



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

## Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: May 11, 2023 REPORT NO. HRB-23-016

HEARING DATE: May 25, 2023

SUBJECT: **ITEM #3 – George and Martha Saunders House**

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

APPLICANT: Martha L Bradbeer Revocable Trust 10-20-98; represented by Urbana Preservation & Planning, LLC

LOCATION: 3120 Sterne Street, Peninsula Community, Council District 2  
APN 450-253-06-00

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the George and Martha Saunders House located at 3120 Sterne Street as a historical resource.

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the George and Martha Saunders House located at 3120 Sterne Street as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1951-1955 under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the north elevation 1977 dining room addition, the 1996 south elevation two-story addition, and the 1996 east elevation deck. This recommendation is based on the following finding:

The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics through the retention of character defining features of the Organic Geometric style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1951-1955 period of significance. Specifically, the resource features the use of natural unpainted redwood materials as exterior cladding; exposed concrete masonry supports and steel supports; cantilevering design; repeated window geometry; large expanses of glass to emphasize indoor-outdoor connections; asymmetrical facades; and a site-specific design.

### 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. Built on a steep hill with views of San Diego Bay, the subject property is a two-story residence with a detached carport.

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 George and Martha Saunders House, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name of George Saunders and Martha Saunders, who constructed the house as their personal residence.

## ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Urbana Preservation and Planning which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria C and D. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criterion C but not Criterion D. 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 two-story, Organic Geometric style building was constructed between 1951 and 1955, beginning with the lower story. The upper story began construction in 1955. It is built with concrete block and wood frame. Both stories are generally rectilinear in shape, and the upper story volume overlaps with the lower story volume at an angle. Both stories feature low-pitched shed roofs with widely overhanging eave projections. Portions of building feature pergolas attached to the building exterior. The lower floor cantilevers eastward over the slope, supported by unpainted concrete block piers and steel beams, while the second floor is supported by unpainted concrete masonry walls and steel posts.

The building is clad with vertical unpainted redwood board and batten siding. A concrete block chimney begins at the lower floor and extends upward through the upper floor. Its site-specific design allows for an eastward view toward San Diego Bay; the east elevation is the primary elevation. This elevation of the lower-floor features bands of horizontal fixed wood sash windows spanning nearly the entire length of the façade. The south elevation at the lower level contains the primary entry, containing a band of windows and a plain entry door. A two-story redwood-clad addition is also present along this elevation. The west elevation is the rear elevation, featuring an expanse of redwood-clad walls with clerestory and fixed windows. The north elevation contains a 1977 dining room addition with matching siding and floor-to-ceiling glazing. A wood deck is also present along this elevation and projects eastward.

The property's hardscape features, including the supporting concrete columns, the wood stairs with metal railing, the concrete terraced planters, and the concrete pathways with stone aggregate, were constructed during the period of significance. A detached carport is located below the residence at the end of a long uphill driveway, also dating to the period of significance.

Modifications to the property include a 1977 dining room addition, a 1996 south-elevation two-story addition, and a 1996 east-elevation deck. Undated alterations include the modification of the south elevation lower-floor window, which was replaced with a larger casement window. Overall, these modifications do not significantly impair the integrity of design, materials, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C.

Organic Geometric architecture is a philosophy of design that promotes a harmonious relationship between buildings and nature. Organic Geometric designers used natural building materials such as wood and stone. Like their Post and Beam Modern contemporaries, Organic Geometric architects also used glass to minimize the separation between the interior and the exterior and encourage indoor/outdoor living. Buildings were carefully sited to take advantage of views and other site features. Designs emphasize rectilinear geometry, asymmetrical facades, unusual rooflines, and angular shapes. Primary character-defining features of the Organic Geometric style are: exposed structure and materials; polygon design motifs including squares and diamonds; and natural materials. Secondary features are: sharp angular massing, asymmetrical facades, complex roof forms, and site-specific design.

Significance Statement: The house continues to convey the historic significance of the Organic Geometric style by embodying the historic characteristics associated with the style; including the use of natural unpainted redwood materials as exterior cladding; exposed concrete masonry supports and steel supports; cantilevering design; repeated window geometry; large expanses of glass to emphasize indoor-outdoor connections; asymmetrical facades; and a site-specific design. Therefore, staff recommends 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 property at 3120 Sterne Street was designed and built by George R. Saunders. The historic resource research report proposes the establishment of Saunders as a Master Structural Engineer.

