



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 8, 2022 REPORT NO. HRB-22-035

HEARING DATE: September 22, 2022

SUBJECT: **ITEM #02 – Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Troy Wu and Insun Lee; represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 1676 El Camino Del Teatro, La Jolla Community, Council District 1  
APN 352-150-11-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House located at 1676 El Camino Del Teatro as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House located at 1676 El Camino Del Teatro as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1973-2020 under HRB Criterion B and C. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is identified with Joseph and Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada, historically significant individuals, and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was the primary residence for Joseph Y. Yamada, a prominent landscape architect of the Wimmer and Yamada firm responsible for the landscape design of many San Diego landmarks and institutions, and Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada, a prominent civic activist who worked in philanthropic, educational, and civic organizations such as the Japanese American Citizens League, and the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation and raised awareness of the history of Japanese Internment.
2. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Shed style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1973 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features an asymmetrical design, a lack of roof overhang, horizontal cedar wood siding, shed roof forms with clerestory windows, large fixed windows, and an unelaborated chimney.

## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with a preliminary review application to determine whether or not the building is historically significant as part of a constraints analysis for future development. The one-story residence was built on a sloping lot and surrounded by similarly scaled residential homes.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Joseph Y. Yamada and Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada who are historically significant individuals.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by IS Architecture, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria B and C, and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

*CRITERION B - Is identified with persons or events significant in local, state or national history.*

The subject property was commissioned by Joseph Y. Yamada and Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada, original residents of the property from 1973 to 2020.

Joseph "Joe" Yamada (1930-2020) was born in San Diego. He developed a passion for landscapes as a child. During WWII, Yamada was detained by federal authorities because of his Japanese ancestry and was interned in Arizona for several years. As a teenager, he met Elizabeth Kikuchi in the internment camp and whom he would later marry in 1954. After the war, Yamada returned to San Diego and worked alongside his father to design and create residential landscapes. Following a short stint with the U.S. Air Force, Yamada studied landscape architecture at UC Berkeley and was influenced by prominent modernist instructors, including Thomas Church, Lawrence Halprin, and Garrett Eckbo. Upon graduating, he joined the office of Harriet B. Wimmer and later formed a partnership with her in 1960 named "Wimmer Yamada & Associates." Yamada's work included designing landscapes for many large establishments and landmarks of San Diego, such as the Islandia Hotel & Restaurant along Mission Bay (1961), Sea World (1963-64), Scripps Institute of Oceanography (1963-1970), Seaport Village (1978), Embarcadero Marina Park (1978), the La Jolla Village Plaza (1979), and Del Mar Grandstand (1991). He also worked on campus planning for UCSD for about 20 years (1960s-1980s). He served on the City of San Diego Park and Recreation Board for seven years in the 1970s. Yamada has been credited with influencing local land development and landscape architecture in public and civic land planning from the 1960s to the 1990s. Recognizing Yamada's accomplishments, the American Society of Landscape Architects named him a Fellow in 1979. He has also received awards from the American Institute of Architects.

Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada (1930-2020) was born in Hunting Beach and settled in San Diego in 1941. During WWII, she was interned in Arizona, where she met Joseph Yamada. After the war, Yamada

obtained an English Literature degree from UC Berkeley and received a California Secondary Teaching Credential. She taught English at San Diego High School and was the first Asian-American teacher at that school. Yamada later joined her husband's firm and worked as an administrator and partner from 1976 to 1995, marketing the firm's projects. Elizabeth Yamada was a member of the Japanese American Citizens League, a center for cultural activity and activism for Japanese Americans. She was an outspoken contributor who shared her experience of the Japanese internment camps during WWII, serving on the Board of Directors of the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF) in the 2010s. In the same decade, she directed and guided exhibits and education for the Japanese American National Museum (JANM) in Los Angeles, serving on the organization's Board of Governors. Demonstrating her teaching and leadership, Yamada served on the Design Review Committee for the San Diego Parks and Recreation Board (1970s), the City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture (1980s), the Board of Governors of the San Diego Foundation (2010-2012), the LEAD advisory board and the San Diego Historical Society advisory committee (2008), the San Diego State University College of Professional Studies and Fine Arts advisory board (2010s), the Family Literacy Foundation (2010s), the Charter 100 board of directors (2010s), and the UC San Diego Board of Overseers.

Elizabeth Yamada received numerous awards, including the 1987 Salvation Army Auxiliary's Women of Dedication, 1988 City Club Citizen of the Year, and the 2006 Cool Woman Award from the Girl Scouts of America. In recognition of Elizabeth Yamada's philanthropy and contributions, the Charter One Hundred named Yamada "Woman of the year" in 2004, noting her volunteer work with the Family Literacy Foundation, the NJAMF, the JANM, and more.

Besides the subject property, the only identified property associated with the Yamadas is 3611 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, also known as the "Design Center" (built 1949). While this property is associated Joseph Yamada's career and Elizabeth Yamada's later career, it is more indicative of the work of Wimmer and Yamada as a whole, and not the personal lives of the Yamadas. No other specific locations were identified. Therefore, 1676 El Camino Del Teatro is the property best associated with Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada, who resided at the property during their most productive years.

