



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 11, 2024 REPORT NO. HRB-24-018

HEARING DATE: April 25, 2024

SUBJECT: **ITEM #4 – 7960 LA JOTA WAY**

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

APPLICANT: Daniel and Carrie Aisen; represented by IS Architecture

LOCATION: 7960 La Jota Way, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 346-463-11-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the property located at 7960 La Jota Way as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Do not designate the property located at 7960 La Jota Way under any adopted HRB Criteria.

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

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on

certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 7960 La Jota Way is a one-story, Ranch style single-family residential building with a detached garage constructed in 1952 in the Spindrift area of the La Jolla Community Planning Area. The property is located on a sloping lot at the north end of La Jota Way. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1952, the property has been modified on several occasions. In 1998 a construction project included the garage addition, the two-story addition with a roof deck, the north elevation first-floor deck expansion and railing replacement with glass, the breezeway enclosure, the service entry window and door opening alterations, the north elevation living room window and door replacements, the north elevation kitchen addition which removed original windows and introduced new exterior windows and doors, the interior courtyard elevation original entry opening alteration with new window and door openings, and the interior courtyard elevation bathroom window opening modifications. Sometime pre-2020 three windows on the north elevation were replaced and sometime post-2020 the service entry fence was removed.

In 2022, the applicant applied for a building permit to remodel the building. Heritage Preservation staff reviewed the property consistent with San Diego Municipal Code section 143.0212 and determined the property to be potentially significant due to its association with Master Architects Robert Mosher and Roy Drew. The scope of work included redesigning and rebuilding the 1998 north elevation deck, infilling the 1998 east elevation kitchen addition windows, and installing folding doors at the previously altered north elevation living room door/window opening. The project also modified the 1998 two-story addition to be smaller and differentiated in exterior material, converted a north elevation basement-level window set to doors, and removed the 1998 breezeway infill and replaced it with a glass wall and glass door. Furthermore, the project restored the original service entry (described as "front entry" by the Historical Resources Research Report) doors and windows based on existing remnants of the original framing and proposed an in-kind replacement of the exterior wood shingles. Staff approved this permit as consistent with the Secretary of the Interiors (SOI) Standards for Rehabilitation. The report cited a need for fire-resistive construction driven by insurance considerations and local building codes. Subsequently, the applicant worked with Heritage Preservation staff to determine an appropriate substitute material. The owners elected to use a fire-resistant synthetic shingle siding but did not match in-kind the original number of courses. The applicant asserts that evidence of the original paint color was found at the top of the original deteriorated shingles and used this information to justify replacing all existing unpainted exterior shingles with colored shingles. However, it is unclear if all the siding was once painted, as other photos from 2020 do not show evidence of paint at the top of exterior shingles. Copper gutters and downspouts were also added to the building. In 2022, the owners obtained permits for an interior courtyard pool and for rooftop solar panels. Permits for rear yard pools and solar panels do not trigger a review by Heritage Preservation staff and the project was not reviewed for consistency with the SOI Standards.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by IS Architecture, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff disagrees and finds that the building is not eligible under any HRB Criteria. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board 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 subject property is a single-family residence with a detached garage constructed in 1952 in the Custom Ranch style. It is sited on a northerly-sloping lot overlooking the ocean. The building is roughly U-shaped in plan, and it has a one-story form that graduates to a three-story form as the structure approaches downward the northerly slope. Its gable and hipped roofs are low-pitched and covered in synthetic wood shakes. The boxed eaves are overhanging and features “pork chop” style eave returns, and the building contains two brick chimneys. The exterior cladding is synthetic multi-width shingles made to resemble wood.

The east elevation, facing the driveway, is the primary elevation according to the Historical Resource Research Report. This elevation reveals a detached two-car garage that has a roof connecting to the main residence. This connecting roof forms a breezeway below that is currently glassed-in. The north end of this elevation contains a wood-framed glass entrance door. Fenestration along this elevation is fixed or casement wood windows in various groupings. Also at this elevation are concrete steps leading down to the basement level, where the exterior wall is brick.

The north elevation, facing the Pacific Ocean, contains a two-story addition with a deck. This addition has flat and shed roofs, no eave overhang, and large picture windows. It is sided in a vertical wood rainscreen exterior finish. The first-floor façade is accentuated by a balcony with glass panel railing which are supported by simple wood posts. The first floor contains a wood frame sliding door, a tripartite window set, folding doors, and a large picture window, all set on different wall planes. The basement level, clad in running bond brick veneer, contains two door openings with single-lite French doors but is otherwise devoid of architectural elaborations.

The west elevation, facing the interior courtyard, contains a covered patio formed by the overhanging roof that runs the length of the building façade and is supported by decorative square posts set on brick bases. This elevation exhibits sets of floor-to-ceiling glass doors and awning windows. The exterior siding is composed of synthetic wood shingles, and wood vertical rain screen system clads the 1998 two-story addition.

A 1998 guest suite addition is attached to the garage, and it features large wood-framed floor-to-ceiling windows, glass doors, and large single-lite casement windows. The garage also contains louvered doors. An in-ground pool is located within the interior courtyard.

