

Agenda Report

October 27, 2014

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF 1350 LINDA RIDGE ROAD AS A LANDMARK

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 property at 1350 Linda Ridge Road meets Criterion "C" for designation as a landmark (P.M.C. §17.62.040) because it is a locally significant example of a Mid-Century Modern style house designed by architect Gregory Ain, and a locally significant example of a California Modern residential garden designed by landscape architect Garrett Eckbo, and retains a high level of integrity;
3. Approve the designation of the property at 1350 Linda Ridge Road as a landmark;
4. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1350 Linda Ridge Road, Pasadena, California;
5. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1350 Linda Ridge Road, Pasadena, California; and
6. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

At its regular meeting of August 19, 2014, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of 1350 Linda Ridge Road as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC §17.62.040.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The property at 1350 Linda Ridge Road qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion "C" as an intact, locally significant example of a Mid-Century Modern house with a California Modern residential garden.

BACKGROUND:

On June 9, 2014, Jeffrey Palmer, trustee for property owners Everett and Margaret Palmer, submitted an application for landmark designation of the property. The staff evaluated the property according to the landmark criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that it qualifies for designation.

Property Data

- Historical Name: Ralphs House
- Address: 1350 Linda Ridge Road, Pasadena, CA 91103
- Location: East side of Linda Ridge Road, west of Linda Vista Avenue
- Date of Construction: 1950, documented by building permit
- Original Architect: Gregory Ain
- Original Landscape Architect: Garrett Eckbo (Eckbo, Royston & Williams)
- Original Contractor: Richard M. Illsley
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Original / Present Owner: Walter W. Ralphs, Jr. / Everett & Margaret Palmer
- Lot size: 0.78 acre
- House size: 3,678 square feet

Setting & Site Description

The site is a 0.78 acre interior lot on a ridge in a hillside setting overlooking the Lower Arroyo Seco in the Linda Vista neighborhood. The site is approximately 120 feet in width and 260 feet in depth, with the house set back approximately 55 feet from the centerline of Linda Ridge Road, a private street. The mostly flat site slopes dramatically downward at the east side of the rear yard. In the center of the rear yard is a swimming pool.

Building Features

Built in 1950, this one-story house has an irregular splayed T-shaped plan, concrete slab foundation, walls of lightly textured stucco, wood framed windows, and a flat roof with a boxed cornice and extended flat canopies at various locations. At the center of the front elevation is a recessed entry courtyard with a trapezoidal footprint that opens to the front. Parallelogram-shaped planters occupy the left side and center-right portions of the courtyard. The rear wall of the courtyard consists of the front door and floor-to-ceiling translucent windows with clear transoms, the left wall of the courtyard has a row of awning windows at the level of the transoms, and the right wall is without windows. The wood front door has a smooth face without any ornamentation, except for a knocker. The front of the courtyard is screened with rectangular geometric patterns constructed of wood timbers attached to posts. The posts support a wood trellis consisting of beams intersecting at angles following the parallelogram patterns of the courtyard. Flanking the courtyard on the front elevation is a windowless wall (with

vertical wood trim, painted brown, added later) on the left, and an attached garage (converted from a carport) on the right. The garage doors have rectangular geometric patterns that are compatible with the courtyard screening. Horizontal bands of wood framed fixed and casement windows, half-light doors, and transom windows provide light, ventilation, and access for the bedrooms on the north side and rear elevation.

At the rear elevation, the common areas of the house (i.e., the living room and dining room) face north and east, with the main views of the back yard through floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows, including a pair of steel sliding glass doors. The north-facing living room has a canted roof that rises toward the north, with a soffit that continues from the interior ceiling approximately six feet past the windows. Transom windows occupy the space between the cross-beam representing the typical lower roof height and the canted living room ceiling, disappearing into the ceiling without framing. A row of recessed square lighting fixtures is placed near the edge of the roof.

Site Features

Many of the site features were installed during or shortly after the construction of the house, following a landscape plan drawn by Eckbo, Royston, and Williams in August 1950. Other mostly compatible features were added over time.

