



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 6, 2024 REPORT NO. HRB-24-033

HEARING DATE: September 26, 2024

SUBJECT: **ITEM 05 – Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Hopkins Richards House II**

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

APPLICANT: Keith A. York and Jessica L. Hanson; represented by Ginger Weatherford

LOCATION: 955 Bangor Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2
APN 531-641-02-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Hopkins Richards House II located at 955 Bangor Street as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Hopkins Richards House II located at 955 Bangor Avenue as a historical resource under Criteria B, C, and D with a period of significance of 1956-1983 for Criterion B and 1956-1957 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The subject resource was the primary residence of Sim Bruce Richards during his most productive period, during which time he designed 145 out of his 200 known architecture projects. Sim Bruce Richards, a local Master Architect, made demonstrable contributions to the art and architectural fabric of San Diego, and the resource has the longest and most significant association with him.
2. The subject resource continues to convey the historic significance of the Organic Geometric style of modern architecture by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style, including a strong roof form in shed and gable styles (some with skyward-directed gable ends,) deep eave overhangs, exposed roof beams, large wood windows, tongue and groove siding, a wide brick chimney, angular massing, and site-specific design. The resource retains integrity from its 1956-1957 period of significance.
3. The resource is representative of the notable work of Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Richards' original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as an intact example of Richards'

Organic-Geometric style residential work characterized by complex roof forms and angular massing, site specific design, and geometric motifs.

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, although the subject property was listed as a work of Sim Bruce Richards in the Modernism Context Statement.

The historic name of the resource, the Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Hopkins Richards House II, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Richards, who constructed the house as their personal residence and the name of Sim Bruce Richards, a Master Architect.

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 955 Bangor Street is a one-story with partial basement, Organic-Geometric style, single-family home with an attached garage, constructed from 1956-1957 by Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards in the Golden Park subdivision of Point Loma.

Since its construction in 1956-1957 the property has been modified as follows: An east facade door was resurfaced with vertical tongue-and-groove siding in 1975. At an unknown point between 1956 and 2017 the rear deck was extended 80" south and 40" west, creating an entryway to the deck from the backyard. The original deck railing and bench were reinstalled after this expansion, and the east deck railing and bench were extended. In 2017, two 4x4 posts were installed underneath the deck in order to provide support. The only other change to the property includes the removal of a trellis from underneath the east façade eave at an unknown date. These modifications are minor and do not detract from the integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling or association.

There are also some discrepancies between Richards' original plans and existing conditions. The original drawn plans were working/construction drawings and based on material and documentation, the features on the house were changes made during the construction process for various construction and budgetary concerns. These changes include:

- The original drawings indicated a "cement stoop" in front. The red brick driveway is original to house.
- The front trellis is not drawn on the plans but is original to the house and a typical Sim Bruce Richards feature.
- On the east elevation (bedroom #1 in drawings) the original drawings show two sets of casement windows. A door and window arrangement was constructed due to the primary bedroom closet construction.
- On the south elevation (bedroom #1 in drawings) a 5'6 window is drawn but was constructed as a smaller window.

These discrepancies are typical changes made during the construction process and were not constructed as drawn. Therefore, they do not impact integrity or represent modifications to the resource.

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Ginger Weatherford, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, B, C and D. Staff does not concur with the determination that the property is significant under Criterion A. However, staff concurs that the resource is significant under Criteria B, C, and D. 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.

Staff does not believe that the subject structure 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.

Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Hopkins Richards acquired Lots 1 and 2, in Block 5 of the Golden Park subdivision in 1948. The first house on the lots was designed by Sim Bruce Richards for Mrs. Leone Wright and Mrs. Elsie Gillette, and completed in 1949. The second house on the lots (3360 Harbor View Drive) was designed by Sim Bruce Richards and the Richards family occupied the house from its completion, in 1952, until the third house designed for the Richards family was complete, in 1957. The property at 955 Bangor Street was the Richards family home from 1957 to 2017. The three houses along Bangor Street are all unique modern designs and are linked by the same red brick pattern on the driveways and sidewalk.

While the property was one of three sites in the immediate vicinity developed by Richards, staff does not believe that the argument for Criterion A was fully developed as stated in the Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria.

The significance findings presented state that the resource property exemplifies Golden Park subdivision's architectural and landscaping development.

The criteria guidelines establish that for a resource to gain significance under Criterion A for landscape development, it must demonstrably exemplify or reflect development associated with garden and park design, subdivision design, or ecosystem/habitat restoration and may include professionally applied standards or design ingenuity within landscape disciplines. The report indicates that Richards utilized red brick on driveways and sidewalks on all three resources designed in Golden Park but does not establish how this is associated with a larger design of a subdivision or garden/park design or what landscape design standards or design ingenuity this is representative of.

For architectural development the criteria guidelines state that the resource shall exemplify or reflect development associated with the city's built environment, especially that designed and constructed by nonarchitects, including real estate developers, contractors, speculators, homeowners and others associated with the building industry. The report does not develop an argument about how the resource rises to a level of significance of architectural development under Criterion A. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation 955 Bangor Street under HRB Criterion A.