The subject property exhibits some of the character-defining features of the Custom Ranch style, including horizontal massing, custom details of large wood windows, and prominent low-sloped gable and hipped roofs with deep overhangs. However, many of the large windows at the north elevation were modified prior to 2020 and do not reflect their original designs. The property also displays some secondary character-defining features of the style, such as a sprawling “U” shaped floor plan around a courtyard and (synthetic) wood and brick veneer siding. Overall, the property

exhibits some, but not all, of the primary and secondary character-defining features of the Custom Ranch style as described in the [San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement](#). The property also lacks custom design features that distinguish it from details typically found on tract ranch styled homes, which were popular during this era, such as large prominent masonry chimneys, window shutters, or large attached carports/garages. Therefore, staff does not find that the subject resource rises to the level of significance to be individually eligible for designation as an example of the Custom Ranch style.

The Custom Ranch style of architecture was popular between 1950 and 1975 and is differentiated from Tract Ranch homes because they were typically custom-designed with a specific client in mind. The Ranch style became the era's most prevalent type of residential construction in San Diego. Custom Ranch Homes are generally more lavish than their tract counterparts, but like Tract Ranch housing, materials and detailing are generally traditional. Primary character defining features include horizontal massing, wide to the street; usually single-story; custom details such as wood shutters, large wood windows, or large prominent brick or stone chimneys; and prominent low-sloped gabled or hipped roofs with deep overhangs. Secondary character defining features include a sprawling floor plan frequently "L" or "U" shaped around a central courtyard; large attached carports or garages; and expensive building materials such as wood shingle roofing, wood siding, brick, stone, and adobe which are usually much more generous in materials and craftsmanship than tract homes.

In 1998, the building was substantially altered through the construction of a two-story addition, which dramatically changed the courtyard facade's original entry opening; the north elevation kitchen addition was constructed, which introduced new windows and doors; the north elevation deck was enlarged; and a garage addition was built. Overall, the 1998 construction project was not consistent with the SOI Standards for Rehabilitation. Furthermore, when comparing the 1998 existing floor plan and the 2020 photos, it is evident that two window openings in the courtyard elevation were altered, and three windows to the north elevation were replaced but not in-kind in terms of design. In 2022, staff approved new alterations in areas previously modified in 1998, which prevented more integrity loss. While this project was determined to be consistent with the SOI Standards, it did not restore the property's architectural integrity, as Rehabilitation standards do not require restoration of the prior alterations. Staff worked to ensure that the rehabilitation project preserved the remaining distinctive original features of the building and that new exterior alterations were differentiated and compatible with the historic character of the house. This project also partially restored the building's integrity of design on the east elevation, but it did not restore the building's most substantial alterations and the house retains significant modifications on the north elevation and the interior courtyard elevation.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Custom Ranch style. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, does not retain integrity of materials, design, workmanship, and feeling. Therefore, the property does not retain integrity to its 1952 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

In conclusion, the property embodies a limited number of Custom Ranch character-defining features and does not rise to the level of significance under Criterion C. Furthermore, the property does not

retain integrity to its original design due to alterations between 1998 and 2022. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion C as an example of the Custom Ranch style.

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

The Historical Resource Research Report credits the subject property's design to the firm Architects Mosher Drew (AMD), composed of Master Architect Robert Mosher and Master Architect Roy Drew. The report found the property significant under Criterion D, stating that the property is representative of the notable work of the firm. The report does not credit the work to any individual architect of AMD.

According to the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Criteria](#), Criterion D requires the resource be representative of the notable work of the Master, as demonstrated in the nomination. Staff finds insufficient evidence in the report to qualify the property as representative of the notable work of Master Architects Robert Mosher and Roy Drew.

The report states, "Mosher Drew's work in the Modern Architecture Movement was significant in that they were able to express new ideas in architecture at a time when communities were unsure about the new architectural language." However, the report did not elaborate on whether AMD expressed any "new ideas" through the subject property, or what "new idea" referred to specifically.

The report compares the subject property located at 7960 La Jota Way to five residences in La Jolla built between 1948 and 1952, all designed by AMD, and concludes, "7960 La Jota Way is a notable example of AMD's early residential design at this point. It showcases a combination of a U-Shaped building footprint, capturing private external views through site orientation, and a typical blend of exterior materials the firm used at the time prior to Mosher's sabbatical in 1955." The aforementioned design features are not unique to Architects Mosher Drew, and the report does not demonstrate how the property is representative of AMD's notable work. It only demonstrated that the subject property is similar to other ranch-styled properties designed by AMD during 1948-1952.