In the front yard, diamond-shaped and triangular panels of pebble pavement framed in wood extend seamlessly from the courtyard to the driveways and parking areas. The planting beds within the courtyard contain boulders and cobblestones (not shown in the original plan), and plantings of bird of paradise, palms, and ivy. The original angular pattern of ground cover in the largest bed is no longer evident. The bed at the left of the front courtyard contains boulders and a cobbled path (features not shown in the original plan) and is planted with short grasses and a young tree. Between the road and the front parking area is a large elongated planting bed with trees, tall screening shrubbery, grasses, succulents, and small boulders.

Non-original (but compatible) rectangular geometric pattern fences and gates enclose the side yards from the front. A similar non-original open fence runs along the north side property line. In the north side yard is a non-original pathway of rectangular pebble-surfaced concrete pavers. Pebble-surfaced circular concrete pavers, indicated on the plan, are used as landings for the exterior doors of the bedrooms and den.

An original swimming pool occupies the center of the rear yard, which is bordered by a geometric area of original flagstone paving and pebble pavement which extends to the landing that extends most of the length of the living room. A lawn area, with sycamore trees atop a slight rise in the northern portion is between the house and the swimming pool. A non-original path of variously sized cobbles extends from the north side yard to the swimming pool. The periphery of the back yard is composed of lush planting areas, some of which are on an elongated rise east of the swimming pool. Boulders are placed in various locations in the lawn and planting areas, though many have been

moved from the original locations (obscured by plantings) at the elongated rise at the periphery. A trapezoidal pocket garden, with cobbles and plantings, is at the southwest corner of the rear yard opposite the front entry. A small pond that was shown in the original landscape plans in that garden is no longer extant. A trellis, extending out from the east elevation of the living room, supported by a freestanding stucco wall and posts, is an original feature indicated in the original plans for the house. The Chinese style circular opening in the wall was added later. A non-original deck was built to extend the usable space at the east end of the house.

Documented Changes to the Property

Known minor alterations to the house include the installation of vertical wood trim on the front wall to reference the spacing of the front courtyard posts. The carport was enclosed with garage doors, side doors and walls, and vertical wood slats at the rear. A small sunroom was also added, attached to the garage. Vertical slats were added to shade the walkway between the garage and the kitchen. The house hasn't had any significant exterior alterations.

In 1988, the wood deck was constructed at the east end of the house, documented by building permit. A Chinese style circular opening was added to the wall supporting the rear trellis, adjacent to the deck. Fences and gates have been added to the property.

In general, planting materials species have changed and boulders have been moved from the original locations at the rear of the rear yard to various locations throughout the property. A cobbled path has been added between the swimming pool and the north side yard to the front yard, and rectangular pavers have been added in a few locations. The pocket garden at the southwest corner of the rear yard does not have the small pond indicated in the plan, and the ground cover pattern of the largest front courtyard garden bed is no longer evident.

Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

The house exterior is currently in good condition and it is used as a single-family residence. No significant changes to the property are proposed.

Mid-Century Modern Style

Mid-Century Modern describes the postwar iteration of the International Style in both residential and commercial design. The International Style was characterized by geometric forms, smooth wall surfaces, and an absence of exterior decoration. Mid-Century Modern represents the adaptation of these elements to the local climate and topography, as well as to the postwar need for efficiently built, moderately-priced homes. In Pasadena, this often meant the use of wood post-and-beam construction. The Mid-Century Modern house or office is characterized by its clear expression of structure and materials, large expanses of glass, and open interior plan. Local

practitioners of the style included prewar International Style architects like Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra, Gregory Ain and Harwell Hamilton Harris, as well as second generation Modernists like Ray Kappe, Buff & Hensman, Ladd & Kelsey, Carl Maston, A. Quincy Jones, Whitney Smith, and Wayne Williams. Architects such as John Lautner incorporated geometric and sculptural forms, embracing a more expressionistic or organic version of the style. Richard Neutra's Perkins House at 1540 Poppy Peak Drive (1955) and Buff & Hensman's Dubnoff Residence at 1150 La Loma Road (1965) are both excellent residential examples of Mid-Century Modernism in Pasadena.

