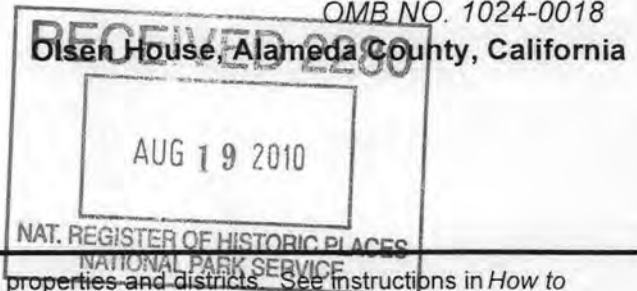


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

812



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
other names/site number: 771 San Diego Road

2. Location

street and number 771 San Diego Road Not for publication
city or town Berkeley vicinity N/A
state California code CA county Alameda code 001 zip code 94707

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] State Historic Preservation Officer 18 AUG 2010 Date

California State Office of Historic Preservation

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
 - entered in the National Register
 - see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
- see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper [Signature] Date of Action 10/1/2010

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

contributing	noncontributing	
.....1.....	.....0.....	buildings
.....0.....	.....0.....	sites
.....0.....	.....0.....	structures
.....0.....	.....0.....	objects
.....1.....	.....0.....	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A.....

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0.....

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Category	Sub
DOMESTIC.....	Single dwelling.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Category	Sub
DOMESTIC.....	Single dwelling.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement / International Style.....

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE.....
 roof OTHER: Composition.....
 walls GLASS.....
 WOOD.....
 other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

See Continuation Sheet.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 7 Page 1Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of propertyAlameda County, California
County and State**DESCRIPTION****NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION SUMMARY**

The Donald and Helen Olsen House is a single-family residence designed and built in the Modernist style. The house's brand of Modernism is specifically the International style popularized in Europe by architects Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier. The Olsen House displays the geometries, ethos, strict formalism and rigor that embody the utopian style. With its smooth facades, flat roof, boxy volume, cantilevered form, extensive fenestration and lack of ornamentation, the Olsen House reflects the Miesian ideals of the International style of Modernism.

The house is sited on a wedge-shaped lot at 771 San Diego Road in Berkeley, California. Situated upon a hillside lot, bounded by a creek to the north and a hillside slope to the east, the main floor of the house is raised over the ground level and was originally constructed to take advantage of views of the San Francisco Bay and Golden Gate Bridge. Today the view is obscured by mature trees that surround the house. The house's exterior and interior have been painted white and stand out against the hillside. The topography of the site provides structural support for the rear part of the house where the three bedrooms are located in addition to privacy found at the back of the lot. The remaining interior spaces: house, office, living room, dining room, and kitchen project beyond the plane of the hill and are supported by steel columns. At the time of its construction, a structural framework of steel columns and wood beams allowed for an open plan of nine bays and glass walls around the perimeter that would be difficult to replicate today due to stricter code requirements. On the interior, limited use of permanent walls and implementation of moveable panels allow for flexibility of spatial organization. This innovative approach speaks to the Modern style as it allows for space to be easily adaptable to any particular use at any time. Through its elegant use of the Modern, International style ethos, siting, and materials, the Donald and Helen Olsen House is one of several architecturally significant Modernist houses in Berkeley. It is singular, however, in its reflection of Miesian ideals.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Donald and Helen Olsen House is sited on a hillside slope in the North Berkeley hills on a winding street adjacent to the undeveloped upper reaches of John Hinkel Park. The house's white palette stands out against the surrounding trees and greenery. Nestled into a small, wedge-shaped lot with a creek running through the north end, the house is accessed by a steep driveway. Park visitors and passersby often remark upon its glass box design, unusual for a single-family residence in the Berkeley Hills.

The structural techniques employed by the architect were uncommon for residential design. The sixteen supporting steel I-beam columns organize the rectangular plan into nine bays. The walls are wood and painted white. The columns allow for unobstructed interior spaces that also afford views of the park-like surroundings. Because the columns bear the load, the exterior walls could be composed of glass panels. The house's street side elevation is comprised of three 8'x12' glass panels. The house's

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 7 Page 2Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of propertyAlameda County, California
County and State

northeast and southeast elevations have three 8'x13'4" glass panels. The glass is held in place by channels in the steel columns and stone. The rear wall is comprised of cabinets measuring 4' high with 4' high glass panels above. For cost efficiency, the architect used standard-sized materials. Panels are made of recycled glass.