Robert Mosher, FAIA, established the architectural firm in 1948 with Roy Drew, and began designing residential projects out of their office in La Jolla. Mosher was born in Colorado in 1920 and at a young age, moved with his family to Los Angeles. While living in LA, his family spent summers in La Jolla. As a young adult, Mosher obtained a bachelor's degree in architecture and from the University of Washington. After WWII, he apprenticed with the distinguished Los Angeles firms of Myron Hunt and H. C. Chambers. Later, he worked under architect Paul Haynes as he studied for the state architectural exam. It was during this time when he met Roy Drew, who at the time a draftsman under Haynes, and began their friendship. In c.1946, Mosher procured his California architectural license and moved to La Jolla, partnering with established Master Architect William Templeton Johnson for a short period. In 1948, Mosher invited Roy Drew to form a partnership. Drew accepted, and together they formed a productive practice and close friendship that lasted more than 55 years. The Mosher/Drew partnership is the longest continuous architectural partnership in San Diego. They responded to a vacuum in the building industry, filling a demand for new talent and new ideas to meet the housing needs of returning veterans and others; they designed various structures in the Modernist style of architecture. In 1955, Mosher took a sabbatical leave from his firm to serve as Building Editor for House Beautiful magazine, where he wrote extensively about Frank Lloyd Wright

and visited many of his sites in the Midwest. Wright's work influenced and reinforced Mosher's own Modernist principles. In 1966, the California State Division of Bay Toll Crossing commissioned Mosher to serve as a co-design consultant for the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, and Mosher's influence led to the bridge's sinuous, clean-lined modern design. Mosher was also the principal designer for the Aztec Center at SDSU, several projects at UCSD, the NBC Tower on Broadway Street between 2nd and 3rd Streets, the Golden Door Health Spa in Escondido, his office, and many residences. In 1970, Mosher was elected to the AIA College of Fellows. He retired in 1998, although he continued to design projects of his choosing in his home studio. Robert Mosher's body of work illustrates that he was an early, prolific, and superior proponent of the Modernist style of architecture. The HRB established Robert Mosher as a Master Architect in 2005 during the designation of HRB #715.

A partial list of Mosher's notable works is below:

- HRB #715 – Herbert Kunzel / Robert Mosher House (3250 McCall Street), 1951
- HRB #1507 – Lucile Hamilton / Robert Mosher House (485 San Gorgonio St), 1967¹
- Aztec Center, San Diego State University (Demolished)

Roy Drew was born in 1913 and raised in Pasadena. He obtained a bachelor's degree in Graphic Arts from Stanford University in 1936. After graduating, he worked for two years in the office of Myron Hunt, and this experience spurred his interest in pursuing an architectural career. In 1938, he began to study architecture at Yale University, where he was exposed to the work of Mies van der Rohe, Aalto, Serge Chermayeff, and Antonin Raymond. He graduated in 1941, receiving a master's degree in architecture. Afterward, Drew served in the US Navy, returning to Los Angeles after WWII in 1946, and worked with architect Paul Haynes. He met Robert Mosher at this time and formed a partnership with Mosher in 1948. During the early years of the partnership, Drew designed dozens of smaller homes throughout the city and built a reputation as a respected residential architect. As Drew's career progressed, he expanded the scope of his work and designed several churches, schools, banks, and hotels. By the 1960s, Drew had built a reputation as one of San Diego's leading institutional architects. Over the course of his career, Drew became known for incorporating modernist principles into his designs. While many of Drew's projects were relatively modest in scale and stressed decorative simplicity, he nonetheless gained notoriety for his careful attention to detail and his respect for the natural setting. Drew also incorporated technological innovations into his designs and designed buildings that provided room for later growth. Among other recognitions, Drew was named to the AIA College of Fellows in 1966 and received an AIA Lifetime Achievement Award. Along with Mosher, Drew is recognized as being a pivotal figure in San Diego's modernist movement. The HRB established Drew as a Master Architect during the designation of HRB #460 in 2001.

A partial list of Drew's notable works is below:

- HRB #460– Conard-Arrington House (809 San Antonio Place), 1949
- HRB #1199– John and Joan Lightner/Roy Drew House (420 Silvergate Avenue), 1969

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion D as a resource that represents the notable work of Architects Mosher Drew. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the

¹ As of April 2024, the historical designation of HRB #1507 is pending appeal to the City Council.

beginning of the analysis section of this report, does not retain integrity of materials, design, workmanship, and feeling. Therefore, the property does not retain integrity to its 1952 period of significance under HRB Criterion D.

In conclusion, there is insufficient information to support a designation of the subject property under Criterion D as a resource representative of the notable work of Architects Mosher Drew. Furthermore, the property does not retain integrity to its original design due to alterations between 1998 and 2022. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

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

Approval of a project by staff as consistent with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards on a potentially historic property does not guarantee designation or an affirmative recommendation for designation from staff. With submittal of the nomination, we now have a report that fully evaluates the building and its eligibility, and staff does not concur that it is eligible as it is not a good example of the Custom Ranch style and has not been demonstrated to be representative of the notable work of established Master Architects Robert Mosher and Roy Drew. Additionally, the modifications that occurred prior to 2022, coupled with the extensive replacement of original materials due to their condition, have resulted in a loss of integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, all of which are critical to conveying significance under HRB Criteria C and D. Therefore, based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended the property located at 7960 La Jota Way not be designated under any adopted HRB Criteria.



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Attachment(s):

1. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cove