Saunders was born in San Diego in 1924, obtaining a civil engineering degree from the California Institute of Technology in 1944. He began his engineering career with the City of San Diego Water Engineering Department before working for the San Diego United School District from 1952 until 1958. In 1958, he established his own structural engineering consulting firm George R. Saunders Associates. The firm specializes in large concrete buildings. Saunders was associated with the construction of the Solar Aircraft Company Engineering and Research Building (1959-1960), the Balboa Park Fine Arts Gallery expansion (1961), the La Jolla branch of the San Diego Trust & Savings Bank (1964-1965), the Le Rondelet Apartment Complex (1964-1965), the Reuben H. Fleet Space Theater in Balboa Park (1971-1973), and the P-028 Bachelor Enlisted Quarters at the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (1974-1975), among others. He worked with prominent Established Masters such as Robert Mosher, Roy Drew, Homer Delawie, and Joseph Yamada. In 1966, the La Jolla branch of the San Diego Trust & Savings Bank won honors from the Portland Cement Association's Building Awards Program of Southern California. In 1976, he was also acknowledged by the Masonry Awards Competition for his involvement in the P-028 Bachelor Enlisted Quarters project. Saunders was active in his professional and civic memberships. His affiliations included the Consulting Engineers Association of California, American Military Engineers, American Concrete Institute, University Club, San Diego Rotary Club, and the San Diego Yacht Club.

According to the City of San Diego's *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, a resource associated with the work of a master refers to their technical or aesthetic achievements. For a proposed establishment of a Master Engineer, the nomination report should include contextual information and analysis regarding the technical achievements of

Saunders within the structural engineering field. Although the report identified a list of Saunders projects, it does not elaborate on the structural engineering achievements that would qualify Saunders as a Master. There is insufficient information to designate George R. Saunders as a Master Structural Engineer at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D. Eligibility under this criterion may be reevaluated at a future date pending submittal of additional information and analysis.

Established Master Architect Homer Delawie and Established Master Landscape Architect Joseph Yamada of Wimmer-Yamada drew landscape plans for the subject property. These designs were minimally implemented, and the landscape design today does not represent a notable work of either Homer Delawie or Joseph Yamada. Therefore, staff does not recommend the designation of the existing landscape under HRB Criterion D for Master Architect Homer Delawie or Master Landscape Architect Joseph Yamada.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

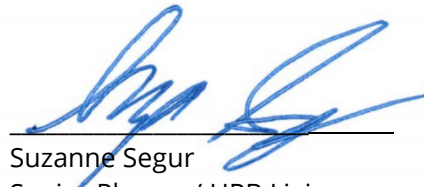
Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility 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 George and Martha Saunders House located at 3120 Sterne Street be designated with a period of significance of 1951-1955 under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the 1977 north elevation dining room addition, the 1996 south elevation two-story addition, and the 1996 east elevation deck.



Alvin Lin  
Assistant Planner



Suzanne Segur  
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison  
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

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

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A  
ADOPTED ON 5/25/2023

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 5/27/2023, to consider the historical designation of the **George and Martha Saunders House** (owned by Martha L Bradbeer Revocable Trust 10-20-98, 3120 Sterne Street, San Diego, CA 92106) located at **3120 Sterne Street, San Diego, CA, 92106**, APN: **450-253-06-00**, further described as **BLK 160 LOT 5 LOT 4 & NE 1/2** 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 **George and Martha Saunders House** on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C for its distinctive characteristics through the retention of character-defining features of the Organic Geometric style and retains a good level of architectural integrity from its 1951-1955 period of significance. Specifically, this property features the use of natural unpainted redwood materials; exposed concrete masonry supports and steel supports; cantilevering design; repeated window geometry; large expanses of glass to emphasize indoor-outdoor connections; asymmetrical facades; and a site-specific design. 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 designation shall exclude the 1977 north elevation dining room addition, the 1996 south elevation two-story addition, and the 1996 east elevation deck.

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

**3120 Sterne Street, San Diego, CA, 92106**

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **450-253-06-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**