

AGENDA REPORT

September 21, 2015

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 1475 LINDA RIDGE ROAD AS A HISTORIC MONUMENT

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Find that the designation of a historic resource is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA Guidelines §15308: Class 8 - Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment);
2. Find that the Margaret Driscoll House at 1475 Linda Ridge Road is significant under Criterion "C" for designation as a Historic Monument (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because it is an exceptional example of a custom-designed California Ranch single-family residence from the recent past designed by nationally significant designer Cliff May;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Historic Monument Designation for 1475 Linda Ridge Road, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Historic Monument Designation for 1475 Linda Ridge Road, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

At its regular meeting of July 21, 2015, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the house at 1475 Linda Ridge Road as a Historic Monument under Criterion "C" of PMC §17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The house at 1475 Linda Ridge Road qualifies for designation as a Historic Monument under Criterion “C” because it is an exceptional example of a custom-designed California Ranch single-family residence from the recent past designed by nationally significant designer Cliff May.

BACKGROUND:

On May 8, 2015 property owners Mike & Susanne Hollis submitted an application for designation of the property as a historic monument. The staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the building qualifies for designation as a historic monument.

Property Data

- Historical Name: Margaret Driscoll House
- Address: 1475 Linda Ridge Road, Pasadena, CA 91103
- Location: Northwestern terminus of Linda Ridge Road (a private street)
- Date of Construction: 1952 (source: County Assessor)
- Original Owner: Margaret Driscoll (source: building permits)
- Architect: Cliff May (source: University of Santa Barbara Architecture & Design Collection; architectural drawings and renderings)
- Original/Present Use: Single Family Residence
- Property Size: 1.97 acres (source: County Assessor)
- Building Size: 5,728 square feet (source: County Assessor)

Site Features

The property is a hillside lot in the Linda Vista neighborhood and includes the one-story house and attached garage at roughly the center and a detached accessory structure and recently constructed swimming pool north of it. The remainder of the site consists of landscape and hardscape features with a portion of the lot being natural hillside. The property is accessed by a large motor court of newer interlocking octagonal and square stone pavers.

Exterior Features of the House

The house has an irregular plan which generally forms a splayed U-shape with a north-south orientation and projecting wings at either end, the southerly of which accommodates an attached, three-car garage. It has a gabled roof sheathed in concrete tiles with extended, open eaves and a cut-out opening with exposed beams east of the entry, aligned with a kitchen window grouping. Exterior walls are largely clad in rustic board and batten wood siding with some areas of stone and smooth-finish stucco. Many of the stone or stucco walls are battered; an area of stone cladding west of the entry has battered walls and an integral, continuous stone bench at the base. A

pair of paneled, solid wood doors lead into the house; opposite the entry is a series of sliding-glass doors within the entry parlor that allow for immediate views to the rear yard and hills beyond upon opening the entry doors. The entry porch area, which is at grade with the adjoining motor court, is paved with rustic terra cotta pavers. The house has groupings of steel-framed sliding and fixed windows as well as several groupings of steel-framed sliding-glass doors. Windows in wood-clad walls have wood trim and sills; windows in stucco walls have a simple rounded recess detail with wood sills and windows in stone walls are recessed and have stone sills. There are also several stone or stucco chimneys, both at exterior walls of the house and internal to the house. The attached three-car garage has two doors (one for two cars and the other for one) which are solid with horizontal wood exterior cladding and a heavy wood header. A diagonal bracing feature is present at the southern end of the garage, extending from the eave to the main wall.

Interior Features of the House

The house has original fixtures and high-quality finishes on the interior. The primary semi-public rooms of the house—the entry hall, gallery and living room—have the highest quality design features and the owner proposes to include these rooms in the historic monument designation. The flooring in the entry hall and gallery is a continuation of the terra cotta tiles that are present within the front porch, creating a seamless transition from exterior to interior. Interior walls of all three rooms are clad in high quality vertically oriented tongue-and-groove California Cedar planks, notably without visible knots, and with a terra cotta tile base. The gallery (see architect rendering in Attachment A for location) has a vaulted ceiling that exposes the roof's structural beams and wood tongue-and-groove sheathing, a feature that is common in Cliff May's houses. The entry hall and living room have plaster ceilings, with some newer recessed lighting. The gallery and living room have hidden tracks of fluorescent lighting above the sliding doors.