Significance Statement: The subject resource was the primary residence of Joseph Y. Yamada, a prominent San Diego landscape architect, and Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada, a prominent activist and educator, during their most productive years. Joseph Yamada, with Harriett Wimmer, operated the regionally significant Wimmer and Yamada, a commercial landscape architecture firm; he was instrumental in designing the landscape for numerous San Diego landmarks and institutions, such as Sea World, Scripps Institute of Oceanography, Seaport Village, Embarcadero Marina Park, UCSD, and the La Jolla Village Plaza. His contributions also included serving on the San Diego Parks and Recreation Board, shaping ordinances and public lands. Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada was also involved in the Wimmer and Yamada firm from the 1970s to the 1990s. She was active in philanthropic, educational, and activist organizations such as the Japanese American Citizens League and the National Japanese American Memorial Foundation, raising awareness of the history of Japanese Internment of WWII. Her contributions also include service in various San Diego governmental boards and commissions. Together the Yamadas made demonstrable contributions to shape, educate, and serve the City of San Diego while residing at the subject property until their passing in 2020. Therefore, staff recommends the designation of the subject property at 1676 El Camino Del Teatro under HRB Criterion B with a period of significance of 1973-2020.

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 was constructed primarily in the Shed style. Built on a sloping hillside, the residence has a site-specific design. The property follows a compound, rambling floor plan with a small central courtyard. Clad entirely in with horizontal cedar siding and glass, the house features flat roof, shed roof, and clerestory windows. A two-car garage is attached to the residence. The entire site is characterized the generous use of natural materials, including wood, stone, and glass. The building's massing is angular and exhibits large windows. These design motifs are influenced by the Contemporary style, Organic Geometric style, and Shed style.

The south elevation is the primary elevation, featuring the front entry covered by a wooden trellis and surrounded by various mature plants and a small waterfall. The entry walkway is textured concrete, and the entry façade is a wood and glass wall. The west elevation features uninterrupted wood siding and slopes downward towards the north. A wooden deck is present along this elevation, as are its wood piers and concrete footings. The shed roof and massing are visible from this elevation. The north elevation is the rear elevation, and its form is dominated by a northerly sloping shed roof. The walls along this elevation are set on different planes. They are fronted by a full-width redwood deck with guard rails. Fenestration along this elevation includes groupings of casement windows and full-length glass walls and doors. The rear yard features mature plantings and a putting green. The east elevation is inaccessible from the front. It features an exterior redwood patio deck, a bench, and a koi pond. An inset courtyard is present, exhibiting full-length windows and louvered glazing. Fenestration within the courtyard elevation also includes sliding glass doors, fixed windows, and clerestory windows.

Modifications to the property include the undated roof replacement from wood shingles to composite shingles, the undated in-kind replacement of the east deck, and the 2014 addition of a putting green in the rear yard. Overall, these modifications do not significantly impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

The Shed style architecture style originated in the 1960s from Charles Moore and Joseph Esherick through their design of the Sea Ranch Lodge condominium complex in Sonoma County. This architecture spread throughout the United States and is expressed in both commercial and residential structures. Typically, Shed style buildings are clad with wood board siding, T-11 plywood siding, wood shingles, or brick veneer and contain no roof overhangs. Character-defining features include asymmetry and juxtaposition of forms; recessed front door; varied massing; long narrow windows; and clerestory windows to provide ventilation. While common in one or two-story houses, the Shed style can also be seen in more elaborate custom homes or apartments. This form of architecture was short-lived, and in the 1980s the Shed style slowly became replaced by more traditional designs.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Shed style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including an asymmetrical design, a lack of roof overhangs, horizontal cedar wood siding, shed roof forms with clerestory windows, large fixed windows, and an unelaborated chimney. 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.*

The applicant's request for designation for the property located at 1676 El Camino Del Teatro did not include information to support a determination under HRB Criterion D; therefore, staff has not made a determination regarding eligibility under Criterion D at this time. Eligibility under this criterion may be reevaluated at a future date pending submittal of additional information and analysis.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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. 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 Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House located at 1676 El Camino Del Teatro be designated with a period of significance of 1973-2020 under HRB Criterion B for its association with historically significant individuals Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada and Criterion C as a good example of the Shed style.



Alvin Lin  
Assistant Planner



Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 9/22/2022

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 9/22/2022, to consider the historical designation of the **Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House** (owned by Troy Wu & Insun lee, 1676 El Camino Del Teatro, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **1676 El Camino Del Teatro, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **352-150-11-00**, further described as LOT 11 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 Joseph and Elizabeth Yamada House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B in connection with Joseph Y. Yamada and Elizabeth Kukuchi Yamada who are historically significant persons and retains integrity for that association. Specifically, the resource was their primary residence during their most productive years as a prominent landscape architect and a civic activist with a period of significance of 1973-2020. 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 C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Shed style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1973 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features an asymmetrical design, a lack of roof overhang, horizontal cedar wood siding, shed roof forms with clerestory windows, large fixed windows, and an unelaborated chimney. 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:

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,  
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY  
CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD  
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY  
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

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SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

**1676 El Camino Del Teatro, San Diego, CA 92037**

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **352-150-11-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**