

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Brooks House

AGENDA ITEM: C1

OWNERS: Gavin and Vanessa Gerondale

HPO FILE NO.: 16PL129

APPLICANTS: Gavin and Vanessa Gerondale

DATE ACCEPTED: 4/21/2016

LOCATION: 5231 Braesvalley Drive - Meyerland

HAHC HEARING DATE: 5/19/2016

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 3, Block 42, Meyerland, Section 6B, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a historic, 2,768 square foot single story brick home with attached carport and screened terrace constructed in 1965 situated on an 11,257 square foot (approximately 91' x 122') interior lot.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

Architect David G. Brooks designed the house at 5231 Braesvalley Drive with his brother and business partner, Edward Byron Brooks, as his own family's residence. Their firm, Brooks and Brooks, designed commercial, institutional, industrial, and residential structures throughout Houston. Their work received awards at the local, state, and national levels. The Brooks House, designed in the modern style, was completed in March 1965 in the Meyerland neighborhood. Meyerland's development began as suburban planned communities were appearing throughout the country. Each section of the subdivision was assigned a number and given a set of deed restrictions. Brays Bayou provided a picturesque location, and the scenic value of the wide streets flanking the tree-lined waterway offered ideal sites for architects to design commissioned homes along North and South Braeswood boulevards, with the majority of the architect-designed homes located south of Brays Bayou.

As described by architectural historian Stephen Fox, the Brooks House is "closed on its street side... overlooks a south-facing back yard through walls of glass," and "features (a) carport as a surrogate front porch."¹ The plan, materials, and details of the Brooks House make it a superior example of mid-century residential design.

The house remains significantly intact; the Brooks family maintained the house as originally designed and occupied the residence for 30 years. In February 1996, the Brooks sold the house to Gavin and Vanessa Gerondale. The Gerondales have maintained the original design of the house, making minor upgrades and maintenance decisions, including restoration work after the house flooded during the 2015 Memorial Day floods. As exemplary stewards of the Brooks House, the Gerondales received a 2015 Preservation Award from Houston Mod for furthering the knowledge, appreciation, and preservation of modern architecture and design in Houston and Texas.

The Brooks House at 5231 Braesvalley Drive meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for Protected Landmark Designation.

¹ Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*. 3rd ed. 562.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE*Brooks and Brooks*

David George Brooks (1925-1995) and his brother Edward “Buddy” Byron Brooks (1927-2006) were the sons of Serena Lefkovitz Brooks and Harry Brooks. The family moved from Denver, Colorado to Houston, Texas shortly after Edward’s birth.²

Both of the Brooks brothers attended Reagan High School in Houston. David Brooks received his Bachelor of Science from the University of Houston in 1949 and his Bachelor of Architecture in 1950. Edward Brooks received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Houston in 1951.³ David and Edward formed a small firm, Brooks and Brooks Architects, in 1953 and worked together for over 40 years. After David died in 1995, Edward moved the practice to his residence in Richmond, Texas. Edward died in Richmond in 2006.

Brooks and Brooks designed commercial, institutional, industrial, and residential structures throughout Houston. Their work received awards at the local, state, and national levels. In 1967, Brooks and Brooks received the Grand Prize for the National Fallout Center Design Competition - Community Center, the third of such competitions conducted in a partnership of the American Institute of Architects and the Office of Civil Defense.⁴

Commercial, institutional, and industrial works of note in Houston:⁵

- Hanna Apartments, Mid Lane (1958)
- Brand Warehouse-Office, Dixie Drive and Chalmers Street (1958)
- Strawberry Park Shopping Center, Strawberry Belt Road and E. Southmore Boulevard (1960)
- Finger Furniture Co. (1964)
- Ramada Inn Motor Hotel (1965)
- Finger Contract and Office Supply Co. (1966)
- DeZavala Elementary School, 7521 Avenue H (1967)
- Houston Independent School District Central Warehouse (1969)
- Harold’s, 350 West 19th Avenue (1959)⁶
- Pulaski Iron & Metal Co. Building, 6000 block Navigation Boulevard (1956)

Residences of note in Houston:

- Murry and Arlyn Getz House, 303 Isolde Drive (1959)⁷
- Solomon House, 3615 S. Braeswood Boulevard (1956)⁸
- Brooks House, 5231 Braesvalley Drive (1965)⁹

² "Edward Byron "Buddy" Brooks." *Houston Chronicle*, July 21, 2006, Obituaries.

³ Gane, J.F. *American Architects Directory*. 3rd ed.

⁴ Office of Civil Defense. *National Fallout Shelter Design Competition Community Center Awards*.

⁵ Gane, J.F. *American Architects Directory*. 3rd ed.

⁶ Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*. 3rd ed. 366-367.

⁷ "303 Isolde." *The Architecture of Memorial Bend*. Web.

⁸ Smith, Jason. "Solomon House." Houston MOD. Web.

David George Brooks Family

David G. Brooks designed the house at 5231 Braesvalley Drive with his brother and business partner, Edward Brooks, as his own family's residence. Construction of the residence was completed in March 1965. Brooks moved into the home with his wife Sandy and their three children Rachel, Serena and Daniel. The names and handprints of the children impressed into the concrete driveway just outside the front door, although a tad faded, still remain. None of the children reside in Houston today, but Sandy Brooks, now 83, lives nearby. Serena Brooks is a quilt artist whose work based on her childhood home in Meyerland was accepted in a Modern Quilt exhibit which toured the U.S in 2014. Daniel Brooks followed his father and "Uncle Ed" into architecture and now practices in Austin.

An extended illness found David Brooks with assisted living needs and Sandy Brooks unable to sustain the maintenance and upkeep required for the large home. David Brooks died on July 11, 1995 and the home was then listed for sale thirty years after their first spring on Braesvalley Drive.¹⁰

*Meyerland*¹¹

The Meyer family came to Houston soon after the Civil War and during the 1890s Joseph F. Meyer gradually acquired 6,000 acres of land southwest of town. In the 1950s, Joseph's son George decided to develop a subdivision of single-family homes on 1,200 acres of the family's rice fields. Tom Robinson, Jr., president of First Mortgage Company, was selected to plan the subdivision and lead the Meyerland Company. In the spring of 1955, the former rice fields became a subdivision for single-family dwellings. Vice President Richard Nixon cut the ribbon for the grand opening that featured a Parade of Homes in the 5100 block of Jackwood. Development of Meyerland was done in stages and each new section was given a number and set of deed restrictions. There were several years of Medallion Showcases of Homes in Meyerland. *Look Magazine* devoted four pages to Meyerland in 1957. *House and Home Magazine* covered the area as the "ideal plan" for a subdivision in 1958.

In May 2015, Meyerland was affected by a large storm that moved slowly over Houston and its neighboring areas. Heavy rainfall triggered record-breaking floods and caused Houston bayous to breach their banks. Over 2,500 homes were damaged during the Memorial Day flooding, much of which occurred in the southwest area of Houston, including the Meyerland neighborhood. In all, 750 of Meyerland's 2,315 houses were damaged by water, including the Brooks House, and at least 60 flooded completely.¹² On April 18, 2016, the neighborhood flooded for a second time in less than a year, although the second storm was less severe. The Brooks House was not affected by the mass flooding during the second storm.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

The floor plan of the primary living spaces of the Brooks House is organized into two slightly off-set, abutting squares. The east square contains the public spaces: porch, entry, screened terrace, living, dining, and kitchen; all with poured-in-place terrazzo floors. The west square contains the private spaces: den (originally playroom), four bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms, closets and mechanical

⁹ Fox, Stephen. *Houston Architectural Guide*. 3rd ed. 562.

¹⁰ Brooks, Daniel. Message to Vanessa Gerondale.

¹¹ "History of Meyerland." *Meyerland Community Improvement Association*. Web.

¹² Mulvaney, Erin. "Flood Speeds up Inevitable Change in Houston Neighborhood."

room. Attached to each square plan element are smaller elements projecting toward the street to the north. From the east square projects the utility, storage, workshop and carport. From the west square projects the closet and master bath. The space between these projected elements is the entry and a large auto court. The exterior material is primarily brick veneer with accents of California redwood siding and duraply plywood.

A circulation path between the kitchen and living rooms, and passing along the screened terrace, connects the two squares. This path is detailed with poured-in-place terrazzo floors, rift-sawn red oak paneling and a continuous light cove. The repeated use of rift-sawn red oak paneling and cabinetry and light coves throughout the house illustrates continuity of design.

The house includes other details and finishes typical of this period including six skylights, three exterior jalousie doors and interior accordion doors, a floor to ceiling cork wall, tack-board and chalk wall panels, and a sunken poured-in-place terrazzo tub. Also noteworthy is a sculptural element rendered in brick and centered on the wall between the living room and screened terrace; this element contains a wood-burning fireplace facing the living room and a grill servicing the enclosed terrace.

The north, street elevation is very private with limited glazing. This belies the openness of the public spaces of the house, south to the backyard, and west into the screened terrace. This openness comes from the use of wall to wall and floor to ceiling fixed glass panels and seven sliding glass doors. The living room is particularly airy with 10' high ceilings. The space has exposed tongue and groove pine roof decking, glue-lam structural beams, and clerestory windows to the north. The decking and beams project several feet to the south to protect the glazing from direct sunlight.

The house has remained remarkably intact since its construction. Minor changes to the home include a new roof, repaired plumbing system, and built-in sideboard addition fabricated from matching rift-sawn red oak.

The Brooks House was one of the many homes affected by the 2015 Memorial Day floods. The house took in approximately four inches of water, which completely flooded the four carpeted bedrooms, stained the terrazzo floor, damaged the dishwasher, and clogged floor drains. Repairs began immediately to remove all carpet and padding. Restoration work included the replacement of all carpet; honing and resurfacing all terrazzo floors to remove stains and restore the original finish; and light sanding and repainting of baseboards. No sheetrock or interior wall cladding was removed.

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Smith, Jason. "Solomon House." Houston MOD. Web. (<http://www.houstonmod.org>).

The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by the Historic Preservation Office, 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, 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	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(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;		
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(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;		

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

- (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.

OR

- The property was constructed before 1905;

OR

- The property was 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;

OR

- The property was designated as a State of Texas Recorded Texas Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Brooks House at 5231 Braesvalley Drive.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Brooks House at 5231 Braesvalley Drive.

EXHIBIT A
PHOTOS
BROOKS HOUSE
5231 BRAESVALLEY DRIVE



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EXHIBIT B
PROPERTY LOCATION
BROOKS HOUSE
5231 BRAESVALLEY DRIVE