As described in the National Register Multiple Property Submission "Cultural Resources of the Recent Past," the USC School of Architecture was highly influential in Southern California, and particularly in Pasadena, in the postwar period. This report references the following quote from Esther McCoy:

The postwar Pasadenans managed to combine, successfully, creatively, the post-and-beam rationalism which ultimately came from Neutra, the Arts-and-Crafts tradition of Wright and the Greenes, and the high standards of design and technique perpetuated here by architects like Myron Hunt, Reginald Johnson and Roland Coate into a fresh, convincing expression of residential architecture.

The Modern Garden: Post-World War II Era Garden Design in Pasadena, 1945-1968

Distinct from the designed landscapes of prior eras, the landscape architecture that emerged in the post-World War II era was fresh and innovative. Modernism's overlapping ground planes shattered the traditional axial plan, and its abstract fluid forms emphasized spatial continuity and flow over the rigidity of prewar formal design principles. The Modern movement's social objectives created a landscape architecture that was committed to achieving a balance between human, environmental, and aesthetic interests. The advent of new building materials, such as aluminum, plastics, and lightweight steel, introduced a varied palette of diverse colors, textures, and shapes to the garden. The movement also embraced the simplicity of Japanese-inspired design influences, which had a long lineage in Pasadena's Craftsman gardens. Modern-era landscape architecture balanced architectural voids and solids to create elegant, simple, and powerful design statements.

In the Modern garden, an innovative relationship between landscape architecture and artistic expression emerged. In earlier eras, garden elements, such as sculpture, often served an allegorical or memorial function. Under Modernist precepts, freestanding elements gained a new appreciation for their aesthetic contribution. Vegetation was redefined in the designed gardens of the post-World War II era. Plants with unusual growing habits and compelling silhouettes were highly sought after for the Modern garden. Designed landscapes associated with public, institutional, and commercial uses remained true to the Modern style's design vocabulary. Unlike the thickly planted pedestrian pathways that were popular in previous decades, Modern open spaces and

plazas ensured free pedestrian movement with large expanses of hardscape that were unencumbered by prescribed pathways. Like their residential counterparts, urban plazas were intended to provide spaces of relief from hectic contemporary lifestyles and a controlled setting for the buildings they fronted. Many designed landscapes intended for public uses had distinctive paving patterns and materials, were minimally planted or unplanted, or used vegetation sparingly.

Gregory Ain, Architect

Gregory Ain is considered the first local architect to work in the Modern idiom in Los Angeles. After an apprenticeship with Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler, Ain established his own practice in 1935. He developed residential designs on his own as well as in collaboration with Hamilton H. Harris. The hallmark of his career was his deep commitment to low-cost housing. Two of his most acclaimed projects in this regard are Dunsmuir Flats in Los Angeles (1937), and the Mar Vista housing tract in Venice (1947), the latter designed in collaboration with Joseph Johnson and Alfred Day, and landscaping by Eckbo, Royston & Williams. Ain taught at USC and at Pennsylvania State University, where he held the position of Dean of the School of Architecture. He returned to Los Angeles in 1967 and retired from teaching. Ain died in 1988 at the age of 79.

Garrett Eckbo, Landscape Architect

Garrett Eckbo (1910-2000) is recognized as an important landscape architect for both his residential and large-scale plans. According to historian Marc Treib, he was known for thinking of the “broad landscape and society first, before focusing on the garden,” a notion that was reflected in the types of work he was commissioned for during his career. A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, Eckbo went on to do graduate work at the Harvard School of Design. Even before his graduation, Eckbo published the first of a long line of studies and books on landscape architecture; entitled “Small Gardens,” the study focused on how creative gardens could be designed for increasingly small lots. After graduating, he went on to form numerous architecture partnerships, designing gardens and working on plans for camps and recreational facilities for the Farm Security Administration. His first office in California, established in 1946, was located in Pasadena. During the 1960s, Eckbo was commissioned with the strategic open space plan for the entire state of California.

In 1964, Eckbo went on to form EDAW with Francis Dean, Don Austin, and Edward Williams. During the nineteen sixties, Eckbo, working with EDAW, designed the landscape plan for the Ambassador College in Pasadena. EDAW has become one of the foremost private planning and landscape architecture firms in the world, and is internationally involved with large-scale urban projects, ranging from the Washington DC Downtown Action Plan to the winning proposal for London’s 2012 Olympic bid.

Walter W. Ralphs, Jr.

Born in Los Angeles in 1916, Walter William Ralphs, Jr. was the grandson of Walter B. Ralphs who along with George A. Ralphs founded the Ralphs grocery store chain in 1874. Before the family sold the chain in 1968, Walter Ralphs was part of the family executive team that administered the chain. He died in Beverly Hills in 2010 at the age of 94.

ANALYSIS:

The Ralphs house and garden at 1350 Linda Ridge Road is eligible for designation under Criterion C, (PMC §17.62.040.C.2), which states:

[The property] embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, architectural style, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose work is of significance to the City or, to the region or possesses artistic values of significance to the City or to the region.

Under this criterion, 1350 Linda Ridge Road is significant as a distinctive example of a Mid-Century Modern style house, designed by architect Gregory Ain, and a locally significant example of a California Modern residential garden designed by landscape architect Garrett Eckbo. The building and garden have a high level of architectural integrity (its ability to demonstrate why it is significant) through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, as follows:

- Location: The building and garden are in their original locations.
- Design: The building retains its form, plan, space, structure, and style, as described above. The garden retains its essential design elements. The design of the house and garden embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the design quality of the architects' work.
- Setting: The residential neighborhood is intact.
- Materials: The building has the original materials used in its construction. The garden retains the character-defining paving materials and boulders used in its construction.
- Workmanship: The building and garden exhibit workmanship through details such as the trellises, wood-bordered paving materials, geometric architectural screens, and frameless clerestory windows in the living room.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the Mid-Century Modern architectural style and California Modern landscape architectural style.

The house retains all of its original character-defining features, including one-story configuration, simple repeated geometric forms, expressed post and beam construction, flat roof with wide overhanging eaves, unadorned wall surfaces, full-height and

clerestory windows. All alterations to the house, including the enclosure of the garage, are compatible with the original structure. The house is listed in the city's 2006 Recent Past survey as eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The garden retains its character-defining features, including horizontal focus; interlocking geometric planes; repetition of a geometric pattern (the repetition of parallelogram and triangle shapes within the front courtyard and yard); clearly delineated circulation patterns; minimal ornamentation, outdoor rooms; linkages between the architecture and the landscape (the identical trellis and paving pattern in the front courtyard); architectural screens; pebble paving laid in decorative patterns; flagstone paving in the rear yard; a swimming pool; naturalistic plantings; plants with distinctive growing habits (birds of paradise and palms in the front courtyard); Japanese-inspired design elements (boulders); and association with a Mid-Century Modern building. Alterations to the site and garden are compatible with the character-defining elements of the design. The garden is listed in the city's 2012 Historic Designed Gardens survey as eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

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

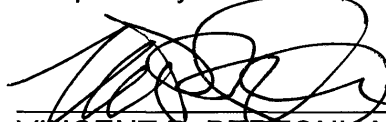
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

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:

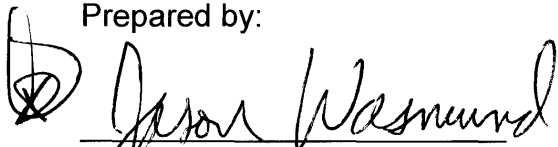
In some instances, owners of designated historic properties may apply to the City for a Historic Property Contract (Mills Act), which allows an alternative and often lower property tax assessment. The City Council reviewed the projected loss of property tax revenue from this program in 2002 when it adopted 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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Development Department

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Attachments:

- Attachment A – Vicinity Map
- Attachment B – Application Materials
- Attachment C – Photographs
- Attachment D – Effects of Landmark Designation