



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: March 13, 2025 REPORT NO. HRB-25-014

HEARING DATE: March 27, 2025

SUBJECT: **ITEM #7 – Helen Copley/ Henry Hester House #2**

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

APPLICANT: Deguttadauro-Blunt Family Trust; represented by Johnson & Johnson Architecture

LOCATION: 7934 Prospect Place, La Jolla Community, Council District 1
APN 350-122-15-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Helen Copley/ Henry Hester House #2 located at 7934 Prospect Place as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Helen Copley/ Henry Hester House #2 located at 7934 Prospect Place as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1987 under HRB Criteria C and D. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Postmodern style and retains integrity from its 1987 period of significance. Specifically, the resource mixes two distinct materials with the exaggerated use of wood shingle and oxidized copper, showcases geometric asymmetry with the set-back front entry and projecting balconies, features stacked and offset, partially cantilevered balconies and uses bold, block-like forms alongside decorative ornamentation.
2. The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Henry Hester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Henry Hester's original design, intent and aesthetic. The resource illustrates Hester's late design evolution, showcasing a break from his early modernist mode of design to accommodate postmodern design motifs alongside the needs of an important client. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

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 property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Helen Copley/ Henry Hester House #2 has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of Helen Copley, who constructed the house as a guest house, and the name of Henry Hester, a Master Architect.

In order to be eligible for designation and listing on the City's Register, a resource must meet one or more of the City's designation criteria as specified in the Historical Resources Guidelines of the Land Development Manual and retain integrity as it relates to the significance of the resource. Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance, which requires an understanding of the physical features and characteristics that existed during the resource's period of significance. The National, California, and City of San Diego Registers recognize location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association as the seven aspects of historical integrity.

Although not all seven aspects of integrity need to be present for a property to be eligible for designation, the record must demonstrate that the property retains enough physical and design characteristics to reflect and convey the significance of the property. Each resource depends on certain aspects of integrity, more than others, to express its historic significance. Determining which of the aspects are most important to a particular property requires an understanding of the property's significance and its essential physical features. The [*Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*](#) provide information regarding the City's designation criteria, as well as guidance on their application and how to evaluate the integrity of a resource.

The subject resource was built in 1987, making it 38 years old. While 45 years of age is used as the threshold for the potential historic resource review laid out in SDMC Section 143.0212, there is no required minimum age for a resource to be designated by the City of San Diego Historical Resources Board. A resource simply needs to have significance under one or more of the HRB Criteria for designation. The *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria* states that "the significance of a historic property can be judged and explained only when it is evaluated within its historic context." In general, as more time passes after a resource's date of construction or period of significance, our understanding of its historic context improves, making it more likely that a resource can be adequately evaluated under the HRB Criteria. However, the age at which a resource can be adequately evaluated in its historic context can vary between resources. Staff finds that the subject resource can be sufficiently evaluated in its historic context as an example of recognized architectural styles and in relation to the entire body of work of Henry Hester, an established master architect.

ANALYSIS

The property located at 7934 Prospect is a three-story, Postmodern style, single-family residential building constructed in 1987 in the La Jolla Community Planning Area. The visually similar adjacent property located at 7932 Prospect Place is designated as HRB #1390, the Helen Copley/ Henry

Hester House. The property is in the middle of a block in the La Jolla Park subdivision. The property slopes down to the northeast, towards the front of the parcel. The property is in its original location.

Since its construction in 1987 the property has been minimally modified as follows: A roof deck on the third story flat roof was added in 2007 which is not visible from any elevation. Rooftop solar panels were added to the same third story flat roof in 2010.

A Historical Resource Research was prepared by Johnson & Johnson Architecture which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criterion C as an example of the International style and Criterion D as a notable work of Master Architect Henry Hester. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria C and D; however, staff concluded that the property was significant under Criterion C as an example of the Postmodern style. 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 was constructed in 1987 as a single-family residence. The three-story wood framed residence (daylight basement/garage and two-level residence) has the rear (south) portion recessed into the steep hillside of the sloping lot. The house is clad in wood-shingles with copper fascia accents on all elevations. All roofs on the resource are flat. Fenestration typically includes multi-lite casement and fixed windows in groupings of two to three.

The primary (north) façade features strong vertical and horizontal elements. Tall grouping of two-lite double casement windows are located on the second and third stories with copper detailing. The garage door also features copper. The primary entrance is recessed to the side of the garage and is accessed via a concrete walkway. The garage roof forms a balcony, offset to the east from the prominent third story balcony above. This third-story balcony with roof forms corner cantilevers. This roof and balcony are supported on two adjacent sides, while the remaining sides are cantilevered. The balconies feature a minimal metal railing.

The west elevation features a large fixed window on the first floor (at grade) that creates a partial width glass wall. The south (rear) elevation features two large covered balconies connected with a spiral staircase.

The historical resource research report categorizes the property as International style. According to the Modernism Context Statement, in San Diego, the international style is had a period of significance from 1935-1955 and is characterized by a simplification of form and a complete rejection of ornament. Primary features of horizontal banding of windows, lack of applied ornament, steel sash windows, typical exterior materials of concrete, brick, or stucco, and corner windows are all missing from the subject property. Staff believes that the house is better represented by the later Postmodern style.

As a late example of the Modern style, the subject resource was built in the Postmodern era and reflects Postmodern influences. Postmodern architecture emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction against what was seen as the rigid, functionalist principles of modernism, embracing

complexity and eclecticism. It often features bold colors, historical references, and decorative elements, blending different styles and materials in unexpected ways. Ornamentation returns as an important design element, sometimes exaggerated or ironic, while asymmetry and fragmented forms create visually dynamic structures. Postmodern buildings frequently challenge conventional design norms, incorporating whimsical or symbolic motifs, pastiche, and a mix of classical and contemporary influences. Postmodernism is characterized by reinterpretations of more traditional design elements, such as pediments, columns, archways, and gables. These reinterpretations are often achieved through distortion of proportions and scale, simplification, and the use of modern materials. Postmodern architecture is known for its diversity and eclecticism. It mixes styles, colors, and forms, often incorporating historical references and ornamentation. Resources typically display a wide range of materials, blending traditional and contemporary elements to create unique and expressive designs.

