



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: September 21, 2012 REPORT NO. HRB-12-047

ATTENTION: Historical Resources Board
Agenda of September 27, 2012

SUBJECT: **ITEM #7 – Casa De Las Joyas**

APPLICANT: Mahmoud and Bibi Ladjevardi represented by Scott A. Moomjian

LOCATION: 7902 Roseland Drive, La Jolla Community, Council District 1

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Casa De Las Joyas located at 7902 Roseland drive as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Casa De Las Joyas located at 7902 Roseland Drive as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1927-1932 under HRB Criterion A. The designation excludes the family room, den, kitchen and utility room additions at the east side of the property, constructed in 1988 and 2006 and totaling approximately 852 square feet. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource is a special element of the City's and La Jolla's historical, cultural, aesthetic, and architectural development and retains integrity to the 1927-1932 period of significance. Specifically, the resource's high visibility and particularly unique Programmatic architecture has made it an important, clearly recognizable landmark in the La Jolla community. The resource's unusual appearance combined with origins fraught with intrigue and mystery have made it the subject of enduring local legends.

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 is a one to three story Programmatic style residence constructed in 1927-1932 on Roseland Drive where it dead ends at the north side of Torrey Pines Road in La Jolla. The structure sits on a large sloping lot facing the Pacific Ocean.

Development Services Department

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The historic name of the resource, the Casa De Las Joyas, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the specific name placed on the building by the architect upon its construction.

ANALYSIS

A historical resource research report was prepared by Scott Moomjian, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion A, but not HRB Criteria C or D. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

The Casa De Las Joyas was designed and built by Master Architect Herbert Palmer over a five year period between 1927 and 1932. Herbert Palmer and his wife Georgie Palmer used the house as their personal residence for a short period into the early 1930s. Palmer's intention was for the building to be the home of the President of an architectural school (himself) that would be located on the site of the present La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club. The effects of the Great Depression prevented this dream from being realized.

Palmer's body of work in San Diego primarily consisted of Mediterranean Revival and Spanish Eclectic style structures. After leaving England, Palmer spent time in South Africa and India in the early twentieth century before coming to the United States in 1912. The native architecture of both India and South Africa clearly made a considerable impression on Palmer. The Casa De Las Joyas is a patent expression of those influences: most notable are the domes derived from the Indian influence and the courtyard wall entrance, which evokes the classic Cape Dutch gables of South Africa.

The original 1927-1932 residence is uniquely distinct, employing a number of exotic influences through the use of multiple domes, clay tile roof, smooth stucco exterior and elaborate entrances. The subject building captures the whimsical, fanciful and eye-catching aesthetic of Programmatic architecture of the period. Also dubbed Mimetic, Roadside, or Novelty architecture, the term "Programmatic" architecture was coined by architectural historian David Gebhard in his introduction in the book, *California Crazy & Beyond: Roadside Vernacular Architecture* by Jim Heimann (2001, 1980).

Gebhard describes Programmatic architecture as architectural borrowing "employing either elements of traditional architecture vocabulary or nontraditional forms to convey meaning by indirection." Programmatic architecture could be direct (the structure as a sign of what it was selling), indirect (which held degrees of meaning), or without any apparent connection to its use. Gebhard identifies the heyday of California's Programmatic buildings as the ten-year period from 1925 through 1934; and notes that twentieth century Programmatic architecture, like Programmatic architecture of the past, used "architectural imagery which was either exotic (the

far-away or distant past), or was a perversion of some past European architectural mode.” Gebhard is sure to also mention the prevalence of non-European traditional imagery that was employed in the twenties: “The rash of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century non-European borrowings was continued, although the context was meant to be more jarring, so that their indirect message could be more favorably conveyed. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Japan, China, and Hindu and Islamic India provided vocabularies for anything ranging from the interior of restaurants to motion picture theaters.”

The acceptance of Programmatic architecture as a valid and significant resource type is reflected in the Historical Resources Board’s designation of the Luscomb Building (site #1047) in April of 2012 under Criterion A, as well as various listings on the National Register.

Based upon available research, the subject property reflects the context of highly distinctive Programmatic architecture which reached its creative and popular peak in the 1920s and 1930s. Within this context, the subject property reflects special elements of the City’s historical, aesthetic and architectural development. In order for a property to be eligible for designation under Criterion A, the Criteria Guidelines state that a resource must be distinct among others of its kind or surpass the usual in significance. The resource is one of the few extant buildings in San Diego which exhibits a Programmatic architecture aesthetic, and is the only known Programmatic building with an Indian motif. By virtue of its rarity within its context, the resource does surpass the usual in significance.

The subject building’s significance as a special element of the community comes greatly through its unique appearance and the impression it has made on San Diegans and the local and historical narrative. The striking domes of the Casa De Las Joyas are highly visible from Torrey Pines Road and have made the house a very recognizable local landmark since its construction. Interesting visual impact combined with alleged royal origins caused a stir among locals. It is believed that Herbert Palmer was the illegitimate son of the Prince of Wales who later became King Edward VII of England. Frequently called the ‘Taj Mahal’ or just ‘Taj’ by locals, the house has for decades inspired wonder and curiosity among the public and been the subject of countless legends and mysteries. It is believed that during Prohibition Palmer kept hundreds of bottles of wine concealed in the walls of the house. Some believe that the walls in fact still accommodate a hidden treasure of rare jewels. Other rumors say that it once served as a Muslim temple for an exiled Eastern monarch; or that it was built for a Maharaja who fled India to marry an American girl. The domed edifice continues to startle and fascinate passers-by on Torrey Pines Road - both visitors and locals alike.

