



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: April 5, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-011

HEARING DATE: April 27, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #1 – Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Stephen and Susan Connor; represented by Heritage Architecture & Planning

LOCATION: 2228 33rd Street, 92104, North Park Community, Council District 3  
APN: 539-181-10-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House located at 2228 33rd Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House located at 2228 33rd Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1938 under HRB Criteria C and D. The designation includes the interior wood paneling, rafter beams, and plywood detailing of the living room ceiling and the stone and brick fireplace. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the International Style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1938 period of significance. Specifically, the resource has a flat tri-level roof with cantilevered sections, an asymmetrical façade, split level layout, smooth stucco cladding, absence of ornamentation, painted brick chimney, fenestration consists of ribbon and casement wood windows.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect, Lloyd Ruocco and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a rare example of Ruocco's work in the International style during an early phase in his career and is based off of one of his designs for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition's Modeltown. Additionally, the building also exemplifies Ruocco's typical design aesthetic through the lack of ornamentation, use of natural materials and floor plans adapted for the hilly sites of San Diego.

## BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The resource is a one-story single-family residence located on the west side of 33<sup>rd</sup> Street between Juniper and Ivy Streets in the North Park community.

The property was identified in the [2016 North Park Community Plan Area Historic Resources Survey](#) as a "Potential Individual Resource" and was determined to be individually eligible for designation on the San Diego, California and National Registers.

The historic name of the resource, the Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Donald and Gladys Clitsome, who constructed the house as their personal residence, and the name of Lloyd Ruocco, Master Architect.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research was prepared by Heritage Architecture & Planning, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D and staff concurs. This determination is consistent with the [Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria](#), as follows.

*CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.*

The subject resource is a one-story, single-family residence constructed in 1938 in the International Style. The resource features a flat, tri-level roof with horizontal boxed eaves. An irregular floor plan accommodates the sloping lot with multiple elevation changes on the interior and exterior, with a split-level layout and multiple entrances. Concrete steps lead to the main entrance, which is slightly recessed, with a small porch covered by a cantilevered roof with horizontal stepping, to side over the garage is a small sun trellis projecting from the roof to the south elevation. The house has an asymmetrical façade, smooth sand stucco with minimal ornamentation, and a painted brick chimney on the west elevation. Fenestration consists of wood casement and flush fixed ribbon windows that wrap the East and Southeast elevations, and individual casement windows. The attached single-car garage is set at the lowest level on the site and is accessed via 33<sup>rd</sup> Street.

The property owner is also requesting inclusion of select interior features. They are proposing to include the: wood paneling, rafter beams, and plywood detailing of the living room ceiling; stone and brick fireplace, and built-in plywood shelves at the living room and hallway. Staff is recommending that the wood paneling, rafter beams, and plywood detailing of the living room ceiling and the stone and brick fireplace be included in this designation.

There have been minimal modifications to the structure since its 1938 date of construction. A permit was issued in 1967 for roof repair. Additional modifications that occurred at an unknown date are the replacement of an original kitchen door on the south elevation within the original opening and

the addition of an awning to the north elevation. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

The resource is highlighted in the in the 2007 San Diego Modernism Historic Context Statement as an example of International Style residential architecture in San Diego. The property maintains all four of the four primary features; flat roof, lack of ornament, horizontal bands of windows, asymmetrical facades; and three of the four secondary features, including square corners, corner windows and stucco exterior. The only character defining feature not present are the steel casement windows, whereas this house features wood casement windows.

The International style was a major world-wide architectural trend of the 1920s and 30s and reflects the formative decades of Modernism prior to World War II. Although the International style originated in Western Europe, it transcended any national or regional identity because International style architecture made no reference to local vernaculars or traditional building forms. The style quickly migrated to the United States as architects from Europe fled prior to WWII. In Los Angeles, immigrant architects Rudolph Schindler and Richard Neutra were instrumental in popularizing the International style. The emergence of International style architecture in San Diego came later with most examples built after 1935. The International style is characterized by a radical simplification of form and a complete rejection of ornament. Common features of International style architecture include square and rectangular building footprints, simple cubic or extruded rectangular forms, horizontal bands of windows, and strong right angles. Predominant building materials include concrete, smooth stucco, brick, and glass.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the International style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including a flat tri-level roof with cantilevered sections, an asymmetrical façade, split level layout, smooth stucco cladding, absence of ornamentation, painted brick chimney, fenestration consists of ribbon and casement wood windows. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

*CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.*

Lloyd Pietrantonio Ruocco was born in Maine in 1907 and moved to Canada as a baby. In 1923, he and his family moved to Southern California, first to LA, then to Long Beach, and finally to San Diego. While attending San Diego High School, Ruocco took an architectural drawing class and entered a contest run by Richard Requa for an original home design. Ruocco's design was so unusual that he was awarded a special third prize and a chance to meet Requa. After attending San Diego State College for one term, Ruocco was hired by the office of Requa and Jackson. He then decided to study architecture at UC Berkeley. While at Berkeley, Ruocco was exposed to the Beaux Arts tradition but favored the designs of Le Corbusier, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Wright.

After graduating from Berkeley in 1933, Ruocco returned to San Diego. He worked for Requa again on the County Administration Building, as well as a model town exhibit for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. During World War II, Ruocco worked as an architectural drafter for the US Public Works Office.

Ruocco built the Lloyd Ruocco Design Center (HRB #434) in 1950 to serve as the offices for his firm and his wife Ilsa's interior design firm and as a place to mentor young architects, including Homer Delawie. Ruocco and Delawie went on to form a partnership in 1958, which lasted until around 1961. Ruocco has been called the second most significant Modernist architect in San Diego architectural history (after Irving Gill). Ruocco, along with several other San Diego Modernist architects, was instrumental in establishing the Post and Beam style. Characteristics of Ruocco's work include an economy of materials, extensive use of glass to create the visual effect of transparency; simple wood beams; the inclusion of small, private places with lighting, nooks, and window seats; floor-to-ceiling cabinetry of fine wood; walls and ceilings made from redwood; Masonite floors; intricate landscape relationships; sliding panels; and flat roofs with wide eave overhangs.

Ruocco was also an advocate for social change and sound city planning. In 1961, he founded Citizens Coordinate for Century Three (C-3), an organization that advocates for strong city planning. He was also a founding member of the San Diego County Creativity Research Committee and a member of the San Diego City Urban Renewal Commission. In 1974, he was elected to the AIA College of Fellows.

At least six of Ruocco's works have been designated as historical resources by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. They include the Lloyd Ruocco Design Center (HRB #434), which established him as a Master Architect in 2000, in addition:

- HRB #911– James Don & Rita H. Keller/Lloyd Ruocco House (1433 Puterbaugh Street), 1948
- HRB #1228– Jackson Johnson III/Lloyd Ruocco & Homer Delawie House (8272 El Paseo Grande), 1961
- HRB # 1271– Park Garden Apartments/Lloyd Ruocco and Homer Delawie Building (1740 Upas Street), 1960
- HRB #1297– Robert and Alma Lard/Homer Delawie and Lloyd Ruocco House (2218 Vallecitos), 1965
- HRB #1340– Ruth Smith and Louise Neece / Lloyd Ruocco and Homer Delawie Duplex (8015–8017 El Paseo Grande), 1960

Ruocco submitted six designs for the Federal Housing Administration's (FHA) Modeltown at the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. The newly created FHA used the Exposition to show new and affordable home options meant to encourage new construction, and home ownership, by promoting cutting edge architectural styles and innovative building techniques. Up and coming Southern California architects were featured in the Modeltown exhibit and would use the platform to advertise their designs. Visitors would walk through a scale model community of 56 3-foot-tall houses, it is estimated that over a million people passed through the exhibit. The homes featured were designed to be both affordable and appealing to new home buyers, contrasting sleek designs and new construction with the realities of Great Depression era life. Ruocco used the Exposition as a platform to show off his innovative concepts of flexible design, raw materials, and indoor-outdoor connections with adapted floorplans for the hilly terrain. These innovations would go on to influence his, and other Southern California modernists, work.

The property was designed and built for Donald and Gladys Clitsome in 1938, based on one of his designs for Modeltown at the 1935 Exposition. This demonstrates Ruocco's early work in a Modern

style and is one of his few designs in the International substyle. The use of modernist principles of architecture and design are hallmarks of Ruocco's influential style.


Significance Statement: The subject resource retains good integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco's original design, intent and aesthetic. The house is significant as a rare example of Ruocco's work in the International style during an early phase in his career and is based off of one of his designs for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition's Modeltown. Additionally, the building also exemplifies Ruocco's typical design aesthetic through the lack of ornamentation, use of natural materials and floor plans adapted for the hilly sites of San Diego. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco located at 2228 33<sup>rd</sup> Street be designated with a period of significance of 1938 under HRB Criterion C as a good example of International style of architecture and Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Lloyd Ruocco. The designation includes the interior wood paneling, rafter beams, and plywood detailing of the living room ceiling and the stone and brick fireplace.