The subject resource showcases several key postmodern architectural features. It mixes two distinct materials, wood shingle and oxidized copper, creating a contrast between natural and modern materials. The design incorporates geometric asymmetry, with stacked and offset balconies that break away from rigid modernist symmetry. The use of bold, block-like forms and varying depths adds a sense of visual dynamism. Additionally, the incorporation of decorative elements—such as the oxidized copper garage door and copper fascia—introduces a sense of texture and historical reference, aligning with postmodernism's playful approach to materiality. The exaggerated use of shingle and copper, along with the block-like, asymmetric form and stacked balconies are the key features of this postmodern residence.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion C as a resource that embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Postmodern style. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, retains all aspects of integrity as the property has not had any changes to the original design or materials. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1987 period of significance under HRB Criterion C.

Significance Statement: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Postmodern style and retains integrity from its 1987 period of significance. Specifically, the resource mixes two distinct materials with the exaggerated use of wood shingle and oxidized copper, showcases geometric asymmetry with the set-back front entry and projecting balconies, features stacked and offset, partially cantilevered balconies and uses bold, block-like forms alongside decorative ornamentation. 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.

Henry Hartwell Hester was born in Oklahoma in 1925. He graduated from USC in 1947 with a bachelor's degree in architecture. After graduation, he moved to La Jolla. Some of his early mentors were William F. Cody and Lloyd Ruocco. Over the course of his career, he formed partnerships with several other architects, including Cody, Ronald K. Davis, Robert E. Jones and Fred Liebhardt.

Hester designed mostly custom single-family houses and commercial structures. His modernist architectural designs won local and national AIA awards. In 1958, he was commissioned to design a luxury apartment building at 3200 6th Avenue, overlooking Balboa Park. Hester created an airy and free-flowing atmosphere with floor-to-ceiling doors and windows to take advantage of the views. Each of the apartment floor plans was unique. Distinguishable block-like balconies functioned like outside rooms, enhancing privacy from neighboring tenants. The apartment building was one of the most acclaimed luxury apartment buildings of its day: it was showcased in a 1960 edition of San Diego Magazine and won an AIA Award of Merit. The HRB's designation of this apartment building (the Colonel Irving Salomon/Henry Hester Apartments, HRB #801) established Hester as a Master Architect in 2007. One other of his works, the Martin and Enid Gleich/Henry Hester House (HRB #1143), has been designated as a historical resource by the HRB.

Architectural photographer Julius Shulman observed that Hester's career peaked during "a good period of architecture when San Diego was just beginning to express itself in favor of modernism... in the early years...the International Style was not accepted... Hester and others warmed up the work quite a bit and edited it in a way that clients would accept."

In the mid-1970s, Hester entered semi-retirement by limiting his work to custom residential projects. Helen Copley asked him to design the subject resource in 1986. According to the Historical Resources Research Report, Hester broke from his typical modernist design mode to accommodate Copley's desire for more unique design elements.

Of the seven aspects of integrity, design, materials, and workmanship are the most critical to the property's ability to convey significance under HRB Criterion D as a resource that represents the notable work of Master Architect Henry Hester. The property, which has been modified as detailed in the beginning of the analysis section of this report, has not had any changes to the original design created by Hester. All aspects of integrity, especially design, workmanship, and materials are intact. Therefore, the property does retain integrity to its 1987 period of significance under HRB Criterion D.

Significance Statement: The resource is representative of a notable work of Master Architect Henry Hester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Henry Hester's original design, intent and aesthetic. The resource illustrates Hester's late design evolution, showcasing a break from his early modernist mode of design to accommodate postmodern design motifs alongside the needs of an important client. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D.

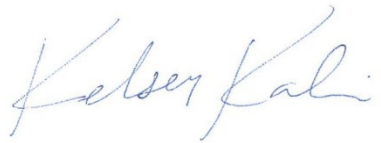
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 the Helen Copley/ Hester Hester House #2 located at 7934 Prospect Place be designated with a period of significance of 1987 under HRB Criterion C as a good example of the Postmodern style and Criterion D for its association with Master Architect Henry Hester.



Kelsey Kaline
Associate Planner
City Planning Department



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
City Planning Department

KK/SS

Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on , to consider the historical designation of the **HELEN COPLEY/HENRY HESTER HOUSE #2** (owned by Deguttadauro-Blunt Family Trust, 7934 Prospect Place, San Diego, CA 92037) located at **7934 Prospect Place, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **350-122-1500**, further described as PAR 1 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 Helen Copley/Henry Hester House #2 on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics of the Postmodern style and retains integrity from its 1987 period of significance. Specifically, the resource mixes two distinct materials with the exaggerated use of wood shingle and oxidized copper, showcases geometric asymmetry with the set-back front entry and projecting balconies, features stacked and offset, partially cantilevered balconies and uses bold, block-like forms alongside decorative ornamentation. 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 Henry Hester and retains integrity as it relates to the original design. Specifically, the subject resource retains integrity and continues to reflect Master Architect Henry Hester's original design, intent and aesthetic. The resource illustrates Hester's late design evolution, showcasing a break from his early modernist mode of design to accommodate postmodern design motifs alongside the needs of an important client. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion D. 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 **Site No. 0**.

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: HEATHER FERBERT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney