



Agenda Report

September 19, 2022

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Planning & Community Development Department
**SUBJECT: DESIGNATION OF THE ROBERT EARL LANGDON, JR. RESIDENCE
AT 1350 LA LOMA 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) 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 the Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. Residence at 1350 La Loma Road meets Criterion C as a landmark pursuant to Pasadena Municipal Code (PMC) Section 17.62.040.D.2 because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Mid-Century Modern property type and represents the work of Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. an architect whose work is of significance to the City and region;
3. Adopt a resolution approving a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1350 La Loma Road, Pasadena, California;
4. Authorize the Mayor to execute a Declaration of Landmark Designation for 1350 La Loma Road, Pasadena, California; and
5. Direct the City Clerk to record the declaration with the Los Angeles County Recorder.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

On June 7, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission recommended that the City Council approve the designation of the Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. Residence at 1350 La Loma Road as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.

BACKGROUND:

The Site

The residence is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of La Loma Road and Avenue 64, west of the Arroyo Seco. The property, flanked on its east and south sides by other single-family residential properties, is accessed from the north through a driveway adjoining La Loma Road at the east end of the property frontage.

Exterior Features of the Building

This single-story Mid-Century Modern style residence has an L-shape footprint consisting of two wings. The building sits on a low concrete slab foundation and is topped by a multi-plane flat roof with overhanging open eaves and exposed soffits. The roof sheathing is asphalt and gravel surfacing, replaced to match the original materials. The east-west oriented wing of the residence is clad in plywood panels elaborated with faux battens. The primary, north elevation of this wing is fenestrated with a horizontal band of metal-sash casement windows separated by wide wood mullions. The recessed main entrance to the residence is situated at the west end of this wing. The north-south wing, consisting of Langdon's former home studio and an attached two-car garage, is coated in smooth cement stucco and fenestrated with metal-sash windows similar to those of the north elevation of the east-west wing. The rear of the residence features steel-framed sliding glass doors that open onto the pool deck. For further information regarding the architectural features of the building, please refer to Attachment A

Documented Changes to the Property

The exterior of the house is largely intact. The only notable exterior changes identified through research and visual analysis include the in-kind replacement of the roofing material and the replacement of the original tilt-up garage door. 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 A.N. George and constructed by the California Swimming Pool Company
- Repair and replacement of a portion of the wood perimeter fence in 2013
- Various aesthetic and material modifications to the residence interior including installation of new flooring and upgrades to fixtures and finishes in the kitchen and bathrooms

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. For further information regarding the Mid-Century Modern style, please refer to Attachment A.

Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. (1918-2004)

Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. was born in 1918 in Council Bluffs, Iowa. Following a brief stint at Yale University during the late 1930s, Langdon attended the USC School of Architecture and graduated in 1944. After receiving his degree, Langdon served as Assistant Architect for USC's postwar expansion. Langdon and his former classmate Ernest Wilson, Jr. joined forces in 1949. The partners formally established the firm Langdon & Wilson in 1951. The year prior, Langdon designed the house at 1350 La Loma Road as his personal residence. Langdon resided at the subject property until about 1965.¹

While Wilson headed the office in Newport Beach, Langdon lead the firm's Los Angeles office and its associated projects. Langdon oversaw the design of nearly 30 important high-rise office and commercial buildings in downtown Los Angeles, particularly on Wilshire Boulevard, as well as the plans for the original Getty Villa, which opened in 1974. Langdon was skilled in a number of different architectural idioms, as evidenced by his work on the classically-inspired Getty Villa, but he primarily worked within the bounds of the International, New Formalism, and related Mid-Century Modern styles. One of his most well-known, extant works is the CNA Tower, the first all-reflective glass building in Los Angeles, completed in 1971. Together, the Langdon & Wilson firm amassed numerous accolades, including eight awards from the American Institute of Architects. Individually, Langdon and Wilson received lifetime achievement awards from the Construction Industries Committee of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.² For further information regarding Langdon's career, please refer to Attachment A.

¹ Myrna Oliver, "Robert Langdon Jr., 86; Designed 1st Getty Museum," *Los Angeles Times* (August 25, 2004), B9; Pacific Coast Architecture Database "Robert Earl Langdon, Jr." accessed May 2022, <https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/1008/>.

² "Insurance Firm Opens New Home Office Building," *Los Angeles Times* (January 11, 1953), 4; "Glendale's Highest Building Nears Reality," *Los Angeles Times* (September 9, 1962), 8; "Home Savings, Loan To Open New Office Building Tomorrow," *Pomona Progress-Bulletin* (December 11, 1963), 16; "Concrete Work Completed for Eight-Story TWA Towner," *Los Angeles Times* (May 31, 1964), J25; "Ground Broken for S&L Unit," *Los Angeles Times* (October 11, 1964), J28; "Steele Laboratories Going Up at Caltech," *Los Angeles Times* (July 18, 1965), J25; "Automated," *Los Angeles Times* (November 21, 1965), J8; "More Mirrors," *Architectural Forum* 135, no 5 (December 1971), 7; Myrna Oliver, "Robert Langdon Jr., 86;

ANALYSIS:

The application for landmark designation of the property at 1350 La Loma Road cited that the property was eligible for local listing under Criteria B, C, and D. Staff has determined that the property is eligible for listing under Criterion C, but not Criteria B (association with historical persons) or D (association with historical events).

Staff has determined that the house at 1350 La Loma Road is eligible for designation as a landmark under Criterion C of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2.c, 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 1350 La Loma Road is significant because it is a locally significant, intact example of the Mid-Century Modern property type and is a representation of the work of architect Robert Langdon Jr., a significant local architect who designed important modernist buildings, mainly International and New Formalism-style offices, throughout Southern California. The subject property is a unique expression of Langdon's professional style adapted for a residential setting and his personal use. 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 L-shape footprint, asymmetrical composition, multi-plane flat roof with overhanging eaves, exterior walls of plywood panels and smooth cement stucco, metal-sash windows, and interior configuration and spatial relationships. The design of the house embodies the defining characteristics of a distinct architectural movement and the minor exterior alterations result in minimal visual impact on the significant original design features.
- **Setting:** The surrounding residential neighborhood remains 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-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 has remained in use as a single-family residence throughout its history.

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 L-shape footprint, asymmetrical composition, multi-plane flat roof with overhanging eaves, exterior walls of plywood panels and smooth cement stucco, metal-sash windows, and interior configuration and spatial relationships. The house itself, which is the sole site component that is directly and significantly associated with Langdon's initial design, is the only contributing element to this designation. Other features of the site, such as the rear yard swimming pool, paved pathways and driveway, raised planters, etc. are non-contributing to this designation.

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:

The proposed designation qualifies for a categorical exemption pursuant to Section 15308, Class 8 of the CEQA Guidelines. 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,



JENNIFER PAIGE
Interim Director of Planning & Community
Development Department

Prepared by:



MICHELLE ANDERSON
Contract Planner

Reviewed by:



KEVIN JOHNSON
Principal Planner

Approved by:


MIGUEL MÁRQUEZ
City Manager

Attachments (5):

- A. Historic Preservation Commission Staff Report (June 7, 2022)
- B. Vicinity Map
- C. Application & Historical Documents (Building Description; Original Building Permit)
- D. Current Photographs
- E. Effects of Historic Designation