



PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STAFF REPORT

DATE: JUNE 7, 2022

TO: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

FROM: DAVID M. REYES, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUBJECT: APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A LANDMARK
1350 LA LOMA ROAD

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Historic Preservation Commission:

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 pertaining to Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment such as designation of historic resources.
2. Find that the house at 1350 La Loma Road meets Criterion C for designation as a Landmark pursuant to PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2 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; and,
3. Recommend that the City Council approve the designation of the property at 1350 La Loma Road as a Landmark.

BACKGROUND:

The subject property was previously surveyed in 2007, at which time it was assigned National Register of Historic Places status code 6L (should be considered in the city planning process, but is ineligible for designation as a historic resource). On March 14, 2022, property owner Cherise White submitted an application for Landmark designation of the property at 1350 La Loma Road under Criteria B, C, and D. City staff evaluated the property according to the criteria in Title 17 of the PMC 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 residence on the property, which exhibits many

character-defining features of the Mid-Century Modern architectural style, was designed by architect Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. as his personal residence.

DESCRIPTION:

Property Data

- Address: 1350 La Loma Road, Pasadena California 91105
- Location: Southeast corner of the intersection of La Loma Road and North Avenue 64
- Date of Construction Completion: 1950 (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Owner: Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Architect: Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original Builder: J.H. Kuhl & Sons (source: Original Building Permit)
- Original/Present Use: Single-family residence
- Property size: 11,725 square feet (source: County Assessor)
- Building size: 1,880 square feet (source: County Assessor)

Architectural Description:

The Neighborhood

The surrounding neighborhood consists of predominantly single-family residences constructed during the early through the mid-twentieth century. The architectural styles most represented on the same block as the subject property include Minimal Traditional, California Ranch, and Mid-Century Modern. Noteworthy, locally and national designated examples of the Mid-Century Modern style in the vicinity include 1175 La Loma Road, designed by Dennis Smith, and 919 La Loma Road, designed by Buff, Straub & Hensman.

The Site

The residence is located on a generally rectangular parcel at the southeast corner of the intersection of La Loma Road and North 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. The building is set back from the street front by a paved driveway lined by mature oak trees and a narrow lawn strip paralleling the north elevation of the residence. A concrete walkway leads from the driveway to the primary, front entry to the house. The rear, south yard, consists of a concrete swimming pool surrounded by brick pavers.

Exterior Features of the Building

This single-story, Mid-Century Modern residence, has an L-shape footprint consisting of two wings. The building sits on a concrete foundation and is topped by a multi-plane flat roof with overhanging open eaves and exposed soffits. The roof sheathing is recent asphalt and gravel surfacing, replaced to match the original materials. The east-west oriented wing of the residence, which includes the primary living spaces, is clad in plywood panels elaborated with faux battens. The primary, north elevation of this wing is fenestrated with a horizontal band of six metal-sash sliding windows separated by wide wood mullions. The recessed main entrance

to the residence is situated at the west end of this wing at the intersection with the north-south wing. The entry is fitted with a glass door set in a wood frame and surround.

The north-south wing, consisting of Langdon's former home studio and an attached two-car garage, is coated in smooth cement stucco. The garage opening, which has a replacement door, occupies the north half of the east elevation of this wing. A former studio is located between the garage and the east-west wing. Slightly set back from the garage, this portion of the façade is fenestrated with a horizontal band of five metal-sash windows. The windows are shaded beneath the roof overhang. Here, the spaces between the eave's exposed rafters are open to allow for light penetration.

The rear, south side, of the residence features four sets of sliding glass doors that open onto the back pool deck. Two of the door units are paired near the southwest corner of the building. Additional metal-sash sliding windows fenestrate the west side of the north-south wing and the east end of the east-west wing.

Although some material changes have been made to the interior, the configuration of rooms largely reflects the original layout as it was constructed in 1951. Advertisements from the previous sale indicate that a hall closet was removed to enlarge one of the bathrooms.

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

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 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" identifies 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 and the University of Southern California (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 USC 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. The most successful in reaching acclaim were the firms of Buff, Straub & Hensman; Smith & Williams; and Ladd & Kelsey. Robert Earl Langdon, Jr. and Ernest Wilson, Jr. partners of the firm Langdon & Wilson, likewise attended USC during this formative period. 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 and throughout the Los Angeles area 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 in Pasadena 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.

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. That same year, Langdon designed the house at 1350 La Loma Road as his personal residence. Langdon resided at the subject property until about 1965. Langdon also designed his second residence in Pasadena at 390 Mooresque Drive, which has been previously been identified as an eligible contributor the potential Glen Oaks/Manford/Mooresque Landmark District.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 Museum, which opened in 1974. Langdon was skilled in a number of different architectural idioms, as evidenced by his work on the classically-inspired Getty Museum, but he primarily worked within the bounds of the International, New Formalism, and related Mid-Century Modern styles. Notable commissions Langdon contributed to while residing at 1350 La Loma Road include the Balboa Insurance Company Building adjacent to USC’s campus in 1953; the Verdugo Towers in Glendale in 1962; the Home Savings and Loan Association Building in Pomona in 1963; the TWA Tower on Adams Plaza in Los Angeles and

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/>.

the Mariners Savings and Loan Association Building in Newport Beach in 1964; and the Henry G. Steele Laboratory at Caltech and the Mode O'Day Building in Burbank in 1965. 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

During his decades-long career, Langdon acted as President of the Pasadena Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), as well as the Director of AIA's California Council. Additionally, he served as the nationwide President of the architectural fraternity SCARAB.³

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 or D.

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, designed by Robert Langdon Jr., a significant local architect who designed important modernist buildings, namely 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 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

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; 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/>.

³ Myrna Oliver, "Robert Langdon Jr., 86; Designed 1st Getty Museum," *Los Angeles Times* (August 25, 2004), B9.

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 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. All alterations to the house, including the replacement garage door, are not considered character-defining features. The house, 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. The pool added in 1958 and site landscaping do not contribute to this designation.

The house at 1350 La Loma Road is not eligible for designation as a Landmark under Criterion B of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2.b, which states:

[The property] is associated with the lives of persons who are significant in the history of the City.

Under Criterion B, the house at 1350 La Loma Road is not significant as the former personal residence of Robert Earl Langdon Jr. Most of Langdon's significant works, including the Getty Museum and the CNA Tower, were completed during the late 1960s and through the 1970s while he resided at 390 Mooresque Drive. Furthermore, although Langdon appears to have maintained a home studio at 1350 La Loma Road, the residence was not his principle place of business.

The house at 1350 La Loma Road is not eligible for designation as a Landmark under Criterion D of PMC Section 17.62.040.D.2.d, which states:

[The property] has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important locally in prehistory or history.

Under Criterion D, the house at 1350 La Loma Road is not likely to yield valuable information which will contribute to our understanding of human history because the property is not and never was the principle source of important information pertaining to significant events, people, or architectural style.

CONCLUSION:

The house at 1350 La Loma Road qualifies for designation as a Landmark under Criterion C as an intact, locally significant example of a Mid-Century Modern style house, designed by and resided in by Pasadena architect Robert Earl Langdon, Jr.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Attachments:

- A. Application
- B. Vicinity Map & Historical Documentation
- C. Photographs
- D. Effects of Historic Designation