The Casa De Las Joyas is indeed a unique and special element of the City’s and La Jolla’s historical, cultural, aesthetic, and architectural development. In addition, the resource retains sufficient integrity of association dating to the 1927-1932 period to convey this significance. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion A.

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 building was designed in a Programmatic style borrowing mainly from Indian architectural vocabulary and retains some character defining features of the style including the

three prominent domes, the barrel clay tile roof, and stucco exterior. Fenestration consists of wood framed casement style windows. Overall the structure is irregularly shaped and features a varied roof system to include domes; various barrel clay tiled roofs; and portions of flat roof with parapets.

The historical report concludes that the subject property is significant under Criterion C and staff does not concur. The residential building record notes a “remodel” that occurred in 1940, the details of which are unknown. No historic photographs were provided in the historical report which might shed light on the extent of this unexplained remodel.

Close inspection of the structure as well as examination of a 1978 monograph written by local historian James A. Leftwich revealed a few areas of concern for staff. First and foremost, the character defining supports for the domed structure and the balconies below have lost their decorative elements as seen in the Leftwich publication – where there were once elegant pairs of smooth tapered columns with square bases and capitals are mere structural members.

While the iconic domes of the structure remain highly visible to motorists on Torrey Pines Road, other architectural elements of the structure below are obscured by the courtyard wall. The height of the original courtyard wall is clearly delineated by the indigenous pebble and stone accent running the length of the wall. The stuccoed wall surface above is not original. Staff was able to locate in the La Jolla edition of the *Images of America* book series a single historic photograph from 1927 that confirms this conclusion.

The *Images of America* book shows what appears to be divided light windows above the main entrance to the house. Additionally, the Leftwich publication shows that most of the windows on the south elevation of the structure were of a divided light style. At some unknown time those windows were replaced with single light windows.

A stuccoed brick wall that sits below the secondary dome on the southeast is also an area of questionable historicity. The surface of the wall below the eave presents an unusual pattern where there may have been exposed rafter tails that had subsequently been in-filled. Also noteworthy is the fact that this wall is presently without any windows but was pictured in the 1978 Leftwich monograph with a divided light window that matched the others that are pictured on the building.

Finally, the west end of the house, specifically the portion containing the garage and the structure above it is an area of concern for staff. The unusual offset gable roof on this structure combined with the stucco texture and window treatments that do not appear typical throughout the house give reason for staff to believe that this west end of the house was an addition that occurred at some unknown date.

Other changes that were made to the house in 1988 and 2006 are better documented, namely the family room, den, kitchen and utility room additions that are located on the east side of the property.

The 2006 additions were approved as consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and on their own do not negatively impact the integrity of the resource. It is the cumulative effect

of the various other modifications to character defining features of the original structure that has significantly diminished the overall integrity of the resource and hindered its ability to convey the historic significance of the original Programmatic design style. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under Criterion C.

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

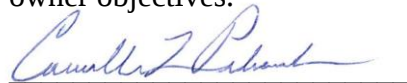
The subject building was designed and built by Master Architect Herbert Palmer. While this resource may be a particularly unique example of Palmer's work, significant alterations to character defining features have wholly diminished the integrity of the structure and cumulatively defeated the original design and intent of the Master Architect. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under Criterion D.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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 Casa De Las Joyas located at 7902 Roseland Drive be designated with a period of significance of 1927-1932 under HRB Criterion A as a special element of the City's and La Jolla's historical, cultural, aesthetic, and architectural development. The designation excludes the family room, den, kitchen and utility room additions at the east side of the property, constructed in 1988 and 2006, and totaling approximately 852 square feet. 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.



Camille Pekarek
Planning Intern



Cathy Winterrowd
Assistant Deputy Director/HRB Liaison

CP/cw

Attachments:

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A

ADOPTED ON 9/27/2012

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 9/27/2012, to consider the historical designation of the **Casa De Las Joyas** located at **7902 Roseland Drive, San Diego, CA 92037**, APN: **346-482-11-00**, further described as PAR 2 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 Casa De Las Joyas on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A as a special element of the City's and La Jolla's historical, cultural, aesthetic, and architectural development and retains integrity to the 1927-1932 period of significance. Specifically, the resource's high visibility and particularly unique Indian Vernacular architecture with Spanish Eclectic influences has made it an important, clearly recognizable landmark in the La Jolla community. 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**. The designation excludes the family room, den, kitchen and utility room additions at the east side of the property, constructed in 1988 and 2006, and totaling approximately 852 square feet.

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: N/A

BY: _____
JOHN LEMMO, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND
LEGALITY: JAN I. GOLDSMITH,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
KEITH BAUERLE
Deputy City Attorney