



Historic Site Preservation Board Staff Report

DATE: June 9, 2015

PUBLIC HEARING

SUBJECT: AN APPLICATION BY GARY AND JOAN GAND (OWNERS) IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PALM SPRINGS PRESERVATION FOUNDATION, REQUESTING CLASS 1 HISTORIC DESIGNATION FOR "THE THEODORE & CLAIRE MORSE RESIDENCE" LOCATED AT 1197 ABRIGO ROAD, ZONE R-1-C (HSPB #94)

FROM: Department of Planning Services

SUMMARY

The Morse Residence is a single family residence in the Vista Las Palmas neighborhood, designed by architects Palmer & Krisel and built by the Alexander Construction Company in 1960. Its design was significantly enlarged and modified in 1961 by Hal Levitt, a regionally significant architect who designed many custom homes in the Los Angeles area for film and motion picture celebrities including many in the well-known "Trousdale Estates" neighborhood. Class 1 historic designation would:

1. Place the subject property under the guidance of Municipal Code Section 8.05
2. Require present and subsequent owners to maintain the buildings consistent with that ordinance,
3. Grant possible property tax reduction opportunities to the owners under the State of California Mills Act.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Open the public hearing and receive public testimony.
2. Close the public hearing and adopt Resolution HSPB 94, "A RESOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL APPROVE THE DESIGNATION OF 1197 ABRIGO ROAD (THE THEODORE & CLAIRE MORSE RESIDENCE) A CLASS 1 HISTORIC SITE SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS".

BACKGROUND AND SETTING:

The single family residence at 1197 Abrigo Road is located in one of the many tracts developed in Palm Springs by the Alexander Construction Company in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Although it was designed by the architectural firm of Palmer & Krisel, it bears little resemblance to the other "Alexander" homes in the Vista las Palmas neighborhood. This is because in 1961, the home's first owners, Theodore & Claire Morse, commissioned architect Hal Levitt to design a substantial modification and addition to the home, significantly changing its appearance.

Perhaps the most unique characteristic of the home is the interface between the living room and the swimming pool. When the two massive sliding glass pocket doors are open and slid entirely behind the flanking fieldstone walls, the visual integration of indoors and outdoors is literally seamless.

Levitt masterfully sets the fieldstone walls at different angles to frame the opening, then "dissolves" the wall plane by bringing the exterior fieldstone cladding *inside* and applying it on certain interior walls. He then further blurs the line between inside and outside by extending the ceiling plane of the living room out over the swimming pool. Levitt used this "push and pull" of interior and exterior walls, materials and ceiling planes to create a sophisticated and very memorable sense of "indoor-outdoor" living.



Photo by Dan Chavkin

**THE HOME'S POOL WITH ITS "COLUMN ISLAND", FEATURES A SWIM-UP BAR.
WHEN THE ENORMOUS SLIDING GLASS POCKET DOORS ARE OPEN
IT IS ALMOST INDISTINGUISHABLE WHERE THE INDOOR STOPS AND THE OUTDOOR BEGINS.**

<i>Related Relevant City Actions by HSPB, Planning, Fire, Building, etc...</i>	
May 26, & 28, 2015	Site inspection by members of the HSPB and City Staff.
<i>Neighborhood Meeting</i>	
None	
<i>Ownership Status</i>	
2013	Purchase by current owner.

Historic Preservation activities in Palm Springs are regulated under Municipal Code Section 8.05 ("*Historic Preservation*"). The purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance is:

"... for the purpose of preserving areas and specific buildings of the city which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political, architectural and archaeological history. This chapter is intended to stabilize and improve buildings, structures or areas which are considered to be of historical, architectural, archaeological or ecological value, to foster civic beauty, to strengthen the local economy and to promote the use of specific buildings for the education and welfare of the citizens."

Definition of an Historic Site.

Section 8.05.020 of the Municipal Code provides the definition of a historic site as follows. Staff evaluated the application against this definition, the summary of which is provided below.

(a) Historic Site.

