

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Salvatore and Lily Ann Muscanere House    **AGENDA ITEM:** IIC  
**OWNER:** Donald Dorsey    **HPO FILE NO:** 12L271  
**APPLICANT:** Same as Owner    **DATE ACCEPTED:** April 16, 2012  
**LOCATION:** 7843 Santa Elena Street- Glenbrook Valley    **HAHC HEARING:** July 12, 2012

**SITE INFORMATION:** Tracks 6 and 7a, Block 7, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a single-story, brick veneer, single-family residence.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Salvatore and Lily Ann Muscanere House is located at 7843 Santa Elena Street within the Glenbrook Valley Historic District. The house was constructed in 1956 and Norman Edwards is credited with preparing the construction drawings. The ranch house is located on an interior lot and is of the Mid-Century Modern architectural style. In addition, specific design elements were incorporated indicative of the owners' Sicilian family heritage. The family owned the property continuously until 2008, and the family was well known friendly neighbors of the community. The Muscaneres operated many small businesses in Houston and had extensive real estate holdings throughout the city.

The property is contained within the boundary of the Glenbrook Valley Historic District. At the time of the district survey, the Mid-Century Modern residence was classified as "contributing" to the district. Glenbrook Valley is an intact "textbook example" of the upper middle-income suburban residential neighborhood of the post-World War II period. In October 2009, the house was one of six homes featured on the Modern & Historic Home Tour sponsored by Houston Mod in conjunction with the annual Docomomo Tour Day, a national celebration of Mid-Century Modern architecture.

The Salvatore "Sam" and Lily Ann Muscanere House meets Criteria 1, 3, 4 and 5 for Landmark designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

#### *The Muscaneres*

Salvatore (better known as Sam) and Lily Ann Muscanere were the owners of Lily Ann's, a chain of dry cleaning shops that were subsequently acquired and absorbed into Pilgrim Cleaners. The couple had extensive real estate holdings throughout the city particularly in Garden Oaks, Park Place and Fourth Ward areas. Sam Muscanere was a charter season ticket holder of the Houston Oilers professional football team and was friends with its team players and staff who were entertained at the home. The Muscaneres' son, Joseph S. Muscanere is the owner of SWS Communications and an Italian American recording artist. His latest release is "Italian Festival

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Favorites" issued on Ribera Records. He resides in Pearland, Texas. Their daughter, Lily Ann Cunningham is an adjunct professor in art history at the University of Houston - Downtown and resides in West University Place, Texas. The Muscanere family had sole ownership of the property until the current owners acquired the home in 2008. The Muscanere family, particularly Sam, played a large role in the design of the house, working with the designers to incorporate Sicilian design traditions into the house, including the lot selection in order to have a south facing front façade and U-shaped foundation footprint with a large rear courtyard.

### *Cultural Heritage*

Glenbrook Valley was, and still is, home to many of Houston's prominent doctors, professors, engineers, attorneys, architects, entrepreneurs, war heroes and business people. In the early years of the neighborhood, these prominent people were largely Italian-American. The Italian families in Glenbrook Valley were mostly by way of families who emigrated from Sicily through Galveston and settled in nearby Hitchcock, Texas and later Genoa, Texas. As these Sicilians opened businesses, they wanted to get closer to the large population so eventually relocated to Houston.

### *Architect / Designer*

On original, preliminary drawings of the house – given to the current owners by the Muscanere family – a corner label reads, "Residence for Mr. & Mrs. Sam Muscanere, Drawn by Norman Edwards". Presently, no records have been found regarding Norman Edwards but he has been described within the Muscanere family as a young architect, recently graduated at the time.

### *Recognition*

The Muscanere House at 7843 Santa Elena was featured on Houston Mod's (a local modern architecture preservation organization) Mad about Mod, Glenbrook Valley – Modern & Historic Home Tour on October 9, 2010, an event that hosted tours of the interiors and exteriors of six homes in Glenbrook Valley. The event was part of a national event hosted annually by Docomomo US in celebration of the modern movement in the US through tours and events hosted simultaneously across the country.

### *Glenbrook Valley*

The Glenbrook Valley Historic District was designated in 2011. Comprised of houses developed between 1953 and 1962, the district encompasses thirteen sections with a total of 1,254 homes. It is situated along the south side of Sims Bayou and divided into quadrants by the intersection of Bellfort Avenue and Broadway Street. With Sims Bayou at the north end, the neighborhood lies west of the Gulf Freeway, east of Telephone Road and north of Hobby Airport. The neighborhood was designed for developer Fred McManus by the famous Kansas City landscape architects Hare and Hare.

Built on a central part of what was once the Lubbock and Allen ranches, Glenbrook Valley was designed as a cohesive, planned community that showcased the state-of-the-art in architecture and home innovation during this period. These innovations were displayed numerous times to the

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public, most notably in the 1954 and 1956 Parade of Homes tours. The thirteen sections were developed over only about a ten-year period. All of the original homes are cohesive in their architectural style, consisting primarily of American Ranch Style and Mid-Century Modern homes. Made possible by the first freeway in Texas (the Gulf Freeway), Glenbrook Valley reflected the optimism and expansion of Houston during this period.

