

**ATTACHMENT H:
Norton House Nomination Form**

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OMB No. 1024-0018
(Expires 1-31-2009)
DRAFT

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Norton, John, House
Other names/site number _____

2. Location

Street & Number 820 Burleigh Drive Not for Publication N/A
City or Town Pasadena Vicinity N/A
State California Code CA County Los Angeles Code 039
Zip Code 91105

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this _____ nomination; _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide _____ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government _____

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
_____ entered in the National Register	_____	_____
_____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
_____ determined eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
_____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
_____ determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
_____ removed from the National Register	_____	_____
_____ other (explain): _____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Asphalt

walls Stucco, wood, glass, plastic

walls _____

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 7 Continuation Sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- C
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Period of Significance

1955

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Dates

1955

Architect/Builder

Buff. Straub and Hensman

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 8 Continuation Sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 9 Continuation Sheets. See MPS Form.

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: City of Pasadena Planning Department

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 0.28

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	11	391801	3777131	3		
2				4		

x See continuation sheet.Verbal Boundary Description
See continuation sheet.Boundary Justification
See continuation sheet.**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title	Barbara Lamprecht, Architectural Historian	
Organization	Jones & Stokes	Date April 4, 2008
Street & Number	811 W. 7 th Street, Suite 800	Telephone 213-627-5376
City or Town	Los Angeles	State CA Zip Code 90027

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

Photographs

Representative photographs of the property.

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name	Thomas & Augusta Parrington	
Organization		Telephone (626) 799-0042
Street & Number	820 Burleigh Drive	
City or Town	Pasadena	State CA Zip Code 91105

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Norton House
Los Angeles County, California

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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Description

Summary Paragraph

The Norton House is identified by Assessor Parcel Number 5716-003-009. The property is located within the legal San Rafael Heights Tract #80.28 more or less AC COM at most north corner of lot 78 TH 25/01' west 135.58 feet TH south 51/00'20" east 81.09 Feet TH north 38/59'40" E 125 feet to the northeast line of SD lot TH northwest there on 114.16 FT of legal lot 78. This is the parcel historically associated with the property. The property is located within the corporate limits of the City of Pasadena, California; specifically, within that portion of the city west of the Arroyo Seco. 820 Burleigh Drive is located at the southeast corner of Burleigh Drive and Laguna Road in Pasadena, California. A carport is highly visible from Burleigh Drive; the main house is depressed below street grade with its primary entrance facing west toward Burleigh Drive.

The Norton House is one of Buff, Straub and Hensman masterworks, distinguished by a mature, sensual sophistication and an elegance calibrated not with fancy but humble materials, including Formica that is still in use on kitchen countertops and rough concrete block, seen in the fireplace. The wood-and-glass one-story house was nominated because it reveals yet another way the architects resolved the issues of a unique and difficult site. It is distinguished from other Buff, Straub and Hensman houses of the period because the one-level house is a deceptively simple rectangle parallel to Burleigh Road with a few bump-out volumes cantilevered from the main box. Here, extensive terracing, stepping stones and broad staircases animate the relationship between house and slope, instead of the house stepping down the hill in articulated volumes as in other Buff, Straub and Hensman designs, or in houses that are pinwheel in plan. The result is a superbly composed house that nestles in mature and copious trees and plantings, virtually below road grade at the intersection of two small, quiet roads in southwest Pasadena.

Description

The house is unusual in the Buff, Straub and Hensman canon in following a 10' (rather than their more oft-used 6' or 8' module) structural rafter/beam span; however, custom dimensions frequently occur, seen in the French doors on the east end of the house, leading from the living room to the terrace, which are 35" x 7'0 each; the doors themselves appear to be centered but are not, as are other transparent/opaque relationships throughout the house. The house features extensive wood terracing, steps, landings and balconies around the house and leading up to street level and down to the garden below. The original paint color, an orange-red, is applied to much exterior trim and certainly serves to unify the composition so it reads as one piece. Just as importantly, the color of the trim, dancing through the composition, ties it to the colors of flowers abundant around the house, while the more neutral earth tones applied to the majority of the wood work, lightly anchors the house to the trees and the earth.

