

ASSESSMENT
THE ROBERT HENDERSHOT AND HARUMI TANIGUCHI HOUSE
2866 Westbrook Avenue
Los Angeles 90046
APN 557 000 9022

Summary Statement

Designed by the renowned architect Richard Neutra (1892 – 1970), the Hendershot Taniguchi House is a superb example of his residential architecture. Completed in 1962, the three-story house is distinguished in the canon of his Southern California homes both in embodying a full repertoire of Neutra’s signature details and strategies and as a testament to unusually expert and respectful renovations. With its alternating bands of solid white stucco and banks of glass and its masterful response to a precipitously sloping site, it is clearly the descendant of Neutra’s first masterpiece, the Lovell Health House, 1929, now considered one of the ten best houses of the twentieth century in the world. Three decades after the completion of that iconic residence, the Hendershot Taniguchi House exemplifies Neutra’s refinement of the same ideas and ideals that propelled the design of Lovell Health House, now in a sleeker Mid-Century idiom.¹

Evaluator Qualifications

Dr. Barbara Lamprecht, M.Arch., Ph.D., is a qualified architectural historian meeting and exceeding National Park Service professional qualifications (36 CFR Part 61). She is the author of three books on Richard Neutra, whose work was also the topic of her doctoral dissertation, University of Liverpool. See *curriculum vitae* for details.

Narrative Statement

Neutra’s homes are legendary for their integration of building, site, and landscape, and the Hendershot Taniguchi House is exemplary in this regard. From Westbrook Avenue, the public view is only that of a silver-painted garage door flanked by a long, tall hedge. Entering the courtyard with land- and hardscape reminiscent of the sophisticated severity of Japanese gardens, the Z-shaped house appears to be only one story. Here, however, the Neutra stamp is already unmistakable, seen in deep overhangs; strong horizontal planes; structural members (beams) that extend beyond the building footprint; copious sections of windows and full-height sliding glass walls; and the familiar Neutra exterior color palette of white stucco, silver-painted window frames and trim, and beams and other woodwork painted a dark brown. Again, in typical Neutra fashion, these elements are carried into the interior. This melding of inside-outside, of creating a calming continuity between dwelling and the natural world, is quite typical not only of Neutra but virtually any twentieth century Modern architect. Neutra differed in that he understood, presciently, the quantitative role of nature in contributing to human well-being.

Originally 1,972 square feet, in 1982 architect Dion Neutra (1926 – 2019), Richard Neutra’s son and sometime partner, added the wall fronting the property and the two-car garage, whose interior is illuminated through cleverly located upper windows capturing views of foliage and sky. Reinforcing

¹ The property is noted on p. 416 of *Neutra: Complete Works* (Köln and Los Angeles: Taschen, 2000) by Barbara Lamprecht. The 464-page *catalogue raisonné* is considered the definitive accounting of authentic Neutra works (*Los Angeles Times*.)

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the “legacy” aspect of subsequent renovations to the property, in 1994 one of Neutra’s lead project architects, John Blanton (1928 – 2018) designed a two-story addition at the northeast corner of the house, turning a rectangular footprint at the rear into an L-shaped configuration. In its animated distribution of windows, providing a variety of views and experiences of sunlight, Blanton’s solution closely resembles—but does not copy—Neutra’s work. The protégé, by that time an accomplished and award-winning architect himself, respected and acknowledged the master’s hand but responded with spirit and individuality.

It is important to note that such an approach, first by Dion Neutra and then by John Blanton, is very rare. The same attitude in turn informed the 2017 work of architect Eve Steele, who knew the Hendershots, Bob and Harumi, and heard their stories of working with Neutra. Such thoughtfulness does add value and significance to the property in retaining Neutra’s original expression, materials, craftsmanship, and authorship, qualities that are too often compromised by later designers.

Steele restored or replaced in kind many subtle original details, built-in cabinetry, flooring, wood finishes, brick fireplace, and paint colors, paying special attention to Mrs. Hendershot’s large studio space on the lower floor, unchanged but repaired and refinished where needed. Without changing original spatial layouts, she re-purposed secondary spaces. For example, Steele transformed a glass-walled storage room, originally the open-air carport, into the kitchen. She designed the room’s new wood cabinetry with such a light touch that the space, while quite airy and contemporary, retains Neutra’s strongly rhythmic post-and-beam structural system. Steele restored the slender steel frames and brought the massive sliding and fixed glass walls up to code by replacing the glass.

The architect also rehabilitated the spaces that the Hendershots had more informally carved out below the original lower floor, when they had exploited the potential of the hillside’s sharp slope. Steele’s treatments now define rooms that are well integrated into the existing historic fabric, including new office space, bedrooms, and a bath, and a multi-purpose entertainment room whose glass walls open out to a broad wood terrace above the creek, sheltered by native trees and plantings.

Throughout the dwelling, now about 3,371 square feet, the quality of craftsmanship is exceptionally high, again adding value to the home.

Conclusion

When evaluated according to the federal guidelines for the treatment of historic resources established by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, the Hendershot Taniguchi House exemplifies a rich and dynamic compliance with these Standards. In their sensitive adaptations to each new need, the work of each architect not only enhanced the property’s value and its significance but ensures that these “renovations ensure their preservation,” in Steele’s words. This is a great achievement.