The living room is carpeted and has extensive built-in cabinetry and shelving as well as a fireplace with stone surround, tile hearth and a California Cedar mantelpiece. Although not included in the designation, it should be noted that the kitchen is remarkably intact and has original metal cabinetry. The same cabinetry is also present in the laundry room.

Hobby & Dark Room Building

North of the house is a small detached accessory structure, built at the same time as the house, that was originally used as a hobby room and a dark room. It has similar design features as the main house, in a simpler rectangular plan. The gable-ends of this building have an exposed outrigger beam at the peak as well as large clerestory windows in triangular and trapezoidal shapes. Rather than sliding-glass doors, the building has floor-to-ceiling windows. The entry door is a solid unpaneled wood door.

Other Site Features

As mentioned previously, a motor court with non-original interlocking pavers provides access from the street. Original stone walls, matching the stone used on the house, flank the entry driveway and pilasters that terminate the walls have carriage lamps atop them and support a pair of iron gates. A steep hillside rises from the west side of the property, at the base of which is a non-original low stone curb. A series of partially covered patios adjoin the rear of the house, some of which are edged in non-original stone that appears similar to that which is used throughout the property. Patio flooring is newer interlocking stone pavers. A swimming pool and spa were installed in 2007, at the extreme northern end of the site. A pool shown in the Cliff May rendering is not extant.

Documented Changes to the Property

As indicated above, much of the paving as well as the pool and spa are modern features of the property. New retaining walls have been built, some of which are differentiated by their stucco exterior coating. The original wood shake roof has been replaced with concrete tiles. There are minor changes on the interior semi-public spaces that are included in this designation, most notably the installation of recessed lighting. These changes do not diminish the integrity of the historic property.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The property is remarkably intact and in excellent condition, although showing some localized signs of deterioration, wear and water damage. The owner has submitted an application for Historic Property Contract (Mills Act) to assist with rehabilitation work that is needed on the house.

Historical Overview

The Driscoll House represents the theme “Architect-Designed Single Family Residential Development” identified in the City’s 2007 historic context report, “Cultural Resources of the Recent Past.” Along with identifying concentrations of properties that represent this theme, it is described in the context report as follows:

The major defining architect-designed residential architecture in postwar Pasadena include those residences inspired by the tenets of the Case Study House Program; the post-and-beam architecture practiced by the teachers and graduates of the University of Southern California School of Architecture; and the Modernist variation of the ranch house.

The context of the ranch house is described earlier in the report under the heading “Ranch House and the Growth of Suburbia,” as follows:

Based on the early rancho or Hacienda form, which included the integration of indoor and outdoor space, and a single-story, sprawling floor plan, the Ranch house also shares similar characteristics with the Arts and Crafts-era bungalows that line the streets of Pasadena. The popularity of the modern Ranch house in the postwar period is due to a variety of factors, including the government-sponsored housing programs such as the FHA, new technologies that allowed for more efficient building techniques, the increasingly casual lifestyle of the modern American that necessitated a change in the traditional floor plan of the single family house, and the popularity of the Western, which romanticized the rugged lifestyle of the cowboy.

The report identifies the “architect-designed single-family residence” property type, which is described as “a custom-built detached residential structure, typically one or two stories in height, designed by a licensed architect or building designer for a specific client and a specific site.”