The strict application of the module in this long, narrow "box" results in a series of solids and voids: for example, the east-most module is open to nature and defines part of a broad deck leading to very broad stairs that connect the house to the lushly landscaped area below. The front door, situated under a covered porch, is located in the middle of the house, so that one turns to public space (the living room) on the east or to private space (the bedrooms) on the west. The concrete block fireplace (whose hearth faces east, in the west end of the living room) acts as the primary spatial divider here, and low-cost plywood and Formica shelves attached to the north side of the fireplace are convenient places for keys, knickknacks, etc. The living room itself contains a long, low, built-in sofa with storage below and open bookcase shelving above. A long skylight above the sofa and cleverly placed windows and storage provide different kinds of light throughout the day. Kitchens and bedrooms in the 2,000 sq. ft. house are small but capacious with storage.

Elements that can be read as modernized or traditional Japanese elements abound. These include the stair and rail detailing, the use of horizontal banding at the tops of doors and windows that again unify the interior of the house in the use of a consistent interior band. Plastic panels inset into wood panels (like an updated shoji screen) are used as translucent privacy panels which border and contain a landscaping plot beyond the all-glass wall (the north wall) of the bathroom. This three-room linear space is comprised of a "barbell" of two rooms, each containing a vanity and toilet, flank the inset shower and bathtub. These three rooms are connected with doors and all share the full-height glass wall, located closest to the road above. Thus, the updated

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Norton House
Los Angeles County, California
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

“shogi” screen creates transitions between indoors and outdoors, landscape and interior, as well as conferring privacy for those in the extant and original bathroom. The bathroom and the house were first published by *Sunset* magazine in 1956, and the bathroom continued to be featured prominently in *Sunset* publications thereafter.

This house features several clever spatial and storage strategies, seen in the living room, where a large section of the north living room wall features an orthogonally organized “painting” of sliding, lightly stained wood panels whose simple “handles” of long pieces of wood (exactly like an identical detail found in some early Schindler and Neutra designs), create an ornamental field but in fact serve as a large storage area.

Alterations

In 1983, using the 10' span and identical detailing, Buff, Straub and Hensman designed a small addition: the firm added one span wide to the master bedroom at the west end of the house. The new area of the master suite, which includes a small bathroom on the north, adjacent to the existing bathroom, also extends north, aligned with the existing footprint, and to the south on the rear facade. The alteration is seamless and completely in character with the house, does not compromise the integrity of the house, and the property continues to readily convey its historical significance. The owner later replaced the deteriorated translucent fiberglass panels in the exterior garden wall north of the bedroom described above with translucent plastic, an alteration that exemplifies the desired approach outlined in the Registration Requirements because it preserves the quality of the materials and its aesthetic and functional task of providing translucency in this very private space, permitting light while protecting privacy (which in any case is afforded by the steep hill in front of this north side of the house). The step stone path to the front entry walk was moved from the west to the east, but its materials and layout are also in character with the rustic setting and design intent and do not compromise the integrity of the house in any way.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Norton House
Los Angeles County, California

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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Statement of Significance

The lot was sold to the Nortons by William Carr, the prominent local developer (see the Poppy Peak nomination); the Buffs and Nortons were personal friends of Conrad Buff. It was part of an older Pasadena estate whose brick walkways can still be seen at the base of the property; local mythology is that the paths led to a “party house” discreetly separated from the main estate by the Arroyo.¹

The Norton House is an excellent example of a different type of approach used by Buff, Straub and Hensman, here to beautiful effect. Because the hill was steep but short, and because the lot was long but tight (parallel to Burleigh Road), the architects’ unique response to the site (an important tenet in Modernism, in the USC/Pasadena School, and in Buff, Straub and Hensman’s work particularly) was to not have the house unfold against the slope. Instead, extensive terracing, stepping stones and very broad staircases animate the relationship between house and slope, a very different solution, compared to other contemporary houses such as the Wirick, Frank and Thompson houses. The Norton House thus demonstrates the firm’s flexibility in responding creatively to the program and site. Like so much of their work, its alterations reflect the continuity of collaboration between architect and client over decades. The Norton House, 1955, retains an outstanding degree of integrity, is of exceptionally high quality of design, displays the character-defining features outlined for post-and-beam construction and architecture in the Registration Requirements, and is a single-family house constructed in the period of significance, 1948 – 1968.