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

The subject property was designed by Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards as a personal residence for himself and his family. Richards lived in the house from its construction in 1956 until his death in 1983.

Sim Bruce Richards (1908-1983)

Sim Bruce Richards was born of Cherokee descent in Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 1908 and moved to Phoenix, Arizona with his family in 1920. Richards studied both art and architecture at the University of California, Berkeley between 1930 and 1934. He excelled in weaving fabrics and rugs with abstract designs. His weaving caught the attention of Frank Lloyd Wright, who personally invited him to study architecture at Taliesin. Richards left Berkeley in 1934 and studied at Taliesin until 1936.

Richards moved to San Diego around 1938 and initially worked as a civilian architect for the US Navy throughout much of World War II. In 1944, Richards married Janet Hopkins, whom he met in San Diego.

Sim Bruce Richards worked in the architectural offices of William Templeton Johnson and Harold Abrams before opening his own practice around 1949. During the four decades of his practice, Sim Bruce Richards designed over 200 projects, not including his work in weaving, painting, collage, murals and furniture design. He employed draftsmen like John Reed, Tony Ciani, and Kendrick Bangs Kellogg, during different eras of the office's evolution. He mentored these draftsmen, among others, as well as artists Rhoda Lopez and James Hubbell. Through all of his work, he worked from a philosophy that both he and his clients should enjoy the design process and that the houses should improve upon their lives.

He focused on residential design, although he also designed several public and commercial structures. Reflecting his training in organic design at Taliesin, Richards' body of work is

characterized by unpainted wood and often rough or unfinished appearances, as well as complex roof forms, angular massing, and site-specific design. Richards often collaborated with friends who were artists and craftsmen, incorporating their crafts such as metalworking, tilework, and masonry in his home designs.

From 1957-1983, the time during which Bruce Richards resided in 955 Bangor Street, he designed 145 known projects. During this period Bruce Richards also developed a close relationship with artist James Hubbell, served as president of the San Diego chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and was invited to exhibit his work both locally and across the southwest.

Besides the subject property in which Sim Bruce Richards resided in from 1956 to his death in 1983, Richards also resided at:

- 3505 Talbot Street (1946-1948): Non-Extant
- 977 Albion Street (1948-1951): Extant
- 3360 Harbor View Drive (1952-1957): Extant

Besides personal residences, Sim Bruce Richards kept professional offices at

- 7661 Girard Avenue (1947): Extant
- 800 Pearl Street (1948): Non-Extant
- 5505 La Jolla Boulevard (1948-1953): Non-Extant
- 1298 ¼ Prospect Street (1953-1976): Non-Extant
- 2377 Linwood Street (1976-1983): Extant

Although Sim Bruce Richards also resided at 3505 Talbot, the resource is non-extant. He designed 977 Albion (HRB #1410) and 3360 Harbor View Drive (HRB #944) in the Organic-Geometric style and resided in these properties, but only for 3 and 5 years, respectively, whereas he resided in 955 Bangor for 26 years. Regarding professional office space, the majority of office spaces Bruce Richards utilized are no longer extant. Of those that are extant, they do not represent the bulk of his productive years and were not designed by Bruce Richards. The property at 955 Bangor Street is associated with Sim Bruce Richards from 1956-1983, clearly during the period that Bruce Richards' significant achievements and contributions occurred.

Per the Criteria Guidelines, location, setting, feeling, and association are the most relevant aspects of integrity related to Criterion B.

The property has undergone minor modifications as described at the beginning of the Analysis section of this report, which do not significantly impact key character-defining features of the resource. The property retains all seven aspects of integrity, as it is in its original location, and has not been significantly modified in any way since its original construction, allowing retention of design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1956-1983 period of significance under HRB Criterion B.

Significance Statement: The subject resource was the primary residence of Sim Bruce Richards during his most productive period, during which time he designed 145 out of his 200 known architecture projects. Sim Bruce Richards, a local Master Architect, made demonstrable contributions to the art and architectural fabric of San Diego, and the resource has the longest and

most significant association with him. Therefore, staff recommends the designation of the subject property at 955 Bangor Street under HRB Criterion B with a period of significance of 1956-1983.

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 resource is a single-family residence designed by Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards and constructed in 1956-1957 in the Organic-Geometric style.

The single-family dwelling is a one-story residence with a partial basement and a low-pitched shed roof containing wide overhanging eaves with exposed decorative rafters. The low slope of the roof and its wide eaves combined with a rhythmic range of windows on both the east and south facades give this part of the building a horizontal emphasis. Two skyward directed wood-clad gable roofs are located on the southern and northern portions of the roof, giving the residence a distinctive Organic-Geometric feel. The residence is clad in horizontal mill sawn cedar tongue and groove siding with a transparent stain. The front entry features two mitered resin panels designed by James Hubbell. The focal section of the house, which faces the rear, was sited to take advantage of the city and harbor views.

