



# Agenda Report

July 15, 2019

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE HOUSE AT 280 CALIFORNIA TERRACE 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) pursuant to Section 15308 Class 8 of the CEQA Guidelines pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment and there are no features that distinguish this project from others in the exempt class and, therefore, there are no unusual circumstances;
2. Find that main residence, attached garage, arbors, dendriform sculpture, pool and hardscape adjacent to the house at 280 California Terrace meet landmark designation criterion C in Pasadena Municipal Code (P.M.C) Section 17.62.040(C)(2)(c) because they embody the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period. The building and accessory structures are locally significant, intact example of a single-family residence property type built in the Mid-Century Modern style, designed by locally significant architect Thornton Ladd, and retains integrity;
3. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 280 California Terrace, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute the attached Declaration of Landmark Designation for 280 California Terrace, 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 June 4, 2019, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the house and accessory structures at 280 California Terrace as a Landmark under Criterion “C” of PMC Section 17.62.040.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The house and accessory structure at 280 California Terrace qualify for designation as a Landmark under Criterion “C” because they embody the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period. The house and accessory structure embody the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period and represents the work of an architect whose work is of significance to the City. It is a locally significant example of a Mid-Century Modern style house designed by locally significant architect Thornton Ladd.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On March 5, 2019, John LoCascio, on behalf of property owner Ethan Lipsig, submitted an application for Landmark designation of the property at 280 California Terrace. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the P.M.C. and determined that the house qualifies for designation as a landmark under Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a locally significant property type, architectural style and period and represents the work of an architect whose work is of significance to the City.

The house is located within the eligible Arbor Street Landmark District. The district is located in the western portion of the City of Pasadena, east of the Arroyo Seco and between California Terrace and Grand Avenue. The surrounding area consists of older structures and this relatively large grouping of properties from the mid-century period is somewhat of an anomaly. The properties are within a steep hillside area; however, the pattern of the lots and streets is uniform as opposed to the curving, irregular pattern in most hillside areas, especially those west of the Arroyo Seco. Most of the houses are single-story, flat-roofed houses with a horizontal orientation in the Mid-century Modern and Modern Ranch styles. The international style house at 580 Arbor Street is three stories in height and the house at 591 Arbor Street has a lower half story on the descending slope. The two houses at the north end of the district, 280 and 287 California Terrace are three and two stories in height, respectively.

### **Property Data**

- Address: 280 California Terrace, Pasadena CA 91105
- Location: North of California Terrace, with Arroyo Boulevard the west and South Grand Avenue to the east.
- Date of Construction Completion: 1948 (source: Original Building Permit)

- Original Owner: W. Parker Lyon (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: Thornton Ladd (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: Unknown
- Original / Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: 34,076 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 3,824 square feet (source: County Assessor)

### Site Features

The residence located at 280 California Terrace is located on a sloping, wooded, irregularly-shaped parcel on the east bank of the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena, California. The property is accessed from the north end of California Terrace by a private road and is flanked on all sides by other single-family residential properties. Arbor Street is located to the south of the property, South Arroyo Boulevard is located to the west, and South Grand Avenue is to the east. The house is set back from the private road by a curvilinear driveway and rectilinear parking area paved in asphalt, and a wide sunken lawn surrounded by dense landscaping and mature trees, including a large Oak and Podocarpus. The house is accessed from the parking area by a series of concrete terraces and steps sheltered under a flat-roofed, steel-framed pergola with slender steel posts. The house is flanked to the north and west by terraces of square concrete pavers, fountains and a swimming pool. A detached garage with attached workroom, guestroom and bath is located off the southwest corner of the house.