California Ranch Style

The 2007 historic context report identifies two “ranch”-related styles: California Ranch and Modern Ranch. Of these, the house most closely represents the California Ranch Style, which is described as follows:

The California Ranch style applies traditional or Western detailing to the Ranch house building form. Characterized by its low, horizontal emphasis and sprawling plan, the Ranch house enjoyed enormous popularity throughout the United States during the late 1950s and 1960s. The California Ranch style emerged from the 1930s designs of Southern California architect Cliff May, combined with the mid-century ideal of “California living” promoted throughout the western United States by Sunset Magazine. The resulting architectural style appropriated the many wooden features—including wall cladding, roof shingles, and ornamentation—of many vernacular houses in the West.

Character-defining feature of the style that are evident in the Driscoll House include:

- One-story configuration
- Sprawling plan, often with radiating wings (U-shaped)
- Low, horizontal massing with wide street facade
- Low-pitched gable roof with wide open eaves and (originally) wood shakes
- Wood board-and-batten cladding with stone and stucco accents
- Large multi-light windows (most often wood, but, in this case, steel)

- Wide front porch
- Attached garage (most often two stalls, but, in this case, three)

Cliff May (1908-1989)

Sources for this information about Cliff May include:

Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report, Historic Resources Group & Pasadena Heritage, 2007

Cliff May and the Modern Ranch House, Daniel P. Gregory, 2008.

Despite a lack of formal architectural education or certification, building designer Cliff May is widely considered the “father of the modern ranch house,” which combined elements of modernism with the traditional 19th century western ranch house. May’s designs were popularized in *Sunset Magazine* and its bestselling 1946 book Western Ranch Houses, on which he collaborated, as well as in several other popular architectural and home and garden publications. May’s houses were typically narrow, rambling one-story buildings with sheltered private outdoor spaces, simple gable or shed roofs, and many connections between inside and outside, made accessible by the lack of a raised foundation. Motor courts and attached garages or carports were important features that integrated the car into the design of the house.

May’s career spanned the 1930’s through the 1980’s and his designs, both custom and tract houses, can be found throughout the nation and the world. He “designed or built more than one thousand homes and commercial properties and his plans were used in the construction of more than 18,000 tract ranch houses” (Gregory, p. 20).

Margaret Driscoll (1902-1981)

Margaret (Weyerhaeuser) Driscoll was born in 1902 in Minnesota. She married Walter Driscoll, an employee of the Weyerhaeuser Company, in 1926; he died in 1937 before the house at 1475 Linda Ridge Road was built. She attended college at Vassar and received honorary doctorates from Macalester College, the College of Westminster, the College of Santa Fe and the University of Southern California. She was active in several local charitable and religious organizations. Late in life, she contributed significantly to the Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center in Sante Fe, New Mexico, where she lived until her death in 1981. It has been suggested that Mrs. Driscoll’s association with the Weyerhaeuser lumber family may account for the high quality of the wood on the interior of the house.

ANALYSIS:

The Margaret Driscoll House at 1475 Linda Ridge Road is eligible for historic monument designation under Criterion C, (PMC §17.62.040(B)(1)(c)), which states:

[The property] is exceptional in the embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a historic resource property type, period, architectural style, or method of construction, or that is an exceptional representation of the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is significant to the region, State, or nation, or that possesses high artistic values that are of regional, State-wide or national significance.

Under Criterion C, the Driscoll House is significant because it is an exceptional example of a custom-designed California Ranch single-family residence from the recent past designed by nationally significant designer Cliff May. The registration requirements in the City's 2007 study of the Recent Past period state:

A single family residence that would qualify under [the architect-designed single-family residence] theme would be a good example of a particular architectural style associated with the period, and/or of the work of a significant architect or designer. This property type would usually meet local or California Register registration requirements under Criterion C (3) as an individual resource.

In order to qualify under Criterion C (3), this property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. In Pasadena, common residential architectural styles associated with custom-built houses of the period include the Mid-Century Modern, Modern Ranch, and California Ranch. It must retain high integrity of design, materials and workmanship that convey its period of construction. While most buildings undergo alteration over time, these alterations should not significantly change the historic appearance of the building.