Significance—Conclusion

Argument under Criterion C- Eligible

As demonstrated above, this work by Buff, Straub and Hensman meets the registration requirements as outlined in the MPS. It has retained the respective required aspects of integrity. It is an excellent example of the firm’s body of work, as well as embodying the larger architectural concerns and expressions of Pasadena’s “Recent Past” as described in the Multiple Property Submission (MPS), Cultural Resources of the Recent Past, City of Pasadena. It is significant as embodying architectural innovation in residential Modernism within the MPS period of significance, 1948-1968. Therefore, it is eligible to qualify for listing under Criterion C, Architecture and Design, at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1955.

¹ Interview with August Parrington, current owner (the Parringtons purchased the house from the Nortons), March 24, 2008.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet—Additional Documentation

Norton House
Los Angeles County, California
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

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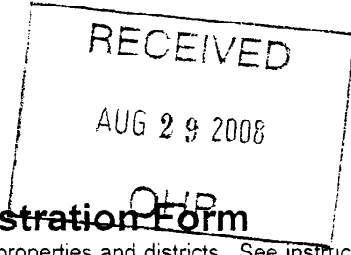
Bibliographic References

Buff, Straub and Hensman Archives. Office of Buff, Smith and Hensman, 1450 W. Colorado Blvd. Pasadena 91105.

Interview, Augusta Parrington, March 25, 2008.

**ATTACHMENT I:
Mello House Nomination Form**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



DRAFT

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Mello, Clarence and Mary, House
Other names/site number The Mello House

2. Location

Street & Number 541 Fremont Drive Not for Publication N/A
City or Town Pasadena Vicinity N/A
State California Code CA County Los Angeles Code 039
Zip Code 91103

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
<u> </u> entered in the National Register	_____	_____
<u> </u> <u> </u> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<u> </u> determined eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<u> </u> <u> </u> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<u> </u> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<u> </u> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<u> </u> other (explain): _____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	1	0 building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	—	— sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	—	— structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	—	— objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	1	0 total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing
 MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past - Pasadena

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Asphalt

walls Stucco, Wood, Glass

walls _____

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 7 Continuation Sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
x C
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Period of Significance

1957

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Dates

1957

Architect/Builder

Buff. Straub, and Hensman

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 8 Continuation Sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Please see Section 9 Continuation Sheets. See MPS Form.

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
X Local government
University
Other

Name of repository: City of Pasadena Planning Department

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 0.95

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	11	392876	3779828	3		
2				4		

x See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title	Barbara Lamprecht, Architectural Historian	
Organization	Jones & Stokes	Date April 4, 2008
Street & Number	811 W. 7 th Street, Suite 800	Telephone 213-627-5376
City or Town	Los Angeles	State CA Zip Code 90027

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

Photographs

Representative photographs of the property.

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name	Clarence E. Mello	
Organization		Telephone (626) 792-6466
Street & Number	541 Fremont Drive	
City or Town	Pasadena	State CA Zip Code 91103

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

*Mello, Clarence and Mary, House
Los Angeles County, California
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past*

Description

Summary

The one-story glass and wood frame house demonstrates the flexibility of the modular post-and-beam construction technique employed in addressing different sites, budgets and programs—as long as it was employed by a master architect, in this case Calvin Straub along with Conrad Buff and Donald Hensman. The owners, Mary and Clarence Mello, loved camping and the architects integrated that activity into what creating what their daughter and current co-owner Anne describes as a “tent with doors,” a description that could be applied to much of Buff, Straub & Hensman’s architecture during this period. Completed in April 1957, the Mello House is a post-and-beam house with a broadly pitched roof sited on a large, idiosyncratically-shaped “wedge” lot. At \$36,689.99,¹ it was built very cheaply for a middle-class couple with imminent plans for a large family of five children. Nonetheless, it shares with more upscale Buff, Straub & Hensman houses all the character-defining features of their work, including rigorously planned “zone” designations for specific activities and an abundance of terraces, decks and private patios woven throughout the composition. All additions and renovations were done under the firm’s supervision. Occupied by the Mello family, it retains exceptional integrity.

The property at 541 Fremont Drive is on the eastern bank of the Arroyo Seco within the Prospect Historic District (noncontributing to the historic district due to date of construction outside the period of significance of the larger district). The property is located at 541 Fremont Drive, Pasadena, California, a cul-de-sac extending southwest from Rosemont Avenue. The building is sited with its primary elevation facing east toward Fremont Avenue. The rear (west) elevation overlooks the Arroyo Seco. This is the parcel historically associated with the property. The parcel is identified as Assessor Parcel Number 5711-003-017, which is located at LEGAL TRACT #3050 LOT COM AT MOST W COR OF LOT 1 TH N 38/42' e 106 FT TH N 49/36' E 97.08 FT THE 60/21'40" E 161.12 FT TH S 54/55'40" E 100 FT TH S 37/55'40" E 45.20 FT TH S 26/49'20" W 20.52 FT TH N OF LEGAL LOT 1.

Description

Access is obtained from a relatively narrow driveway that opens up to the site, which continues flat before dropping off sharply to the lower Arroyo Seco below. The views to the northwest from the house offer an unusual and grand view of the San Gabriel Mountains, just beyond a grove of giant, mature Deodar Cedars beyond the site and growing in the broad river bed, not far from the Rose Bowl. It is located on a quiet cul-de-sac street in west Pasadena, and despite the upscale setting of the community, especially known for “La Miniatura,” the Millard House by Frank Lloyd Wright, feels the most rural and least suburban of Buff, Straub and Hensman houses reviewed.

The immediate setting of the 2,000-square-foot wood tongue-and-groove, glass and brick house includes the remains, seen in brick paving and piers in the forecourt (adjacent to the public entrance) and at the back of the house, of a large Pasadena estate, intentionally integrated into the composition by the architects and the Mellors.

The exterior materials palette of the house is typical Buff, Straub and Hensman: a 6' module of dark-stained posts (articulated with lighter members nailed on both sides) contains either grouped panels of warm gold-yellow stucco, wood, or glass; a brick fireplace concludes the simple palette. These load-bearing posts rise to a datum line of a lightweight beam/header that is continuous throughout the house; above the datum line may be operable transoms (for example, above large pairs of French doors in living room), fixed lights, or plywood or stucco panels. A large wood deck surrounds the house in the rear, where the hillside gently and then steeply falls away. The house is thus Janus-faced in appearing low and ground-hugging on the public side, the east elevation, and more imposing, with a stronger Japanese aesthetic seen in the shallow pitched roof, on the west elevation overlooking the Arroyo.

¹ As indicated by Mary Mello’s notes. Total payments to Cal Straub were \$4,769.70.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Mello, Clarence and Mary, House
Los Angeles County, California
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past

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In plan, it is comprised of a pinwheel shape of two back-to-back "L"s. Like a rock in a stream, one leg of the L, jutting out toward Fremont Street, divides paths of circulation, with a formal public entrance to the right (north) of this L volume. Behaving like a bridge, the roof of this L volume continues south to define an open-walled area for cars and family use, and terminates as the roof for a freestanding work room. This strategy provides a central yard/courtyard leading to the informal family entrance and the large family room/kitchen. This area is the fulcrum of the house. To the north lies the living room. Terraces of wood planking or washed small "Japanese" pebbles set in concrete surround the house.

Both the family and public entrances are on the same plane in plan, separated by the master bedroom/kitchen volume. The formal path to the house consists of a long pebble concrete path leading to a pair of solid French doors. Just as a leg of the L distinguished the paths for family and visitor, a bank of cabinetry just beyond the living room entrance forces one to go left into family space or right into public space. The living room, and experience the view to the northwest, obtained through glass walls on two sides of the room. The long side has glass entirely along the long side of the rectangular room. A fireplace occupies the corner area on the north wall of the living room and to its right is a slender full-height fixed glass window. Perpendicular to the fireplace side is a built-in wood carcass sofa, with a wood soffitt containing translucent panels hiding light bulbs operated by existing and operable electrical switches. Because of the band of clerestory glass here, this light also softly illuminates the exterior public entrance.

The different ways the same wood members is of note here. To the rear of the living room, the patio is made of 1x3 wood planks stained sage green and separated on the module by 4x4 dark-stained wood "posts" used horizontally. These posts, extending beyond the planking, mimic the rafter tails above, reinforcing the rhythm of the module in two planes. The same planking is used vertically as siding, seen on the wall immediately adjacent to the front door, again reinforcing the composition in an easily tangible way. The rafter size throughout is 4x6.

