



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

APPLICATION: HL-134

AGENDA ITEM: PH-2

PREPARED BY: Craig Jimenez
Planning Division Manager

MEETING DATE: April 29, 2015

TITLE: Historic Landmark HL-134; 833 Wildrose Avenue

APPLICANT: Diane Chino
833 Wildrose Avenue
Monrovia, CA 91016

REQUEST: Historic Landmark Designation

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: (Categorical Exemption (Class 1))

BACKGROUND: Pursuant to the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the property owner has filed an application for consideration of historic landmark designation and approval of a Mills Act Contract.

ANALYSIS: Building permits were issued for the house at 833 Wildrose Avenue in November, 1964. The house was constructed over the next three years; completed in 1968. The property is improved with a single family house and a detached guest house in the backyard. The house was designed and built by architect Thomas Chino and was their long time home. Thomas Chino passed away in 2006 at the age of 92. His wife, Diane, still resides in the home.

Post War Period and Modern Design

The period from the Great Depression through the end of World War II marked a dramatic slowdown in housing production. As the pace of residential construction increased after the war, several prominent trends emerged affecting residential development, especially in California. The impact of the automobile, which quickly became the preferred mode of transportation, accelerated suburban development. This in turn, removed the constraints of infill construction in already urbanized areas.

The post war period was a time of extraordinary economic growth which produced a great demand for progressive design in everything including clothing,



automobiles, furniture and architecture. Vernacular residential architecture changed, the popular styles based on designs of the past were generally abandoned in favor of new and often simple variations of modern styles that had begun to appear in the pre-war.

At the time, this “style” was simply referred to as contemporary or modern. The term “midcentury modern” is a recently coined term. Midcentury modern describes a design aesthetic incorporated into modern design (including architecture) roughly between 1940 and 1970, although those dates vary.

Very broadly, in residential architecture the style emphasized creating structures with ample windows and open floor plans with the intention of opening up interior spaces and bringing the outdoors in. Many mid-century homes utilized then groundbreaking post and beam architectural design that eliminated bulky support walls in favor of walls seemingly made of glass. Function was as important as form with an emphasis placed specifically on targeting the needs of the average American family. Examples of residential Mid-Century modern architecture have also been referred to as the California Modern style. Sunset magazine, as a proponent of the style and of western living, has been credited for that term.

The style probably drew its most significant influence from the 1945 Case Study House Program in southern California, sponsored by Arts and Architecture magazine. The Case Study goal was to provide affordable, modern, residential designs. Many of the major architects of this period were commissioned to participate. California-based Joseph Eichler was one of the primary developers that brought this modern aesthetic into the mainstream.

833 Wildrose Avenue

By the time the Mid-Century Modern design became popular, much of Monrovia had already been subdivided and developed. While there are number of houses spread throughout town, it was never a dominant architectural style here. (Although Monrovia City Hall is a very good example of the mid-Century International Style civic building).

This house is a single story, (Mid-Century) Modern style single family dwelling with an open rectangular plan. The house is 2,258 square feet in area and has one bedroom and two bathrooms. The roof is comprised of a single low pitched side gable roof sheathed with



composition shingles with deep eaves and wide spread exposed rafters. The exterior walls are a mixture of glass and vertical shiplap redwood. The front elevation is primarily sided, with large floor to ceiling windows with a two over one design to the right of the entry. The large panes are divided by aluminum mullions. The similar pattern is used across a large portion of the rear elevation.

A two-car carport sits under the east end of the roof structure, supported by square wood posts. Two globe light fixtures are

suspended from the ceiling/roof of the carport. Floor to ceiling double doors are on the front that lead to a glass walled vestibule that projects from the rectangular layout of the house. The stairs, porch landing and vestibule are constructed on an open platform, suspended off of the front of the home by a series of posts. A globe light hangs on each side of the porch, each at a different height. The main living area is accessed from the vestibule through an offset wooden sliding door.

The house has one bedroom and one bathroom. The kitchen, dining-living room are entirely open to the roof and a redwood drop ceiling over the bedroom and kitchen area. A large fireplace anchors the living room on the east. The rest of the interior east wall is paneled with walnut veneer which cover hidden cabinets and a projector screen. The interior also features exposed beams throughout except for a redwood drop ceiling over the bedroom and kitchen area and terrazzo floors are throughout including the bathrooms and built-in tub. Gravel troughs surround the home for drainage and eliminated the need for gutters.

Although not overt, there is a Japanese design aesthetic – simplicity and minimalism. The entry vestibule is reminiscent of the genken, a traditional Japanese entryway area of a house. Traditionally, the primary purpose is an area to remove one's shoes before entering the main part of the house.

Criteria and Guidelines

As specified in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, a property must meet one or more of the designation criteria. The applicants have identified two criteria that they believe the property meets. Each criterion is discussed individually below starting with the criterion from the Municipal Code, a summation of the applicants' determination of applicability (in italics) and staff's response.

Criteria Number 2 – It is representative of the work of a notable builder, designer, or architect.

The property is significant as the long time residence of Thomas and Diane Chino. Thomas Chino was a notable architect working who was the project architect for several prominent projects including the Los Angeles Harbor Terminal. This house was designed and built by him. He was also a noted artist and had showings at Golden Gate International Exposition and a member of the California Watercolor Society.

Criteria Number 4 – *It embodies one or more distinctive characteristics of style, type, period, design, materials, detail, or craftsmanship.*

833 Wildrose Avenue is significant as an excellent intake example of a Mid-Century Modern style residence. The house embodies the distinctive characteristics of the style such as a low pitched roof, walls of glass, open floor plan; it also has distinctive features not evident on others in Monrovia. Primarily, the glass enclosed vestibule is a unique feature and an essence of the Japanese design aesthetic.

The applicant is not requesting a Mills Act Contract.

DPR Form

Based on the information presented in the application and staff research, and an oral interview with property owner Diane Chino, Staff has assigned a rating code of 5S3, meaning that the property is determined to be eligible for designation. If the Historic Preservation

Commission determines that the house is eligible for listing for local designation and the City Council concurs, then the code will be changed to 5S1.

A DPR form is attached for the review, comment and approval of the Commission. The history of the Chinos is an integral part of the history of this house, the Continuation Sheet (DPR pages 3-4) contains a summary of the interview with Mrs. Chino.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission forward a Nomination Statement to the City Council recommending that the house at 833 Wildrose Avenue be designated as a historic landmark.

If the Historic Preservation Commission concurs with this recommendation and determines that the property meets at least one of the seven criteria for historic landmark designation, and the information provided on the DPR is accurate then, following the public hearing, the following motion is appropriate:

Designate the property at 833 Wildrose Avenue as Historic Landmark 134 and so recommend to the City Council

Other Listings
Review Code

Reviewer

Date

Page 1 of *Resource Name or #: HL-134

P1 Other Identifier: 833 Wildrose Avenue

*P2 Location: Not for Publication Unrestricted

a. County: Los Angeles

c. Address: 833 Wildrose Avenue City: Monrovia Zip: 91016

e. Other Locational Data: APN # 8517-027-027

P3a Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)
One story, (Mid-Century) Modern style single family dwelling with an open rectangular plan. The house is 2,258 square feet in area and has one bedroom and two bathrooms. The roof is comprised of a single low pitched side gable roof sheathed with composition shingles with deep eaves and wide spread exposed rafters. The exterior walls are a mixture of glass and vertical shiplap redwood. The front elevation is primarily sided, with large floor to ceiling windows with a two over one design to the right of the entry. The large panes are divided by aluminum mullions. The similar pattern is used across a large portion of the rear elevation.

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P3b Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) HP1. Unknown

*P4 Resources Present: Building Structure Object Site District Element of District Other

P5a Photograph



P5b Description of Photo: (view, date)

Front elevation facing NW, 3/2015

P6 Date Constructed: 1965

Source: Building Permit

P7 Owner and Address:

Diane Chino

833 Wildrose Ave, Monrovia, CA

P8 Recorded by:

Craig Jimenez, City of Monrovia

P9 Date Recorded: 4/2015

P10 Survey Type: Individual

P11 Report Citation:

Attachments: NONE Location Map Sketch Map Continuation Sheet Building, Structure, and Object Record
 Archaeological Record District Record Linear Feature Record Milling Station Record Rock Art Record
 Artifact Record Photograph Record Other (List):

Page 2 of _____ *Resource Name or #: HL-134

B1 Historic Name: Chino House

B2 Common Name: n/a

B3 Original Use Single Family Dwelling

B4 Present Use Single Family Dwelling

B5 Architectural Style Modern (Mid-Century

B6 Construction History (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

1965-1968 – House constructed

B7 Moved: No **Date Moved** _____ **Original Location** _____

B8 Related Features:

Detached guest house was built prior to the main house and served as the primary residence to the owner prior to and during the construction of the house. The exterior of the building was subsequently altered to tie into the design of the house.

B9a Architect: Thomas Chino **b. Builder:** Thomas Chino

B10 Significance: **Theme:** Architecture **Area:** Monrovia

Period of Significance: 1965 **Property Type** HP2 - Single Family Property

Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as well as integrity.

Modern single family dwelling was constructed in 1965. The house is still owned by the original owner and has maintained a high level of integrity. There have been no modifications to the footprint and is well maintained and in excellent condition. As a result, the property exhibits a high level of integrity of design, workmanship, and materials. The residence is in its original location and its setting has been retained. Integrity of association is high because of its continued use as a single family residence under the ownership of the original owner, architect and builder.

B11 Additional Resource Attributes:

B12 References:

City Building permits, interview with owner

B13 Remarks

B14 Evaluator /Date Craig Jimenez, City of Monrovia /4/2015



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The mid-century modern home at 833 Wildrose was built in 1965 by owner-architect Tom Chino and his wife Diane “Dee” Chino. Dee still resides in the home and has been a wealth of information about her husband’s background as an architect as well as the actual construction of the home. The lot at 833 was originally part of a triple lot which was anchored by the Craftsman home at 845 Wildrose Avenue. An avocado grove and bunkhouse stood where 833 would eventually be built.

The story of the Chinos’ lives before arriving in Monrovia is an interesting one. Tom Chino was born in 1914 in Talbert, CA which is now Fountain Valley. Tom’s father had come to Chula Vista from Japan in 1903 and grew celery which was known as the Pride of Chula Vista. Tom’s father also helped organize smaller farmers so that they could sell their crops more efficiently. Tom’s mother sold eggs—saving the money to purchase a parlor grand piano for Tom’s sister who went on to study music at the University of Rochester. Tom was a good student and graduated from Sweetwater High School in Chula Vista hoping to study aeronautical engineering and did research for McDonnell Douglas. Tom’s mother did not want him going up in planes so Tom changed his studies to architecture and graduated from USC in 1938. Most of Tom’s professional work focused on commercial structures including public schools, for which he won numerous awards and was also featured in Time and Life magazines.

Diane “Dee” was born in Mukilteo, WA, a suburb of Seattle, in 1923. She graduated from high school in 1941 and her family took their first vacation trip to southern California. Dee and her sister wished to cross the border to visit Mexico but her parents were hesitant to allow two young girls to travel unescorted. Dee’s father had previously visited Los Angeles to take part in an exhibition of Kendo—a form of Japanese fencing—during the 1932 Olympics. He remembered a Japanese-American young man named Tom Chino who had acted as chauffeur to the Japanese faction of the Olympic participants and called on Tom to drive his daughters across the border in to Mexico. Thus arranged, Tom and Dee met. After the trip they kept up a long distance correspondence which survived the dramatic changes that occurred to Japanese-Americans after the US entered World War II in December of 1941. The Chino family relocated to Rochester, NY, which was the home of the Eastman School of Music. Dee’s family was relocated to Idaho. Tom and Dee married in Twin Falls, Idaho in 1942. Tom worked for an architecture firm in Rochester and eventually sent for Dee to join him. The Chinos returned to southern California in 1949 and temporarily lived in Santa Ana. Tom worked for the architectural firm of Daniel, Mann, Johnson, Mendenhall and Moe on Lafayette Park Place in downtown Los Angeles. (Daniel and Johnson had been Tom’s colleagues at USC). Dee also worked in downtown in the insurance industry.

Based on remaining sentiments after the war, the Chinos had difficulty purchasing property. Monrovia resident and architect William “Bill” Ainley had been a colleague of Tom’s at USC, as well. Bill’s family owned the home at 845 Wildrose Avenue and the adjoining fruit grove and was willing to sell the lots to the Chinos. Tom and Dee moved into the bunkhouse in 1950 and lived in this structure for 17 years before moving into the habitable portion of the main house at 833 in 1968. The Chinos began saving for the construction of their home while Tom worked on the home design. They built the home as they could afford it—never borrowing to pay for construction, until inflation caught up faster than expected.

In 1965 they began construction. One of the first projects was digging the swimming pool—they used the dirt from the pool to level the lot and didn’t actually complete the pool until 1973. Dory Kline assisted Tom in the construction of the home, learning from Tom as the project progressed. The first rooms that the Chinos completed were the kitchen and the bathroom and used these rooms while still living in the bunkhouse.

The mid-century design has an open floor plan with exposed beams throughout except for a redwood drop ceiling over the bedroom and kitchen area. The interior ceiling is covered with select pine knot spruce which Dee clear-coated with creosote, the rafters are Douglas fir, while the exterior siding is vertical shiplap redwood which was originally covered with Cabot transparent stain. Fifty sheets of exquisitely book-matched walnut veneer panels cover hidden cabinets along the east interior wall. One compartment over the fireplace conceals a projector screen used for showing slides. The fireplace on the east wall has no mantel, but a raised brick hearth runs in front of it. The entrance to the home is a glass enclosed foyer which opens to the main living area through a wooden sliding door set to the side. This foyer is suspended off of the front of the home by a series of posts to create a unique entrance way. Dee explained that there is a belief that evil spirits cannot enter a home if the entrance path involves taking right turns, which is why the foyer does not enter straight into the living area. When the sliding panel is closed, there are no windows to the front of the home, although the entire rear of the home – the north side- is comprised of floor to ceiling sliding glass doors which showcase the backyard and the view of the mountains. The home’s floorplan includes one bedroom, and two bathrooms. The kitchen, dining room, and living room

flow in to each other without any dividing walls. Some cabinet modules add storage while creating a hall to the bathroom/bedroom area. The cabinets are aluminum frame and walnut and were built on site by Dory Kline. Certain cabinets were built with specific purposes such as ski storage and a gun safe. Dory also hand poured the cement chimney flue using a 36" sono tube. Terrazzo covers the floors throughout the home including the bathrooms and built in tub. The period kitchen still boasts its original canary yellow appliances, butcher block counters and the original rheostat which controls twelve light systems. Gravel troughs surround the home for drainage and eliminated the need for gutters.

The original bunkhouse where the Chinos lived before and during construction remains in the backyard and was remodeled in the 90s. It now functions as a guest house. The home does not have a garage, rather the roofline of the home continues on the east side of the house to form a large carport with storage and high ceilings. There were plans to add an additional bedroom on the street side of the home based on Tom's 8 foot square design and one of the bathrooms has an alcove which was planned to eventually become access to this never built bedroom.

Tom left the architectural firm and struck out on his own. He designed other Monrovia homes, including 665 Norumbega Drive— the Triangle home for the Rossiter family; and remodeled the exterior of the home across the street at 834 Wildrose Avenue for the Davis family. He also designed the commercial building across from the library on West Lime Avenue. He continued to do many remodeling projects with Dory Kline, who eventually became a licensed contractor. Other local homes designed by Tom Chino include a home at 2170 North Altadena Drive in Pasadena, 439 Oxford Drive in Arcadia (addition and alterations), 1125 Orange Ave in Monrovia (addition and alteration), and a mid-century cabin in Grass Valley. Among Tom's architectural drawing archive are plans and a beautiful rendering that he submitted to the Monrovia Police Department for a shooting range near Sawpit Canyon. It was never built.

Tom was an active member of the Monrovia Mounted Police unit and enjoyed their activities. He continued his interest in cars as well. Tom was also an accomplished water color artist and was a member of the California Water Color Society and is listed in Artists of California. Dee has been a member of Chapter M PEO, as well as the Monrovia Children's Hospital Guild.

There have been very few changes made to the home at 833 Wildrose and much of the original Plummer's teak furniture is still in use. Tom passed away in November 2006 after 62 years of marriage and Dee continues to live in the home, joined by her niece Yvonne Sakahara, whose father was a cousin to Dee's parent's family attorney in Seattle, WA.