

# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

**LANDMARK NAME:** Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Morris House  
**OWNER:** S.I. Morris Interests, Ltd.  
**APPLICANT:** David K. Morris  
**LOCATION:** 2 Waverly Court – Museum District

**AGENDA ITEM:** D.1  
**HPO FILE NO.:** 15PL124  
**DATE ACCEPTED:** Apr-15-2015  
**HAHC HEARING DATE:** May-21-2015

### SITE INFORMATION

Lot 2, Waverly Court, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic two-story, contemporary style single-family residence facing west on Waverly Court at the corner of Bissonnet Street.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Morris House is a contemporary residence at 2 Waverly Court in the Museum District south of downtown Houston. The house was designed by prominent Houston architect Seth Irwin “S.I.” Morris, Jr. (1914-2006) and completed in 1952 as his family’s home. Morris’ firms – Wilson, Morris & Crain, AIA; Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, AIA; S.I. Morris Associates; Morris\*Aubry Architects and Morris Architects – left a timeless imprint on Houston through their crucial roles in creating such treasured landmarks as the Astrodome (1965), Pennzoil Place (1976), Transco (now Williams) Tower (1983) and Gus S. Wortham Theater Center (1987), among many others.

In *Building A Houston Practice: The Career of S.I. Morris*, Barry Moore notes that Morris insisted the only building he had ever personally designed was the house built at the corner of Waverly Court and Bissonnet in the 1950s. That house remains in the Morris family and is home to the architect’s widow, Mrs. Suzanne Morris.

The Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Morris House is significant for its architect, architecture and as a visible reminder of Houston’s development, and meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Protected Landmark designation.

### HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

*Seth Irwin “S.I.” Morris, FAIA*

Seth Irwin “S.I.” Morris, Jr. was born in Madisonville, Texas, in 1914 to Seth Irwin Morris, Sr. and Carrie Holleman Morris. When S.I. was two years old, his mother moved the family to Houston after she discovered that her son might receive a free education at the newly opened Rice Institute. After graduating from San Jacinto High School, Morris entered Rice at 18 years of age. He majored in architecture after being told the engineering program was full. Morris graduated in 1935 and went to work for architect Burns Roensch before joining his former Rice classmate F. Talbott Wilson, Jr. (1912-1987) in starting a firm.

At the end of the New Deal era, the partners earned a major early commission: Park Lane Apartments (1940, demolished) on Hermann Drive, was Houston’s most impressive Federal Housing Administration-sponsored garden apartment complex. At about the same time, developer E.L. Crain

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hired the young architects to design a series of houses in his new Garden Oaks subdivision, and helped them win the contract to design Garden Oaks School (1940, demolished).

After wartime service with the U.S. Navy in bomb disposal and intelligence behind the Chinese lines, Morris married Suzanne Kibler and returned to Houston to raise a family and re-establish his practice with Wilson. In 1946, a third partner, B.W. Crain, Jr. (1914-1995), joined the firm. In 1953, Ralph Anderson, Jr. (1923-1990) became the fourth partner.

Morris contended that he designed very few buildings other than his family's home on Waverly Court, but claimed that design was only part of what makes an architect successful. Firms must earn commissions and get buildings constructed; in those areas Morris had no peers, beginning with his determined effort to bring in the commission for the new Houston Country Club (1957). Morris asserted that taking on that one job allowed his firm to move from residential and small institutional projects to major commercial work thanks to the contacts established with club members.

Major new commissions did come in. Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson was selected as associate architect with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill for the First City National Bank Building (1961) and on its own received the federal commission for the new U.S. Post Office (1962, facing demolition).

The firm's greatest challenge and greatest triumph came when Judge Roy Hofheinz chose Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson to design the Harris County Domed Stadium (1965) with Lloyd, Morgan & Jones. After the Astrodome, the firm made its biggest impact on Houston's skyline in the 1970s when it designed Gerald Hines' first major downtown office building, One Shell Plaza (1971), again with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The firm was soon commissioned to design One Allen Center (1972) on its own.

In 1970, Morris recruited Eugene Aubry as chief designer and two years later dissolved Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson to establish S.I. Morris Associates. The reconstituted firm would be associated with some of Houston's most visible projects, including the Central Library, Jesse H. Jones Building, Houston Public Library (1975); Pennzoil Place (1976) with Johnson/Burgee Architects; and Alfred C. Glassell, Jr. School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (1978, facing demolition). As Morris\*Aubrey Architects, the firm designed First City Tower (1981) and worked on the Transco (now Williams) Tower (1983) again with Johnson/Burgee Architects.

Morris helped transform Houston's Theater District with the Gus S. Wortham Center, a project begun in 1979 by S.I. Morris Associates, carried out under Morris\*Aubrey Architects and completed in 1987 by Morris Architects, one year after S.I. Morris had retired.

S.I. Morris served on the boards of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Houston Chamber of Commerce, Rice University, the Contemporary Arts Museum, Boy Scouts of America and many other philanthropies. He was recognized with alumni awards from Rice University in 1981 and 1991, as a member of the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects, with the Texas Society of Architects' Llewellyn Pitts Award in 1992, and with honors from the Associated General Contractors in 1994 and Rice Design Alliance in 1998.

Morris died on August 1, 2006, in Houston. He was survived by his wife of 60 years, Suzanne Kibler Morris, five children, 14 grandchildren and one great-grandchild. S.I. Morris is interred at Glenwood Cemetery.

*Waverly Court*

Waverly Court is one of the Bissonnet Street private enclaves, including Shadow Lawn (City of Houston Historic District) and West 11th Place (City of Houston and National Register historic districts), which were created along the periphery of the exclusive Shadyside subdivision in the 1920s. Banker J.T. Scott and Mrs. James L. Autry were Waverly Court's developers. In 1922, consulting engineer J.S. Boyles platted the enclave to end in a cul-de-sac; the following year, Boyles would plat the adjacent Shadow Lawn subdivision with a circular street plan.

Several of J.T. Scott's children built houses in the subdivision, two of which, 4 and 6 Waverly Court, were completed in 1923. These homes were designed by Scott's son-in-law, architect James Ruskin Bailey; both houses are still standing. Later, architecturally significant homes were designed by David C. Baer at 1 Waverly Court (1952, demolished); Glassman Shoemaker Maldonado also at 1 Waverly Court (1999, demolished); Wilson, Morris & Crain, AIA, at 2 Waverly Court (1952) and Eubanks/Bohnn Associates with Peter H. Brown at 10 Waverly Court (1997).

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND ALTERATION HISTORY**

This contemporary style, flat-roofed, two-story house faces west at 2 Waverly Court on a well-landscaped corner lot. The house is clad in brick veneer and vertical frame siding on a concrete slab.

Although the original architectural drawings for the home are dated 1950, the Morris House was not completed until 1952. The house has an overall rectangular plan with internal courtyards. The house largely fills the site as a result of three additions designed by Wilson, Morris & Crain, AIA (1953, 1959), and Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, AIA (1963). The additions will be addressed in separate sections of this report.

*Front (West) Façade*

The front, west facade is divided into three unequal bays.

The two-story north bay occupies approximately 1/3 of the front façade. The first floor is clad in brick veneer around an offset horizontal plate glass window with brick sill. The window is divided into three sections; the central pane is wider than the two equal side panes. Above the window is a section of vertical wood trim that matches the vertical siding on the second floor of the north bay. A single row of brick headers is at the top of the brick wall beneath a wooden fascia board and narrow metal flashing that run the entire width of the first floor of the house.

The second floor of the north bay is set back from the front of the house facing Waverly and projects slightly from the north side of the house facing Bissonnet. A narrow column of brick delineates the northwest corner of the two-story section; the rest of the two-story façade is clad in vertical siding. There is one, single-lite casement window offset completely to the north side of the projecting first floor and a second casement window directly above it beneath the eaves on the second floor. The second floor has a shed roof with a shallow slope down to the north. The roofline is delineated by a wooden fascia board beneath metal flashing. Open rafters are visible along the south side of the second floor.

The narrow, one-story, middle bay is offset toward the north side of the first floor. The middle bay contains a recessed entry porch with full-height, 2/3-width plate glass sidelight on the north side of a 1/3-width solid wood door with wooden transom. The floor of the porch is covered in pebbled paving.

The flat-roofed, one-story, south bay occupies approximately 2/3 of the front façade. The front wall is completely covered in brick veneer with a single top row consisting only of headers beneath the fascia board and metal flashing. There are two rounded-end skylights on the roof parallel to the front wall. A square, brick interior chimney with metal cap is centered on the roof of the south bay.

### *North Side*

The north side is divided into four unequal bays. The east bay contains a wood frame, one-story, two-car garage clad in vertical siding. The garage has a shed roof with a very shallow slope to the south. The roofline is delineated with a narrow wooden fascia board.

The second bay to the right is two stories tall and clad in vertical siding. A curved wooden fence screens the first floor of the second bay. According to the architectural drawings, this fence shelters the window of the morning room added in 1959. On the second floor above the morning room is a set-back, shed-roofed, rectangular room clad in vertical siding. According to the architectural drawings, this is a bathroom added in 1959.

The third bay occupies most of the north side. The two-story bay is clad in brick veneer with a single row of brick headers at the top of the second floor beneath the fascia board and metal gutter. The first floor contains a wooden entry door located at the west side of the building. The full-height, 2/3-width wooden door has a repeating triangular decorative pattern. A full-height, 1/3-width prism glass sidelight is on the east side of the door. The door and sidelight are sheltered by a flat metal canopy supported by a single metal bracket. The only other ornamentation in this bay is a rectangular brick grille on the second floor directly above the entry and beneath the eaves.

The fourth bay contains the recessed side of the one-story front façade. The wall is clad in brick veneer with a single row of headers below the fascia board and metal flashing.

### *East Side*

The east side of the house faces Yoakum Boulevard (here a public alley). The south side of this bay is screened by a wooden fence in front of what the architectural drawings indicate is the playroom added in 1953. The roof of the playroom has a very shallow slope down to the east. To the north is the opening of a two-car frame garage clad in vertical siding. A fascia board and metal flashing delineate the shed roof, which has a shallow slope down to the north. Another shed-roofed addition clad in vertical siding is set back on the north side of the garage.

Set back on the second floor behind the garage is a rectangular room with vertical siding and a single jalousie window centered in the wall. This room's shed roof contains a skylight and has a very shallow slope to the south. According to the architectural drawings, this is the bathroom added above the morning room in 1959.

### *Additions*

In the *AIA Houston Architectural Guide*, Stephen Fox writes of the Morris home: "This small-scaled contemporary house, closed off from the traffic along Bissonnet, is focused on a series of internal garden courts." That paragraph, however, describes the result of an 11-year evolution, which saw the house expanded three times to accommodate Morris' growing family.

*1953 Playroom - Wilson, Morris & Crain, AIA*

The one-story, 26' x 15' playroom was added perpendicular to the east end of the original house along Yoakum Boulevard, giving the home an L-shaped footprint. While the east elevation facing Yoakum has limited windows, as described above, the playroom's west elevation faces the interior of the site and has wide fixed glass windows overlooking the existing garden court.

*1959 Morning Room and Bat – Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, AIA*

Since it was built, the morning room addition off the kitchen has been hidden from outside view by a curved wooden fence. The first-floor morning room supports an additional bathroom on the second story of the house.

*1963 Living Room, Master Bedroom and Bath – Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, AIA*

The one-story, brick veneer addition contained a new living room, master bedroom and bath. Construction of the 49' x 43' wing on the west side of the property closed off the site to Waverly Court. The wing has no windows on the Waverly Court, west facade, as described above, however, the bedroom and living room open onto interior garden courts as does the earlier playroom addition.

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Wilson, Morris & Crain, AIA. "A Residence for Mr. & Mrs. S.I. Morris." Architectural drawings, 1953. Courtesy of David K. Morris.

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, AIA. "Residence for Mr. & Mrs. S.I. Morris." Architectural drawings, 1959. Courtesy of David K. Morris.

Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, AIA. "Addition to S.I. Morris Residence." Architectural drawings, 1963. Courtesy of David K. Morris.

*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Erin Glennon, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*

## APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION

The HAHC shall review each application for designation of a protected landmark that is included in an application for designation of a landmark at the same time and in the same manner as it reviews and considers the application for a landmark. The HAHC and the Planning Commission, in making recommendations with respect to a protected landmark designation, and the City Council, in making a designation, shall consider whether the building, structure, site, or area meets at least three of the criteria in Section 33-224, or one of the criteria in Section 33-229, as follows:

**S    NA**

**S - satisfies    NA - not applicable**

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Meets at least three of the following (Sec. 33-229(a)(1):

- (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).

**OR**

- The property was constructed before 1905 (Sec. 33-229(a)(2);

**OR**

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- The property is listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places or designated as a “contributing structure” in an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places (Sec. 33-229(a)(3));

**OR**

- The property is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark (Sec. 33-229(a)(4)).

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Morris House at 2 Waverly Court.



**EXHIBIT A**  
**SITE MAP**  
**MR. AND MRS. S.I. MORRIS HOUSE**  
**2 WAVERLY COURT**



**EXHIBIT B**  
**CURRENT PHOTOS**  
MR. AND MRS. S.I. MORRIS HOUSE  
2 WAVERLY COURT



*Residence for Mr. & Mrs. S.I. Morris. Front (west) façade looking east from Waverly. 2 Waverly Court, Houston, Harris County Texas 77005. March 31, 2015.*

**EXHIBIT B**  
**CURRENT PHOTOS**  
MR. AND MRS. S.I. MORRIS HOUSE  
2 WAVERLY COURT



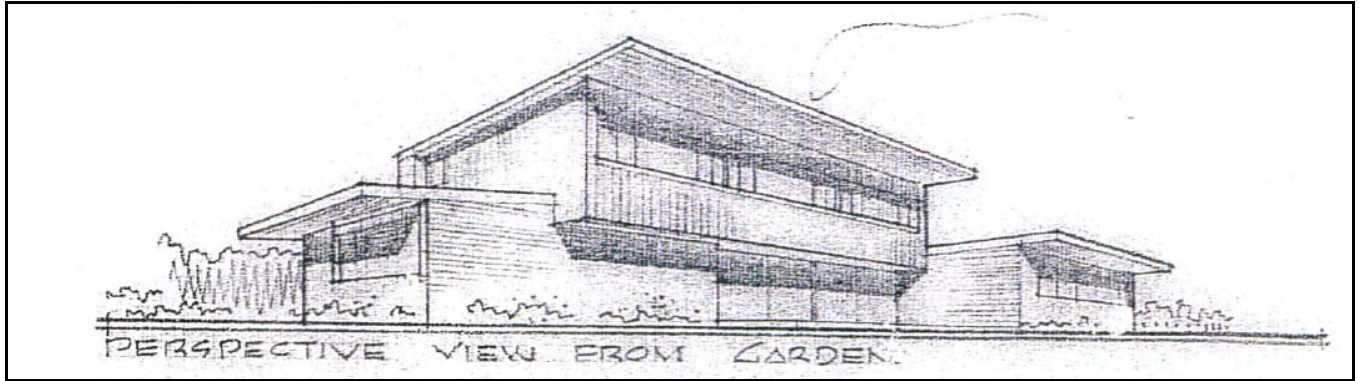
*Morris House, North side looking south from Bissonnet Street. March 31, 2015.*

**EXHIBIT B**  
**CURRENT PHOTOS**  
MR. AND MRS. S.I. MORRIS HOUSE  
2 WAVERLY COURT



*Morris House, East (back) side looking west from Yoakum. March 31, 2015.  
Photos by Jim Parson, Preservation Houston.*

