof above the pool, and then once again returning to the narrow skylights over the end section of the pool terrace.

The pool area consists of two levels. The lanai level is the same elevation as the living room and the pool area is at a lower level. The entire area is covered by the same gable roof of the house. Four wood posts provide support for the gable roof with two of them uniquely situated. One of the posts is located in a planter adjacent to the pool and the other is on a concrete pier island in the pool.

Over the years there have been a few modifications to the house, rain gutters and down spouts were added and the interior skylight was repurposed into a linear light fixture. These modifications do not detract from the historic nature or character-defining features of the house. The house continues to convey the historic significance of the custom design modern Ranch style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style. Therefore, staff recommends 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.

Master Architect Clifford May, undisputed father of the modern ranch house, 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.

May built his first house with the help of engineering contractor Orville U. Miracle in 1931. Its successful sale encouraged him to build additional speculative houses. 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*, the Los Angeles home of Zubin Metha, music director for the New York Philharmonic, and a house for Gianni Agnelli, founder of Fiat, the Italian car company.

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.

The property at 4777 Avion Way is one of three known custom Ranch houses designed in San Diego County by May in the 1960s. There are currently eight May designed homes listed on the San Diego Historic Register:

- HRB #355- Alexander and Nancy Highland House, 2400 Presidio Drive
- HRB #387- The Lindstrom House, 4669 East Talmadge Drive
- HRB #416- Violetta Horton Spec House #1, 6303 La Jolla Scenic Drive South
- HRB #417- Violetta Horton Speculation House #2, 7447 Hillside Drive
- HRB #479- Colonel Arthur J. & Francis O'Leary House, 4725 Norma Drive
- HRB #679- Violetta Horton/Cliff May Spec House #3, 7477 Hillside Drive
- HRB #731- Violetta Lee Horton Spec House #4, 7575 Hillside Drive
- HRB #1031- John R. and Florence Porterfield Beardsley House, 3130 Shadowlawn Street

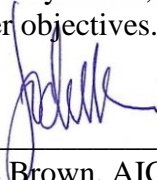
The subject property, 4777 Avion Way, is a notable work of Master Architect Clifford May representing his integration of indoor outdoor living in the custom designed modern Ranch style. Based on the research provided in the applicant's historical report, as well as staff's own research and field visit, staff recommends designation of the Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House as a significant historical resource 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 Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House located at 4777 Avion Way be designated with a period of significance of 1966 under HRB Criterion C for embodying the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of custom designed modern Ranch style architecture and Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Cliff May and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. 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
 Principal Planner/HRB Liaison

JB/cw

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A

ADOPTED ON 5/24/2012

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 5/24/2012, to consider the historical designation of the **Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House** located at **4777 Avion Way, San Diego, CA 92115**, APN: **461-290-07-00**, further described as LOT 110 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 Eason Enterprises/Cliff May Spec House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics of the custom designed modern Ranch style architecture and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1966 period of significance. Specifically, the resource has a low-medium pitched gable roof sheathed with wood shake shingles, a wide roof overhang with exposed rafter and finished end-tails, an exterior sheathed with slump stone veneer, smooth stucco, and board and batten siding, "U" shaped floor plan, and two massive chimney with a battered top and finish in a slump stone veneer. 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 Cliff May and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource features his main design principal of indoor-outdoor living and the notion of the Ranch house lifestyle, but with the integration of modern efficiency. The house also features sprawling one story living, prominent side and cross gabled roof, a roof ridge skylight, a roof covered lanai and extensive use of glass to bring in the outdoors. 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: _____
KEITH BAUERLE
Deputy City Attorney