Over the next fifty-six years, Glenbrook Valley became well-known for its Christmas light displays, its mid-century architecture, and its famous residents. The Carrabbas, the Mandolas, Steve Tyrell, Paul Boesch, Mike Barajas, the Montalbanos, and many others called Glenbrook Valley home.

Today, Glenbrook Valley sits almost untouched like a time capsule. Amazingly, the modern ideas that these homes represented at the time still hold their own today, 50 years later. Since its initial development in the 1950s, the neighborhood has come to mirror the late twentieth and early twenty-first century ethnic and racial diversity of Houston. Many older residents still reside in Glenbrook Valley, but there is a growing influx of younger people who appreciate the mid-century aesthetic and the quality of the old custom homes in the neighborhood. The old and the new residents take pride in the neighborhood and have come together to support the Glenbrook Valley Neighborhood Historic Designation because now is the time to protect what is undoubtedly the finest, most original and intact example left of a Mid-Century modern neighborhood in Houston. Glenbrook Valley offers the rare opportunity to preserve an entire community that contains the developer's totally complete original concept with all its variety of housing stock and architectural styles.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

The Muscanere House is one of the best examples of Mid-Century Modern style homes in Glenbrook Valley. Built on a 13,800 square foot interior square shaped lot, the building is setback 25 feet from the front property line, 10 feet from the west property line, and 23 feet from the east property line. The 5,924 square foot home features a U-shaped plan and central courtyard. In keeping with the simple, streamlined nature of the Mid-Century modern residential architecture, the predominant features of the house include a front elevation with a horizontal profile, spanning 82 feet; a low pitched roof with wide overhangs and cantilevered gables that extend an extra 3 feet from the overhang; and a massive central rectangular chimney with simple crenellated detail at the top. The home was built to custom exterior material specifications that included bell footed foundation piers, uniform orange Mexican clay brick with wood trim at the front and side elevations, and fir framing with structural redwood vertical sheathing above the brick at the at the gables of the house and above the brick at about half-height at the rear and exterior courtyard elevations. The original roof material was crushed white marble, which has been replaced with a high quality composition shingle roof. (A Muscanere family member shared with the current owner a memory of the homes original colors; white roof, green trim, red brick – the colors of the Italian flag).

The front elevation features three different scaled sets of horizontally configured windows. The original aluminum frame windows were replaced with fixed double pane glass windows of the same size and configuration. At the west side is a ribbon window with four vertical panels;

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between the entry and the chimney, a thin horizontal ribbon window with three vertical panels sits high on the façade directly below header height; and on the east side of the façade is a ribbon window with three vertical panels. The double door entry is recessed in the front façade; the iron security gate was a later addition. To the left side of the entry door is a vertically oriented single panel window called out on the drawings as “Magnalite type ‘B’ glass,” which was a semi-opaque wired glass product manufactured during the first half of the century that is described in a 1945 glass product guide as “an unusual design of figured rolled sheet glass in that it has specially designed cylindrical lenses on each surface, running at right angles to each other to produce a particular type of light distribution which is most desirable for ceiling light or panel illumination. They are so obscure that objects behind the glass are well concealed. Approximate light transmission (is) 83.5%.”

The original floor plan included a living room at the front of the west wing of the house connected to the open entry hall; a sunken family room at the front central portion of the “U” shape (which included the brick fireplace and high-set thin horizontal ribbon window at the front elevation and full height plate glass window wall facing the rear courtyard); a dining room at the front of the east wing of the house; followed in order from front to back of the wing, a kitchen, study, bath and garage. The west wing includes two bedrooms, each with private baths, a maintenance room, a small study, and a master bedroom with private bath. The vast majority of the original interior features and materials remain, including low height rectangular brick planters that divide the larger front common areas, bathroom tiles and fixtures, kitchen counters and cabinets, and built in shelving in the family room.

An addition, built in 1984, is located to the rear of the eastern wing of the property. The addition enclosed the original two-car garage located at the rear of the east wing and extended the wing further towards the rear of the property with more living space and a new garage. The library fireplace in the 1984 addition is built from granite recovered from the demolished Gulfgate Mall. No structural modifications are contemplated for the original 1956 structure or its addition.

The present home closely resembles the original 1956 structure and was impeccably maintained by the Muscanere family. The home was undamaged by the three named hurricanes that have struck the region since its construction. The home’s current landscaping was designed and installed shortly after construction and includes an award winning azalea hedge across the front elevation and the six mature oak trees that surround and shade the property.

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*Specifications - Residence for Mr. & Mrs. S. Muscanere, Parts Lots 6 & 7, Block 7, Section 5, Glenbrook Valley*. 18 Apr. 1957. Original material specifications and building instructions.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Delaney Harris-Finch, Historic Preservation Planner, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

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## APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

### Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

- | <b>S</b>                            | <b>NA</b>                           | <b>S - satisfies</b> | <b>D - does not satisfy</b> | <b>NA - not applicable</b> |
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- (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;
- (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;
- (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;
- (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;
- (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;
- (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;
- (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

### AND

- (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of the Salvatore “Sam” and Lily Ann Muscanere House at 7843 Santa Elena Street.

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## EXHIBIT A

Salvatore and Lily Ann Muscanere Home

7843 Santa Elena Street