An historic site is any real property such as: a building; a structure, including but not limited to archways, tiled areas and similar architectural elements; an archaeological excavation or object that is unique or significant because of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect and:

The Theodore & Claire Morse Residence is significant because of its design and aesthetic effect, as characterized further in this staff report.

- 1. That is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community; or*

Contrary to the historic resources report, staff does not believe the site is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the national state or local community.

- 2. That is associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contribution to national, state or local history; or*

The subject site does not meet this criterion.

3. *That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history; or*

The Theodore & Claire Morse Residence (TCMR) possesses many of the distinctive characteristics, detailing, and styling reflective of the post-war period of development in Palm Springs. During this period, many local developers, hoteliers, homeowners and merchants embraced Modern architecture, adapting it to the desert climate and casual lifestyle. The Morse Residence exemplifies the post-war period in architecture in two ways: (1) it began life as a conventional post-war modernist tract house, constructed of inexpensive mass-produced materials using post and beam construction, and (2) the Levitt-designed addition and reconfiguration gave the home more of a custom-built quality, making use of higher quality materials and infusing it with "Hollywood Regency"-like architectural details, a style that reached its zenith of popularity in the post-war sixties.

4. *That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction;*

The original structure of the TCMR was built using inexpensive mass-produced materials and conventional "post and beam" construction, which was common in the 50's and 60's in most of the Alexander Construction Company tract homes built in Palm Springs, as well as the many Eichler homes found throughout California. The Levitt-designed addition appears to be of conventional "stick built" frame and stucco construction with stone veneer. Staff believes that, although certain aspects of the design of the home are unique and distinctive (such as the sunken living room, the large sliding glass pocket doors, and the integration of the swimming pool with the living room), the method of construction is not.

5. *That presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value;*

The home presents the talent of architect Hal Levitt. Levitt was an architect of regional significance, having designed many residential commissions for celebrities in the movie industry in Los Angeles, the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas and most notably, many homes in Trousdale Estates in Beverly Hills. Levitt's work, while solidly grounded in the Modern period of architecture, exhibits characteristics of the Regency style which was popular during the sixties especially in Los Angeles.

Other examples of Levitt's work in Palm Springs include the Abe Schwartz residence (below).



The Abe Schwartz Residence, Palm Springs

Levitt's work can often be distinguished from that of other architects practicing in that period by his grandly-scaled exuberant spatial sequences, eclectic "Regency styled" decorative interiors, and a masterful interplay between indoor and outdoor living. Levitt had the good fortune of receiving many commissions from wealthy patrons, which allowed him greater opportunities to experiment with high quality materials, custom millwork and finishes, and expansive covered terraces and loggias with over-sized sliding glass pocket doors, and interesting angles. The Morse residence possesses these characteristics.

6. *That represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;*

Staff does not believe the subject property meets this condition.

7. *That has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.*

Staff is unaware of any archaeological or pre-historical relevancy to this site.

Designation of Historic Sites.

Only the City Council is authorized to designate historic sites. When the Historic Site Preservation Board determines that Class 1 historic designation of a certain site or district would further the purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the Board may initiate studies, surveys and investigations it deems necessary to adequately gather information in consideration of such a recommendation to the City Council.

Conditions that apply to Class 1 Historic Sites.

According to Section 8.05 of the Municipal Code, the following shall apply to a Class 1 Historic Site:

1. It shall meet the definition of a historic site as outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.020.
2. An archival file shall be maintained on the property by the City.
3. It may be qualified as 'historic' at the federal, state, and/or county level.

4. The structure/site may not be modified nor objects removed without the approval of the City Council.
5. The use may be limited by the City Council to the extent that it may impair the integrity of the site.
6. A marker explaining the historic nature of the site will be installed at the site in a location viewable from the public way.
7. Compliance with all rules and regulations for Historic Sites and Historic Districts under Article IV of Chapter 8.05 of the Municipal Code shall be required.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The historic resources report date stamped March 3, 2015 provides a solid description of the subject site.