### Main House Features

The property owner engaged Historic Resources Group (HRG) to prepare the Landmark designation application. As part of the application, HRG included a thorough description of the exterior of the home, portions of which are excerpted below:

“The Mid-century Modern style house is one story over a semi-subterranean basement, built into the sloping site. It has an irregular plan, asymmetrical composition, and complex massing consisting of two wings connected by an elevated, glass-walled bridge containing the entrance gallery. The house has a very low-pitched hipped roof with wide soffits boxed in redwood or plaster, redwood fascias, concealed stainless-steel gutters, and two interior Roman brick chimneys. The exterior walls are veneered in Roman brick with raked horizontal joints and flush vertical joints, accented with bands of smooth cement plaster at the floor level of the entrance gallery/bridge, living room, dining room, and the enclosed balcony of the south wing. Fenestration consists of steel-framed sliding glass doors and windows in a variety of configurations including fixed and sliding floor-length windows, butt-glazed corner windows, awning windows, and casement units. Near the southwest corner of the house, square cement plaster columns frame a covered porch that shelters a small elevator. The primary entrance is asymmetrically located on the east (rear) façade, at the northeast corner of the bridge, and consists of a

steel-framed sliding glass door. It is accessed by a series of concrete terraces and steps that wrap a square fountain at the west (front) façade, continue up the slope under the bridge, and switch back to the entrance door and pool terrace. In the corner, at the junction of the bridge and dining room, is a tiered, dendriform sculpture of wood and steel, which rises from a sloping planter at grade up to the roof soffit. The entrance door opens to a glass-walled gallery that occupies the bridge connecting the living and bedroom wing to the north with the dining and service wing to the south. The gallery has glazed brick flooring, glass walls, and a ceiling of intersecting rectangular panels at staggered heights, each with a wood fascia, that penetrate the exterior walls and extend in either direction to the living and dining wings. The panels appear to emanate from the top of the dendriform sculpture just outside. They are illuminated from above with concealed lighting. The gallery terminates at its north end at a mirrored, built-in wet bar concealed behind straight-grain Douglas fir pocket doors. A pair of flush bi-fold wood doors to the west (left) of the bar open to the living room; a corridor to the east (right) of the bar leads to the bedrooms. The living room is a large rectangular room with large floor-length fixed and sliding windows on three sides that wrap the corners of the room and look out into the surrounding treetops. The room's solid wall surfaces are paneled in straight-grain Douglas fir, framed with steel channels. The fireplace on the east wall has a mantel and hearth of black granite, with a recessed overmantel of brushed stainless-steel panels. There is a cantilevered terrace with stainless-steel mesh guardrails off the northwest corner of the room, with a floating concrete stair leading down to the garden. The bedroom corridor runs along the east side of the north wing and has large sliding glass doors that open to the swimming pool terrace. The inside wall is lined with large closets and a display niche with a glass shelf, illuminated from below. A guest bedroom and bath open off of the west side of the corridor. The guest bedroom has floor-length windows and a sliding glass door that opens to the living room terrace; a wall of built-in closets flanking a dresser. The guest bath has marble flooring, a marble shower, and a translucent ceiling illuminated by a dormer window. The corridor terminates at an indoor planter and a screen of operable wood louvers that mark the entrance to the master bedroom suite at the north end of the house. The planter and screen are illuminated by a skylight. The master bedroom has a fireplace with a marble mantel and mirrored overmantel; steel-framed windows and glass doors that open to a private terrace... The south end of the entrance gallery terminates at the dining room. It has wood flooring, floor-length windows on three sides, and staggered wood-framed ceiling panels as in the entrance gallery. On the south wall is a wood-paneled niche with a floating shelf... A former balcony, enclosed by the present owners in 1989, leads to the elevator and stairwell that provide access to the lower level... The lower level contains a laundry room and a bedroom and bathroom, originally designed as staff quarters. The garage has a

rectangular plan, simple massing, a flat roof with plaster soffits and wood fascia, exterior walls finished in smooth cement plaster, and a wood plank garage door. A steel arbor wraps the front (west) and north façades of the garage.”

### Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the house is largely intact. The only notable exterior changes appear to be the conversion of a carport to a garage and the addition of a guestroom and bath. The majority of documented changes to the property are related to the grounds and the interior of the home, including:

- Addition of the swimming pool in 1958, designed by Thornton Ladd
- Complete remodel of the kitchen, breakfast nook, and pantry in 1973, 1989, and 2017
- Substantial re-landscaping of the grounds in 1990
- Replacement of the tennis court with landscaping in 2012
- Replacement of cork flooring in the entrance gallery with glazed brick (date unknown)
- Replacement of dining room carpet with wood flooring (date unknown)
- Replacement of the cork panels on the dining room walls with drywall (date unknown)
- Re-facing of the cork shelf in the dining room with walnut in 1989
- Re-facing of the cork telephone desk with walnut in 1989
- Enclosure and interior reconfiguration of elevator balcony in 1989

### Current Conditions, Use, and Proposed Plans

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

### Historical Overview

#### *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.

The City's 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report identify the character-defining features of Mid Century Modern Houses as:

- One or two-story configuration
- Simple geometric forms
- Expressed post-and-beam construction, in wood or steel
- Flat roof with wide overhanging eaves and cantilevered canopies
- Unadorned wall surfaces
- Exterior panels of wood, stucco, brick or stone
- Flush-mounted metal frame full-height and clerestory windows
- Exterior staircases, decks, patios and balconies
- Little or no exterior decorative detailing

Character-defining features are those visual aspects and physical features or elements constructed during the property's period of significance that give the building its character. In general, a property that retains its character defining features continues to convey its significance and therefore retains integrity as an historic resource. Removal or alteration of one character-defining feature does not necessarily alter the integrity of an historic resource. Impacts to historic integrity can result from a single major change or from many incremental changes over time.

#### *Pasadena Style & the USC School of Architecture*

The 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report addresses the impact of the USC School of Architecture on Pasadena. The term "Pasadena" or "USC style" Modernism was coined by architectural historian Esther McCoy, and reflects the profound impact that graduates of the University of Southern California School of Architecture, many of whom lived and worked in Pasadena, had on the architectural landscape of the region. However, the majority of the architects working in Pasadena during the postwar period are not well known outside of the city. Probably the most successful in reaching some level of acclaim were the firms of Buff, Straub & Hensman; Smith & Williams; and Ladd & Kelsey. These were just some of the cadre of innovative Modernist architects who came out of the USC School of Architecture and designed thoughtful and original designs in Pasadena during the postwar period. Pasadena's Mid-century Modern residential architecture, therefore, is characterized not by individual genius, but by the collective excellence of the architects who worked there after the War.

### *Architect Designed Houses*

The 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report discusses architect designed houses in this style from the time period. The term “architect-designed” is used to distinguish high-style, site specific single-family residences from the simpler tract houses that proliferated primarily in large-scale residential developments during this period. 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.

There are concentrations of architect-designed residential properties from the period, which occur primarily along the Pasadena’s western and southern edges, where the subject property is located. These areas, composed largely of single family residences, occupy hilly terrain that had not been previously developed; this resulted in site-specific designs that responded to the unique circumstances of hillside development and were made possible by new technologies developed during and after the War. The area west of the 210 and 710 Freeways on both sides of the Arroyo also contain substantial numbers of houses from the period, particularly in the southwest corner of the city. Many of these are infill properties in previously developed neighborhoods. In some cases, these lots were created by subdividing large estates, for example in the Hillcrest Neighborhood as well as along the Arroyo on lots previously occupied by the Adolphus Busch estate and Busch Gardens.

#### *Thornton Ladd, Architect (1924-2010)*

Thornton Ladd was born in 1924 in Portland, Oregon. After serving in the United States Navy from 1944-1945, he completed his architectural education and training at the USC School of Architecture (B.Arch, 1952) and gained his practical experience working first for a general contractor, and later for two architects. His first professional job was as a designer in the Los Angeles office of Pereira & Luckman (his former professors at USC). In 1954, Ladd established his own practice with offices in Pasadena and Santa Barbara. In 1959, Ladd partnered with fellow USC graduate John Kelsey, setting up an office at 79 N. Pasadena Avenue. Ladd & Kelsey enjoyed a flourishing practice together for more than twenty years. Well-known for his attention to detail and concept of combining landscaping with interior and exterior design, Ladd’s designs often featured indoor fountains and the extensive use of glass walls and skylights. In 1957, the American Institute of Architect in association with Sunset Magazine honored him for the design of his mother’s home at 1085 Glen Oaks Boulevard, built in 1949 when he was only 25 years old. The following year, Ladd received an AIA Award of Merit for his own studio at 1083 Glen Oaks Boulevard, built in 1950. The Ladd House at 1280 Glen Oaks Boulevard (1956) and the Ladd Studio were published together in *House & Home* in December 1953, and in *Progressive Architecture* in 1959. Other residential projects include the residence at 280 California Terrace (1950); the Hodges House at 507 Bellefontaine Street (1955); the residence at 290 W. Colorado Boulevard; the