The house is an exceptional example of a California Ranch house. While many houses in this style in Pasadena have more whimsical designs, this house is a high style example that reflects the primary tenets of the style and strongly represents the designer's ideology in combining the features of the 19th-century western ranch house/hacienda with principles of modernism. In particular, the house has a sense of openness and indoor-outdoor connection that is clearly represented in every room of the house, while maintaining a sense of privacy and responding to the views of the Arroyo Seco that are available from the site. The exterior treatment reflects the character of adobe construction in the incorporation of battered walls, smooth stucco and stone as well as the idea of single-wall construction in its application of board-and-batten siding, the battens of which appear hand-carved and rustic. The interior semi-public rooms included in the nomination also reflect the idea of the modern hacienda in the use of terra cotta flooring and base, wood walls, and the exposed wood roof beams and sheathing in the gallery space, while also incorporating glass doors for visibility and access to the outdoors. The house has architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate

why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The building is in its original location.
- Design: The building retains its form, plan, space, structure, and style, as described above.
- Setting: The setting of the property has changed very little since its original construction. The addition of a swimming pool and spa at the outer edge of the site does not affect the overall integrity of setting.
- Materials: The building retains virtually all of the original materials used in its construction.
- Workmanship: The building demonstrates the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the craft of the designer, Cliff May.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of high style California Ranch houses from the mid-twentieth century period, as detailed above.

Integrity of association does not apply to the house because it is not associated with a significant event or the life of a significant person. Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a Historic Monument under Criterion C.

The house is an exceptional representation of Cliff May's work on individual house designs, which was focused entirely on development of site-specific designs in the California Ranch style. As described above, it clearly reflects May's ideology of combining the sprawling plans and sheltered outdoor spaces of the 19th-century western ranch house with the seamless transitions and openness of modernism.

Contributing structures to this designation include the main house (including original interior fixtures and materials in the entry hall, gallery and living room), hobby/dark room structure and stone entry walls, iron gates and carriage lamps. Non-contributing features include the pool and spa, stucco retaining walls, rear patio and motor court paving materials and stone curbing.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The General Plan – Objective 6: Promote preservation of historically and architecturally significant buildings and revitalization of traditional neighborhoods and commercial areas.

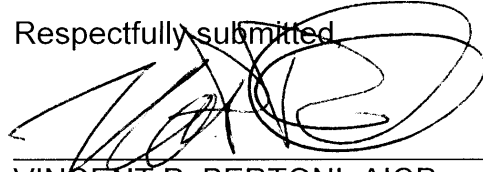
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

Class 8 exemptions consists of actions taken by regulatory agencies, as authorized by state or local ordinance, to assure the maintenance, restoration, enhancement, or protection of the environment where the regulatory process involves procedures for the protection of the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT:

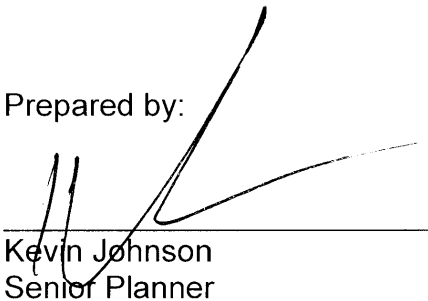
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted the local Mills Act ordinance. As a result of this program, the reduced property tax amount which comes out of the City's local share amount from the State, is a small fraction of the City's overall property tax revenue.

Respectfully submitted,



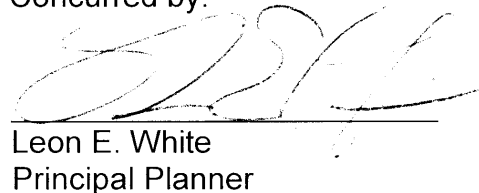
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Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

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Concurred by:



Leon E. White
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Approved by:



MICHAEL J. BECK
City Manager

Attachments (4):

- A. Application & Attachments
- B. Historical Documentation (Permit records, Building Description Blanks)
- C. Current Photographs
- D. Effects of Historic Designation