DEFINING HISTORIC CHARACTERISTICS

The physical character-defining historic features of this site include the following:

1. The concrete "Empress" screenblock wall on the front façade of the home.
2. The oversized glass sliding pocket doors on the west façade between the living room and the swimming pool.
3. The angular swimming pool that abuts the exterior living room wall, including the "island column".
4. The fieldstone walls on the exterior and interior of the home.¹
5. The extended roofline spanning over the swimming pool.
6. The terrazzo walkways at the front of the house (excluding the "Fritztile" terrazzo-looking tiles on the driveway).
7. The "Shadowal" concrete block perimeter wall along the north property line.

REQUIRED FINDINGS

In considering a recommendation for Class 1 historic designation, pursuant to Municipal Code Section 8.05.160, the Board and the City Council shall find that the purposes of the Historic Preservation chapter are furthered by designation of such property as a historic site or district. The purpose of the Historic Preservation chapter of the Municipal Code is outlined in PSMC 8.05.010:

This chapter is adopted pursuant to the authority of (California) Government Code Section 37361 for the purpose of preserving areas and specific buildings of the city which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political, architectural and archaeological history. This chapter is intended to stabilize and improve buildings, structures or areas which are considered to be of historical, architectural, archaeological or

¹ Although the interior of privately owned sites are not subject to HSPB review, the interior rock walls that match the exterior rock walls are integral in creating the visual seamlessness between inside and outside areas around the pool.

ecological value, to foster civic beauty, to strengthen the local economy and to promote the use of specific buildings for the education and welfare of the citizens.

Class 1 designation of the Morse Residence would further the purpose of the historic preservation ordinance because it reflects elements of the City's architectural, social, and cultural history as follows:

Criterion 3: It reflects the Modern period in architecture and design that was popular in the post-war period in Palm Springs and the elsewhere in the nation.

Criterion 5: It presents the work of Hal Levitt, an architect of regional significance whose work possesses high artistic value.

CONCLUSION

Staff believes the Morse Residence meets the definition of a historic site as outlined in the Municipal Code under Criterion 3 and 5; reflecting the post-war period of architectural design and presenting the work of Hal Levitt, an architect of regional significance. Its designation as a Class 1 historic site will further the purpose of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

In accordance with Section 15331 (Historical Resources Restoration/Rehabilitation) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the proposed designation is categorically exempt from environmental review as the proposed designation meets the conditions outlined for preservation of a historic resource (Class 31 Categorical Exemption).

NOTIFICATION

Pursuant to section 8.05.140 of the Municipal Code of Palm Springs, All property owners within five hundred (500) feet of the subject property have been notified and notice was made in a newspaper of general circulation. As of the writing of this report, staff has not received any inquiries on this matter.