residences at 1092 and 1100 Paso Alto Drive; the Ladd House at 1280 Glen Oaks Boulevard (1956); and the residence he designed for his mother at 1085 Glen Oaks Boulevard (1949).

The Ladd Studio at 1083 Glen Oaks Boulevard (1950) has been characterized as “Pasadena’s own version of the house as a glass box... without a doubt, one of the great classics of post-World War II Modern architecture in Southern California” by Gebhard and Winter in their book; “Los Angeles: An Architectural Guide.” Under the partnership of Ladd & Kelsey, Ladd designed the First City Bank building at 123-137 S. Lake Avenue (1961) and their best-known work in Pasadena is the Pasadena Museum of Art (now Norton Simon) at 411 W. Colorado Boulevard (1969). Other notable works include Herrick Chapel at Occidental College 1600 Campus Road, Los Angeles, the First Methodist Church in La Verne at 3205 D Street, La Verne, and the California Institute of the Arts campus at 24700 McBean Parkway, Valencia.

### **ANALYSIS:**

The house at 280 California Terrace is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 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 Criterion C, the house at 280 California Terrace is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Mid-Century Modern property type, designed by Thornton Ladd. The registration requirements in the City’s 2007 Cultural Resources of the Recent Past Historic Context Report state:

In order to qualify under Criterion C (3), this property type would display most of the character-defining features of its style. 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 building has 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 remains on its original site.
- Design: The building retains the majority of its form, plan, space, structure, and style, including its irregular plan, asymmetrical composition, complex massing of two wings connected by a glass-walled bridge, very low-pitched hipped roof with wide redwood soffits and redwood fascias, exterior walls of Roman brick with smooth cement plaster accents, interior configuration and spatial relationships,



and integration with the site. The design of the house embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the prior alterations of the guest bedroom/bath at the rear of the house and the carport alteration have minimal visual impact on significant original design features.

- Setting: The residential neighborhood and expansive ground are intact.
- Materials: The building retains a majority of its original exterior materials.
- Workmanship: The building retains the majority of its exterior materials and features that reflect the craftsmanship of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Mid-Century Modern residential design and construction, and therefore retains integrity of workmanship.
- Feeling: The property clearly expresses the characteristics of the Mid-Century Modern architectural style.
- Association: The property at 280 California Terrace retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling, and therefore continues to convey its association with mid-20<sup>th</sup> century residential development and design in Pasadena.

Based on the above, the property retains sufficient integrity to qualify for designation as a landmark under Criterion C. The house retains all of its original character-defining features, including its irregular plan, asymmetrical composition, complex massing of two wings connected by a glass-walled bridge, very low-pitched hipped roof with wide redwood soffits and redwood fascias, exterior walls of Roman brick with smooth cement plaster accents, interior configuration and spatial relationships, and integration with the site. All alterations to the house, including the carport enclosure and guest room addition are compatible with the original structure. Contributing features to this designation include the house and attached adjacent site features including the dendriform sculpture, walkways and arbors.

#### **COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

The General Plan Land Use Element – Guiding Principle 2: “Pasadena’s historic resources will be preserved. Citywide, new development will be in harmony with and enhance Pasadena’s unique character and sense of place. New construction that could affect the integrity of historic resources will be compatible with, and differentiated from, the existing resource;” and Goal 8: “Preservation and enhancement of Pasadena’s cultural and historic buildings, landscapes, streets and districts as valued assets and important representations of its past and a source of community identity, and social, ecological, and economic vitality.”

#### **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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Attachments: (4)

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Application & Historical Documentation (Building Description Blank; Sanborn Map)
- C. Current Photographs
- D. Effects of Historic Designation