The entrance to the house is on the lower level, at the center bay, at the top of the driveway. Carports are located on either side of the entrance, protected from the weather by the projecting second story. Immediately inside the ground floor, a stair with a return ascends to the living quarters. A double-height oil-on-canvas mural, painted for the space by artist Claire Falkenstein, fills the entire rear wall of the stairwell and draws the eye upward. From the stairs, the open plan of the western part of the house becomes visible. Light streams into the central bay through the stairwell's own clerestory windows, which provide light and air circulation.

The western part of the house does not have interior walls. The house is supported by sixteen 3.5" diameter columns, so bearing walls are unnecessary, creating spaces that are flexible due to the openness. The open plan allows light to flow in from the glass walls of the perimeter. The large windows face west toward the San Francisco Bay, originally intended to capture sweeping views from East Oakland to the Golden Gate Bridge. Trees in the immediate vicinity now obstruct most of the view.

The public spaces occupy the west half of the house. The dining room is in the northwest corner and the living room is in the southwest corner. An office occupies the south side of the open central bay. The interior is furnished with iconic designer furniture.

The private spaces of the house are enclosed by partition walls. The rooms are located in the rear of the house and are accessed by a hallway along the perimeter of the core bay. Two small bathrooms located in the core bay benefit from the clerestory for natural light. The three rooms are similar in size and were originally designed as bedrooms. All rooms have been enlarged from the original size by a 1975 conversion of the rear balcony into interior living space. The master bedroom is the largest of the three and has an entrance at the end of the hallway. The east wall comprises a white built-in cabinet and a window with views of the ivy-filled hillside.

The room at the center bay is used as a study. The east wall comprises a white desk and a wall-to-wall shelving unit. The window above the desk overlooks the hillside, while its angle affords privacy. The north wall of the study is lined with a bookshelf, and there is a twin bed in the southwest corner of the room. The southeast bay is a guest bedroom. It has a bookshelf on the north wall. A built-in ornamental seat, designed by the Olsen's son, lines the east wall. The south wall is composed entirely of windows and looks out upon the landscape.

A balcony overlooking the landscape cantilevers from the kitchen on the north elevation. The balcony highlights the cantilevered design of the house and its overall openness and transparency.

Flexibility governs the house design. The office wall comprises a bookshelf, but according to the architect's original plans, it has the dimensions to become a closet in a potential additional bedroom. The office has moveable panels. Such options echo the Modern ethos since the space can be adapted to diverse or temporary uses. The kitchen, too, has a flexible design. For example, a three-part sliding panel door provides the option to keep the kitchen open to the dining room or to separate it. The panels are constructed of an innovative translucent material.

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National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 7 Page 3 Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of propertyAlameda County, California
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Cost efficiency was part of the original design concept and construction. Not only did the modest size of the house limit the quantity of material needed, but the use of concrete, glass, and wood was economical and in keeping with the utilitarian ideals of the style. The common characteristics of the International style include a radical simplification of form, a rejection of ornament, and adoption of glass, steel and concrete as preferred materials. The honest expression of the building's structure and use of industrial techniques was in keeping with the International style's design philosophy. In addition, Donald Olsen had a resourceful working relationship with the builder, Willis Foster. Because a great portion of the house is open in plan, it feels larger than its true footprint. The original design had a balcony on the west and east elevations. The Olsens enclosed the balconies in 1963 and expanded the square footage on the interior of the main floor. Two alterations at the lower level include a small-scale bathroom (c. 2003) and a studio (1994). These changes do not compromise the overall design or integrity of the house and were accomplished in a manner in keeping with the original architecture.

The notion of flexibility and integrity of materials are fundamental design elements. While guided by economy, the architecture achieves a feeling of spaciousness and elegance. The steel columns allow for open public spaces with views, and the orientation on the sloped landscape provides privacy. At every turn, the experience of the Olsen house is of intact pure Modernism, a movement thoughtfully expressed in architecture, furnishings, artwork and lifestyle. The Donald and Helen Olsen House is a single-family residence that epitomizes the Modern, International style ethos through its expression of structure, lightness, materials and the enclosure of dynamic interior spaces.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Criteria A, B, C (checked), D with descriptions of property significance.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- Criteria A through G with descriptions of property characteristics.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1954

Significant Dates

1954

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Olsen, Donald

Builder: Foster, Willis

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Primary location of additional data:

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed on National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

University of California, Berkeley Environmental Design Archives and Environmental Design Library

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property:

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 10 563 975 4194 517
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title 1) Kate Lyndon, Jaclyn Dab, Tiffany Monk, Architectural Students; 2) Bruce D. Judd, FAIA, Principal
organization 1) CED, UC Berkeley; 2) Architectural Resources Group date 1) 11/08/06; 2) revisions 6/1/08
street & number 1) 230 Wurster Hall, #1820; 2) Pier 9, The Embarcadero telephone 1) 510-524-5764; 2) 415-421-1680
city or town 1) Berkeley; 2) San Francisco state CA zip code 1) 94720; 2) 94111

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locations

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property

Additional items (check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name Donald and Helen Olsen
street & number 771 San Diego Road telephone
city or town Berkeley state CA zip code 94707

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 1Olsen, Donald and Helen, House

Name of property

Alameda County, California

County and State

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Donald and Helen House is significant at the local level under Criterion C, as it is the work of an important figure in the history of mid-twentieth century Bay Area architecture and is representative of the International Style. Architecturally, the house is significant in the evolution of residential development and design on the local level. The building's design quality and Mid-century Modern detailing are such that it represents a type, period, and method of construction emblematic of its era. The house exhibits distinctive design details associated with an architect-designed building. Olsen's body of predominantly residential work, guided by the principles and aesthetics of Modernism, served as an aesthetic and theoretical counterpoint to the prevailing Bay Tradition. Though designed and built early in his career, the Donald and Helen Olsen House represents the purest expression of Olsen's intellectual and constructive philosophy and qualifies for listing under Criterion C.

The Donald and Helen Olsen House was constructed in 1954 in Berkeley, California. The house was designed by Donald Olsen for his own family. Originally from Minnesota, Donald and his wife Helen, a graphic designer and painter, established ties to the Bay Area during the Second World War, when Olsen designed buildings for the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond as part of the war effort. After the war, Olsen studied at Harvard with Walter Gropius. As Chair of the School of Architecture, Gropius brought the visionary tenets of Modernism to Harvard's Graduate School of Design. The former head of the Bauhaus, Gropius espoused "a humane physical environment consonant with and expressive of modern technology."¹ Gropius, and his vision of aesthetically pure, intellectually progressive, and dynamic Modernism has remained a key influence on Olsen throughout his life.

After graduate school, Olsen worked as a designer in the offices of several influential modern architects, including Eero Saarinen (in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan) and Wurster, Bernardi and Emmons (in San Francisco). The Olsens spent extended periods in Europe; Olsen received several grants for travel, including the prestigious A. W. Wheelwright Fellowship from Harvard, and later studied philosophy at the London School of Economics. While in Europe, the Olsens absorbed works by Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and other architects of the International Style. In 1953, Donald opened his own practice, later known as Donald E. Olsen, FAIA & Associates, in Berkeley. In the same year, the Olsens bought a small, irregularly-shaped parcel of land in the North Berkeley hills. Olsen's practice was known for single and multi-unit residences as well as commercial and educational buildings. Notable projects include Wurster Hall at the University of California, Berkeley and numerous single family residences in the Bay Area.

When Olsen began work as a sole practitioner in Northern California in the post-war era, the area's prevalent style was a brand of Modernism known as the Bay Tradition or the Bay Region Style. It is a local variation of Modernism that is distinctly Northern Californian distinguished by the use of specific local materials, a preference for natural redwood and a woody feeling. The Bay Region Style is also traced to an earlier tradition established by practitioners such as Bernard Maybeck, Ernest Coxhead, A. C. and Julius Schweinfurth, epitomized by brown shingled structures, the design and setting of which relied on the natural environment. It was not the philosophy that influenced Olsen's body of work. As a practitioner of the pure International

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 2Olsen, Donald and Helen, House

Name of property

Alameda County, California

County and State

Style of Modernism (the Modern Movement) spawned by the European Bauhaus, Olsen was a disciple of Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier and, among his peers, one of a few regional architects who remained faithful to the Modern Movement in Northern California.

Understanding the dialogue between the two styles is key to understanding Olsen's body of work and overall philosophy. The two styles overlap in the use of materials: wood, stucco, concrete and glass; open interior plans, and floor-to-ceiling glass walls open to the exterior. The styles diverge in their typical color palettes, stark white for the International Style and a warmer, typically wood color palate for the Bay Style. In feeling the two styles are dissimilar: the International Style is starker, with sharper lines and edges. The Bay Style is softer and less rigorous in terms of massing and composition. Bay Style building types tend to evoke rural cabins and barns. International Style buildings are typically floating abstract boxes with railings and decks.