The master bedroom suite with bathroom with original and extant fixtures lies east of the open kitchen, and, like many Buff, Straub, and Hensman plans, is located well away from the children's bedrooms on the west. The east wall of this suite is glass and opens onto a private terrace and "secret" garden, a privacy conferred through the use of original and extant fiberglass panels set in wood; these panels are adjacent to and south of the public path to the front door.

The children's bedrooms are grouped in a spine and contained within the other L in the leg oriented east west. This L opens to the kitchen/family room (which has a second and much used original fireplace). These bedrooms are all slightly different in size and configuration. Of note is the careful consideration of how growing children could use and play in space: 8' wide hallway along all the bedrooms, used as a play area, flanks the bedrooms, whose doors are full-height sliding black chalk walls, still in use by family and extended family. A 1963 addition of two bedrooms, designed by the firm, juts off to the south and is aligned with the original guest room and detailed to match existing bedrooms.

Three characteristic skylights in the kitchen and the bathrooms illuminate potentially dark spaces.

Apart from the replacement of glass as needed, and the enclosure of some open-tailed rafters with fascia board to prevent rot on the east elevation, the house is original.

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Statement of Significance

A single-family house in the Modern style, designed by a master architect, of exceptionally high design quality, and retaining an outstanding degree of integrity, the Mello House meets the registration requirements outlined in the MPS. In a sense, the architecture so intimately reflects the evolution of the Mello family over time and is such a thoughtful response to individual client needs, met with a “generic” construction technology, that the description of the house is also a portrait of the family. The Mello House is particularly significant in that it demonstrates the flexibility of the modular post-and-beam construction technique developed by Buff, Straub and Hensman in addressing different sites, programs and budgets; the full integration with and transitions among site and structure, the full repertoire of character-defining features for post-and-beam houses. It is also significant as demonstrating innovation in residential Modernism within the period of significance, 1948 – 1968; indeed, it continues to convey lessons in how to live cheaply but well, and surrounded by nature, certainly the hope of many a returning G.I. For these reasons, the Mello House is eligible to qualify for listing under Criterion C, Architecture and Design, at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1957.

Of particular note in the Mello House is the early and unstinting organization on behalf of future liberation and casual, informal living, a planning approach that is a constant in Buff, Straub and Hensman houses and very evident here. The expected children’s needs and behavior were presciently analyzed by their parents and easily incorporated into the thinking of the architects.² Bedrooms were rotated among the children, so each could enjoy the different spaces; children’s drinking glasses were put at a low height in the custom-built, clear Douglas fir kitchen cabinets; terraces and secondary entrances on the south side of the children’s wing permit unseen egress and indicate a high level of trust. The two Ls were also zoned separately with two different water heaters and furnaces at Mary Mello’s request, so that “when all the kids were gone, they could close off one wing, which they did, because they knew they would live here their whole lives,” said Anne Mello.

Like many of their other houses, additions and renovations were designed by the firm. Permits and invoices track the changes in the firm’s identity, reinforcing the varying authorships: the house was designed and signed by Cal Straub, who wrote to the Mellos on USC stationery dated 23 April 1956 that the drawings were “well along;” the letterhead was “Straub + (Boris V.) Jocabowsky.” The two adult children interviewed said they had no recollection of their parents ever mentioning that person’s name, although Straub was a well-known figure to the family.

Significance—Conclusion

Argument under Criterion C- Eligible

As demonstrated above, the Mello House designed by master architects Buff, Straub and Hensman meets the registration requirements as outlined in the MPS. It has retained the respective required aspects of integrity. It is an excellent example of the firm’s body of work, as well as embodying the larger architectural concerns and expressions of Pasadena’s “Recent Past” as described in this Multiple Property Submission, Cultural Resources of the Recent Past, City of Pasadena. It is significant as demonstrating innovation in residential Modernism within the MPS period of significance, 1948 – 1968. Therefore, it is eligible to qualify for listing under Criterion C, Architecture and Design, at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1957.

² On-site interview with Ann Mello, daughter, who lived in the house since she was three. February 10, 2008.

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National Park Service

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Bibliographic References

Buff, Straub, and Hensman Archives. Office, Buff, Smith, and Hensman. 1450 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena 91105.

Mello, Anne. On-site interview February 10, 2008. (Archival material including full sets of preliminary and working drawings, correspondence, budgets, ancillary costs, permits, related articles owned, available and on-site with Mello family.)