Organic Geometric architecture is a philosophy of design which promotes a harmonious relationship between buildings and nature. Organic Geometric designers used natural building materials such as wood and stone. Like their Post and Beam Modern contemporaries, Organic Geometric architects also used glass to minimize the separation between the interior and the exterior and encourage indoor/outdoor living. Buildings were carefully sited to take advantage of views and other site features. Designs emphasize rectilinear geometry, asymmetrical facades, unusual rooflines, and angular shapes. Per the City of San Diego Modernism Context Statement, primary character defining features of the Organic Geometric style are: exposed structure and materials; polygon design motifs including squares and diamonds; and natural materials. Secondary features are: sharp angular massing, asymmetrical facades, complex roof forms, and site-specific design. The Organic-Geometric style is relatively rare in San Diego, with only 16 resources previously designated.

The subject resource matches all primary and secondary character-defining features with a wood exterior, large windows, wide eaves, exposed beams, asymmetrical facades, site specific orientation and siting, and geometric elements expressed through the structure and materials. The modifications previously presented do not significantly impair integrity of design, material, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The resource continues to convey the historic significance of the Organic Geometric style of modern architecture by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style, including a strong roof form in shed and gable styles (some with skyward-directed gable ends,) deep eave overhangs, exposed roof beams, large wood windows, tongue and groove siding, a wide brick chimney, angular massing, and site-specific design. The resource retains integrity from its 1956-1957 period of significance. Therefore, staff recommends 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.

The subject property is a known work of Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. In 1930, Richards began studying architecture at UC Berkeley but soon switched to art. He excelled in weaving fabrics and rugs with abstract designs. His weaving caught the attention of Frank Lloyd Wright, who personally invited him to study architecture at Taliesin. Richards left Berkeley in 1934 and studied at Taliesin until 1936.

Richards moved to San Diego around 1938 and initially worked as a civilian architect for the US Navy. He also worked in the architectural offices of William Templeton Johnson and Harold Abrams before opening his own practice around 1949. He focused on residential design, although he also designed several public and commercial structures. Reflecting his training in organic design at Taliesin, Richards' body of work is characterized by unpainted wood and often rough or unfinished appearances, as well as complex roof forms, angular massing, and site-specific design. Richards often collaborated with friends who were artists and craftsmen, incorporating their crafts such as metalworking, tilework, and masonry in his home designs.

Nine of Richard's works have been designated as historical resources by the Historical Resources Board. They include the Richard Olney / Sim Bruce Richards House (HRB #615), the Edward and Iris Bascomb/Sim Bruce Richards House (HRB #1310) and the Sim Bruce Richards House I (HRB #1410). The designation of the Fine Medical Building /Sim Bruce - 4 - Richards Building (formerly HRB #544) established him as a Master Architect by the HRB in 2002, but this designation was later overturned. The subject resource was designed by Sim Bruce Richards as a personal residence for himself and his family. The resource clearly reflects Bruce Richards true design philosophy and intent, unencumbered by client needs to aesthetic desires.

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 Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report retains all aspects of integrity. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1956-1957 period of significance under HRB Criterion D.

Significance Statement: The resource is representative of the notable work of Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Richards' original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as an intact example of Richards' Organic-Geometric style residential work characterized by complex roof forms and angular massing, site specific design, and geometric motifs. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

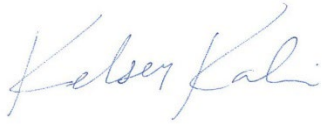
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Sim Bruce Richards and Janet Hopkins Richards House III located at 955 Bangor Avenue be designated as a historical resource under Criterion B with a period of significance of 1956-1983 and Criteria C and D with a period of significance of 1956-1957.



Kelsey Kaline
Associate Planner
City Planning Department



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner
City Planning Department

Kk/SS

Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 9/26/2024

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 9/26/2024, to consider the historical designation of the **Sim Bruce Richards House II** (owned by Little Fur Family Trust 06-10-20, 955 Bangor Street, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **955 Bangor Street, San Diego, CA 92106**, APN: **531-641-02-00**, further described as BLK 5 LOTS 1 & 2 POR 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 Sim Bruce Richards House II on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION B in connection with Sim Bruce Richards who is a historically significant person and retains integrity for that association. The subject resource was the primary residence of Sim Bruce Richards during his most productive period, during which time he designed 145 out of his 200 known architecture projects. Sim Bruce Richards, a local Master Architect, made demonstrable contributions to the art and architectural fabric of San Diego, and the resource has the longest and most significant association with him. 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 Organic-Geometric style and retains an excellent level of architectural integrity from its 1956-1957 period of significance. The subject resource continues to convey the historic significance of the Organic Geometric style of modern architecture by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style, including a strong roof form in shed and gable styles (some with skyward-directed gable ends,) deep eave overhangs, exposed roof beams, large wood windows, tongue and groove siding, a wide brick chimney, angular massing, and site-specific design. The resource retains integrity from its 1956-1957 period of significance. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the subject property under HRB Criterion C. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(3) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards with a period of significance of 1956-1957 and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. The resource is representative of the notable work of Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. The subject resource retains excellent integrity and continues to reflect Richards' original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as an intact example of Richards' Organic-Geometric style residential work characterized by complex roof forms and angular massing, site specific design, and geometric motifs. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D as a notable work of

Master Architect Sim Bruce Richards. 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: _____
TIM HUTTER, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

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