Megan Walker  
Associate Planner



Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
Development Services Department

MW/sa/ss

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Interiors proposed for designation
3. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 4/27/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 4/27/2023, to consider the historical designation of the **Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House** (owned by Stephen and Susan T. Connor, 2228 33rd Street, San Diego, CA 92104) located at **2228 33rd Street, San Diego, CA 92104**, APN: **539-181-10-00**, further described as BLK 19 LOT 9 in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Donald and Gladys Clitsome/Lloyd Ruocco House on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics of the International Style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1938 period of significance. Specifically, the resource has a flat tri-level roof with cantilevered sections, an asymmetrical façade, split level layout, smooth stucco cladding, absence of ornamentation, painted brick chimney, fenestration consists of ribbon and casement wood windows. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION D as a notable work of Master Architect, Lloyd Ruocco and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the resource is a rare example of Ruocco's work in the International style during an early phase in his career and is based off of one of his designs for the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition's Modeltown. Additionally, the building also exemplifies Ruocco's typical design aesthetic through the lack of ornamentation, use of natural materials and floor plans adapted for the hilly sites of San Diego. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include the wood paneling, rafter beams, and plywood detailing of the living room ceiling, and stone and brick fireplace.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
TIM HUTTER, Chair  
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,  
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,  
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY  
CITY OF SAN DIEGO  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD  
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY  
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501  
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

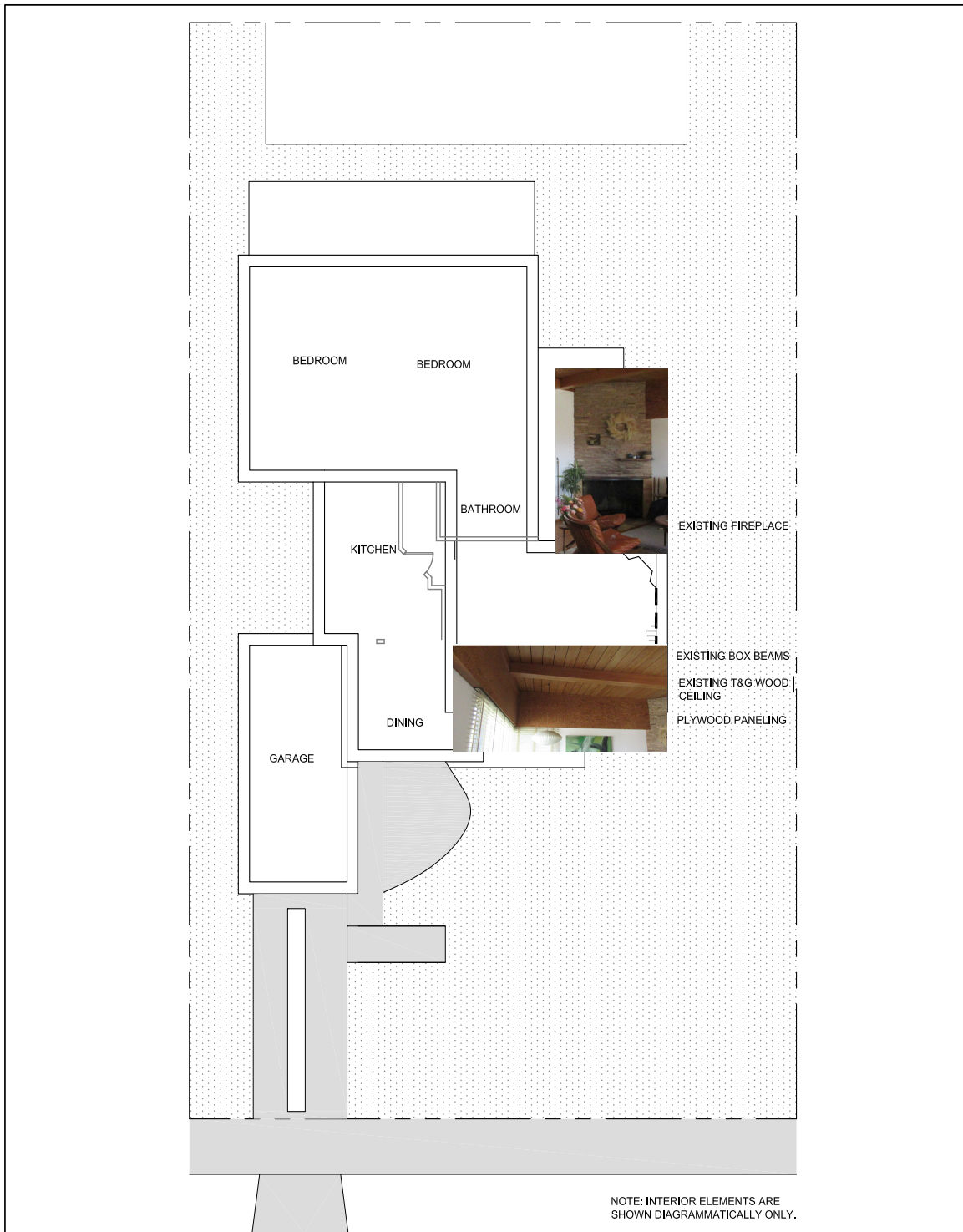
HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

**2228 33rd Street, San Diego, CA 92104**

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **539-181-10-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**

Attachment 2



NOTE: INTERIOR ELEMENTS ARE SHOWN DIAGRAMMATICALLY ONLY.

RUOCCO RESIDENCE PHOTO MAP



LEGEND:  
INTERIOR