**EXHIBIT C**  
**HISTORIC DRAWINGS**  
MR. AND MRS. S.I. MORRIS HOUSE  
2 WAVERLY COURT



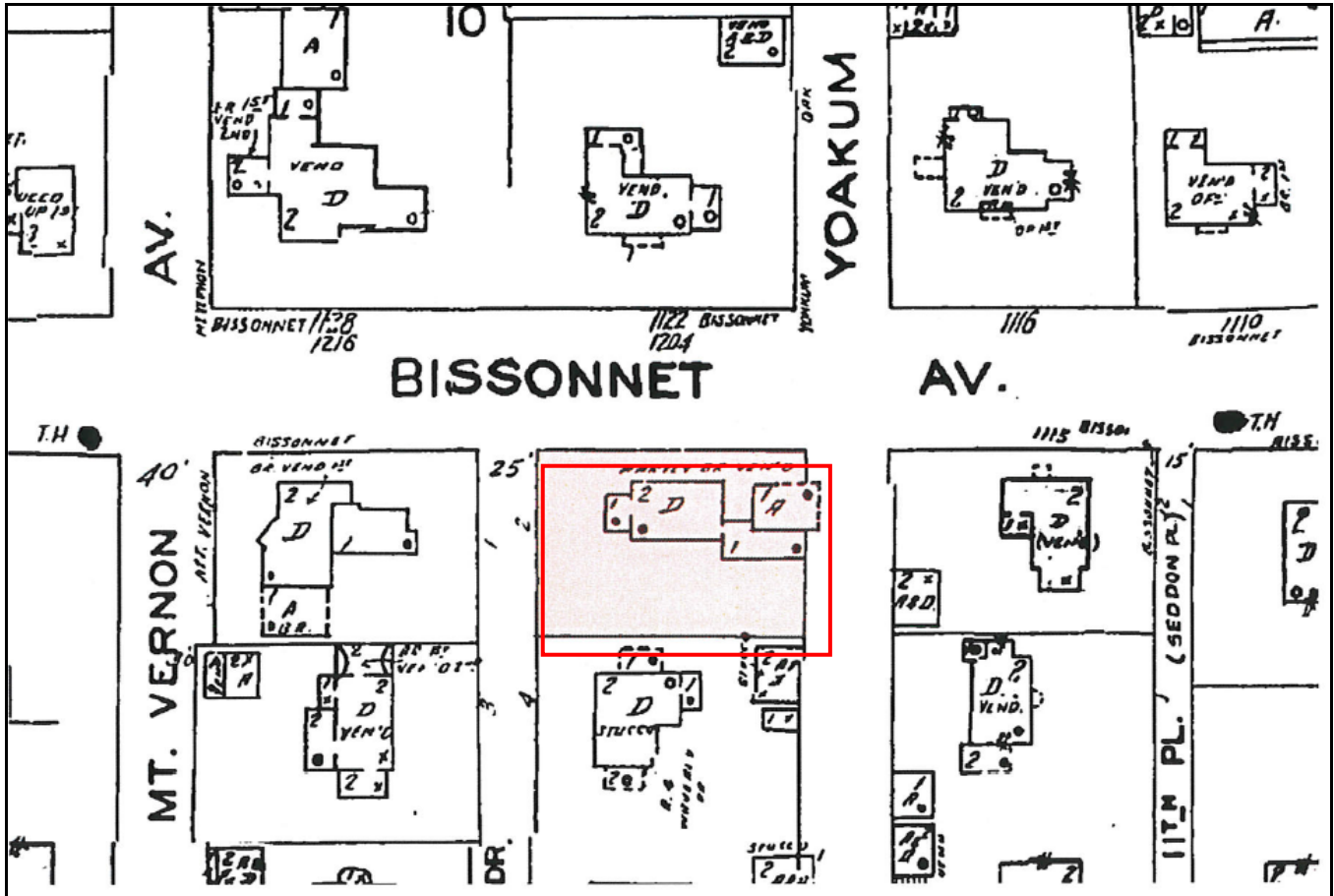
*Morris House rendering, 1950. Wilson, Morris & Crain, AIA.  
Architectural drawing courtesy David K. Morris.*

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EXHIBIT D  
SANBORN MAP  
MR. AND MRS. S.I. MORRIS HOUSE  
2 WAVERLY COURT



2 Waverly Court, Houston 5, Texas (1952 address),  
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Houston, 1924-1951, Volume 5, Sheet 584,  
Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.