Ken Lyon, RA,
Associate Planner



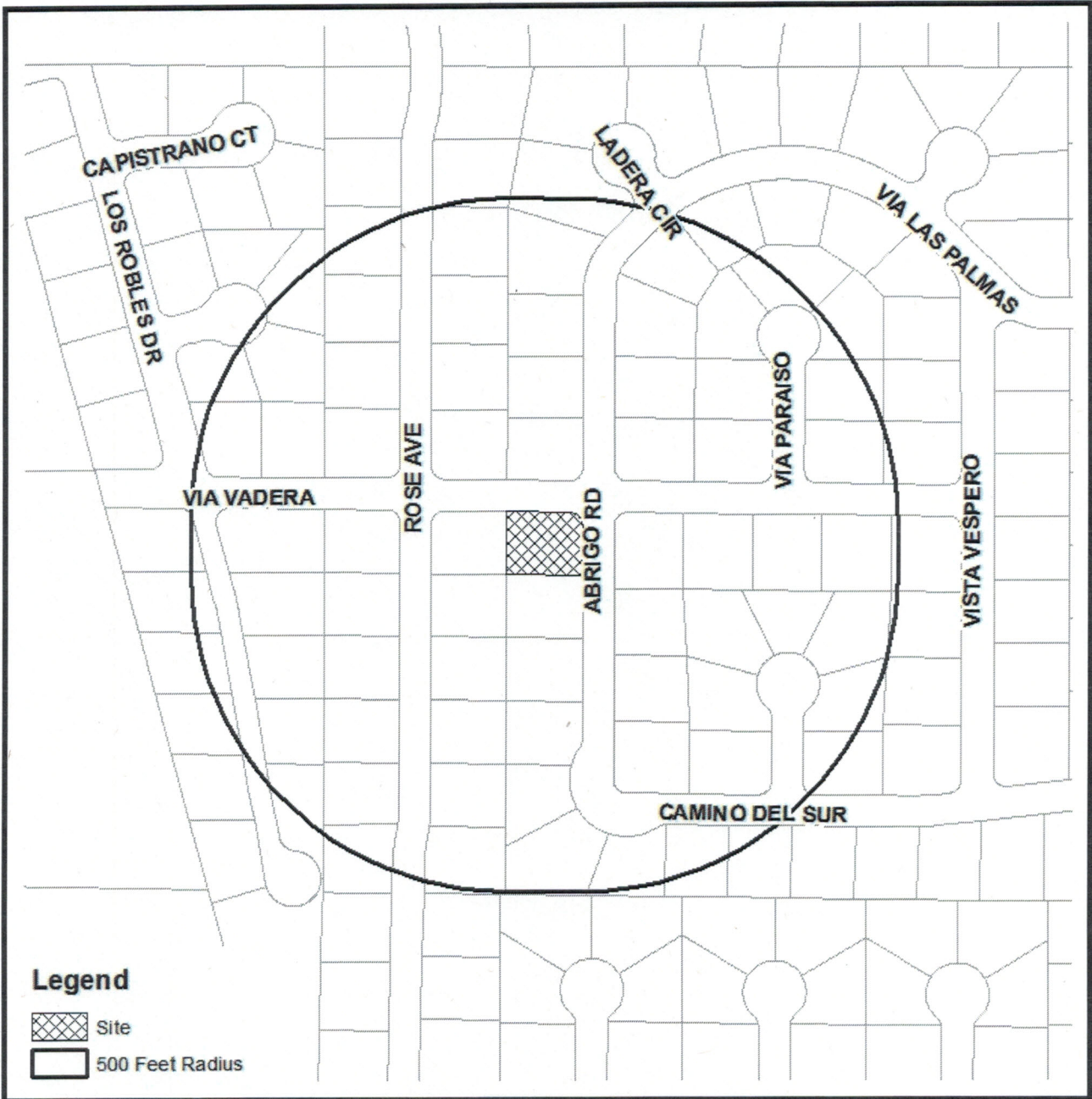
Flinn Fagg, AICP
Director of Planning Services

Attachments:

1. Vicinity Map
2. Draft Resolution
3. Historic Resources Survey, Application, letter of support from the owner, and related documents.



Department of Planning Services Vicinity Map



Legend



Site



500 Feet Radius

CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

RESOLUTION NO. HSPB 94

A RESOLUTION OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA, RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL DESIGNATE THE PARCEL AT 1197 ABRIGO ROAD, (APN #505 092 007) "THE THEODORE & CLAIRE MORSE RESIDENCE" CLASS 1 HISTORIC SITE #HSPB 94, (ZONE R-1-C)

THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD FINDS AND DETERMINES AS FOLLOWS:

- A. Gary & Joan Gand, ("Applicant and owner") in collaboration with the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) have filed an application with the City pursuant to Article III of Section 8.05 ("*Procedure for Designation of Historic Sites or Historic Districts*") of the Palm Springs Municipal Code requesting Class 1 historic site designation for the parcel located at 1197 Abrigo Road (APN 505-092-007).
- B. On May 26 & 28, 2015, members of the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) and city staff conducted site inspections to familiarize themselves with the subject site.
- C. On June 9, 2015, a noticed public hearing to consider Case HSPB 94 was held by the HSPB in accordance with applicable law.
- D. The proposed historic site designation is considered a "project" pursuant to the terms of the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"), and has been determined to be Categorically Exempt as a Class 31 exemption ("*historic resources restoration / rehabilitation*") pursuant to Section 15331 of the CEQA Guidelines.
- E. The HSPB carefully reviewed and considered all of the evidence presented in connection with the hearing on the project, including, but not limited to, the staff report, and all written and oral testimony presented.
- F. The subject parcel is eligible for consideration as a historic site because it conforms to the following criteria established in Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.020 ("*Definitions*")

(a) *Historic Site.*

An historic site is any real property such as: a building; a structure, including but not limited to archways, tiled areas and similar architectural elements; an archaeological excavation or object that is unique or significant because of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect and:

The Theodore & Claire Morse Residence is significant because of its design and aesthetic effect.

Criterion 3: That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history; or

The Theodore & Claire Morse Residence (TCMR) possesses many of the distinctive characteristics, detailing, and styling reflective of the post-war period of development in Palm Springs. During this period, many local developers, hoteliers, homeowners and merchants embraced Modern architecture, adapting it to the desert climate and casual lifestyle. The Morse Residence exemplifies the post-war period in architecture in two ways: (1) it began life as a conventional post-war modernist tract house, constructed of inexpensive mass-produced materials using post and beam construction, and (2) the Levitt-designed addition and reconfiguration gave the home a custom-built quality, making use of higher quality materials and infusing it with "Hollywood Regency"-like architectural details, a style that reached its zenith of popularity in the post-war sixties.

Criterion 5: That presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value;

The home presents the talent of architect Hal Levitt. Levitt was an architect of regional significance, having designed many residential commissions for celebrities in the movie industry in Los Angeles, the Riviera Hotel in Los Vegas and most notably, many homes in Trousdale Estates in Beverly Hills. Levitt's work, while solidly grounded in the Modern period of architecture, exhibits characteristics of the Regency style which was popular during the sixties especially in Los Angeles.

Levitt's work can often be distinguished from that of other architects practicing in that period by his grandly-scaled exuberant spatial sequences, eclectic "Regency styled" decorative interiors, and a masterful interplay between indoor and outdoor living. Levitt had the good fortune of receiving many commissions from wealthy patrons, which allowed him greater opportunities to experiment with high quality materials, custom millwork and finishes, and expansive covered terraces and loggias with over-sized sliding glass pocket doors, and interesting angles. The Morse residence possesses these characteristics.

G. FINDINGS. Pursuant to PSMC 8.05.160 ("*Findings and Decisions – Resolution*"), the HSPB and City Council must make findings in support of the historic site designation as follows:

"If the city council shall find that the purposes of this chapter are furthered by designation of property as an historic site or district, such findings shall be stated in a resolution designating such property within such historic site or district."

The purpose of the Historic Preservation Chapter of the Palm Springs Municipal Code is outlined in PSMC Section 8.05.010 as follows:

"This chapter is adopted pursuant to the authority of Government Code Section 37361 for the purpose of preserving areas and specific buildings of the city which reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political, architectural and archaeological history. This chapter is intended to stabilize and improve buildings, structures or areas which are considered to be of historical, architectural, archaeological or ecological value, to foster civic beauty, to strengthen the local economy and to promote the use of specific buildings for the education and welfare of the citizens."

Class 1 historic site designation of the Morse Residence would further the purpose of the historic preservation ordinance because it reflects elements of the City's architectural, social, and cultural history as follows:

Criterion 3: It reflects the Modern period in architecture and design that was popular in the post-war period in Palm Springs and the elsewhere in the nation.

Criterion 5: It presents the work of Hal Levitt, an architect of regional significance whose work possesses high artistic value.

THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD RESOLVES:

Based upon the foregoing, the HSPB hereby recommends that the City Council designate the parcel at 1197 Abrigo Road (APN 505-092-007), "The Theodore & Claire Morse Residence" Class 1 Historic Site #HSPB 94.

ADOPTED this ninth day of June, 2015.

AYES:
NOES:
ABSENT:
ABSTAIN:

ATTEST:

CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

Flinn Fagg, AICP
Director of Planning Services