The University of California at Berkeley, College of Environmental Design Archives maintains numerous collections of personal papers and project records related to the work of individual architects and firms. The Donald Olsen Collection is held in the archive. Though not fully catalogued, the individual projects that form the Olsen Collection have been partially indexed by the University of California at Berkeley revealing 180 projects, realized and unrealized, primarily located in Northern California, completed during the course of his career as a practicing architect. The index reveals the projects, completed between 1942 and the late 1990s, were done by Olsen as the lead and sole architect, with a limited number completed in collaboration with other practitioners. Only about half of the building types are specified on the index and break down as follows: 19 commercial projects, 13 educational projects, 4 governmental projects, 14 multi residential projects, 2 religious projects and 45 residential projects, the most prolific of all the types. In addition to the Olsen House, the best known of Olsen's residential projects are the Robert Birge House at Wurster's Greenwood Commons, and the Kip House, adjacent to the Olsen House in Berkeley.

The design of the Olsen House is in sharp contrast to the Bay Region Style, the dominant design aesthetic of Northern California at the time of its construction. The Bay Region Style, first designated as such by critic Lewis Mumford in 1947, was defined by a vernacular, rustic vocabulary with an attention to craftsmanship, an orientation to views, and an indoor-outdoor relationship made possible by a gentle climate. Precedents included the work of Bernard Maybeck and the Arts and Crafts movement. Though Olsen was a faculty member at the University of California at Berkeley architecture school, alongside prominent practitioners of the Bay Region style, he aligned himself with Modernists from Europe, many of whom had been his colleagues at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The Donald and Helen Olsen House exemplifies the clarity, transparency, flexibility, and efficiency of the Modernist aesthetic, which reveals a philosophically rigorous belief in the responsibility of architecture to reflect and further the social and material advances of one's time.

Upon completion, the Donald and Helen Olsen House was widely published in architecture journals in the U.S. and abroad, as were many of Donald Olsen's subsequent projects. Olsen forged a path parallel to Bay Area architects working in a more regional style, carving a respected place as the bearer of the Modernist ethos in Northern California. Respected both as an architect and as a

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 3 Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of propertyAlameda County, California
County and State

professor, Olsen recently donated his drawings and papers to the U.C. Berkeley Environmental Design Archives. The Donald and Helen Olsen House continues to be featured on museum and architectural tours of the Bay Area. Prominent colleagues (including Jean Prouve, Felix Candela, Richard Rogers, Robert Smithson, and Richard Meier) as well as architecture students visit the Donald and Helen Olsen House regularly. The house is prominently featured in Pierluigi Serraino's 2006 book, *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism*.

The rigorously modern, clean lines of this luminous design have set it apart from the architectural landscape of Berkeley and the region since construction. Olsen's other work, mostly confined to the Bay Area, furnishes the only local parallels. Immediately adjacent to the Olsen House sits the Kip House, which Olsen designed and built for family friends, Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Kip, two years before completing the Olsen House. The Kip House, also a white rectilinear building in the International Style, is of more conventional construction. In its unswerving purity and focus on flexible volumes made possible by steel structure, the Donald and Helen Olsen House resembles Los Angeles Modernist architecture. The work of Richard Neutra and Charles and Ray Eames are clear parallels, and it shares with the Case Study Houses (initiated in 1945) an interest in economy and efficiency via mass-produced components.

Donald and Helen Olsen continue to live in the house. They have maintained it in its original condition as designed except for the few modifications noted earlier.

With regard to Donald Olsen's career, Olsen (b. 1919) began teaching at University of California at Berkeley, College of Environmental Design in 1954. He was named Professor Emeritus in 1990 and retired from private practice in 1996. Professor Olsen is in his 90s and he has concluded his professional career. At the time of this writing, it has been 13 years since he practiced, a sufficient amount of time to objectively assess his overall career, his active participation in the practice and teaching of architecture. His contributions to the practice of architecture may be fully understood at the present time. Since he is no longer in practice, it is possible to measure his completed body of work.

The Donald and Helen Olsen House can now be publicly recognized as perhaps the most pure and successful domestic expression of the International Style in the Bay Area, and, as such, is most worthy of listing on the National Register.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 1Olsen, Donald and Helen, House

Name of property

Alameda County, California

County and State

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 2

Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of property

Alameda County, California
County and State

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MAPS

1. Assessor's Map 61
2. USGS Map

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 1

Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of property

Alameda County, California
County and State

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The house is sited on a wedge-shaped lot at 771 San Diego Road in Berkeley, California.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The house was designed specifically for this location and site.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Current Photographs Page 1

Olsen, Donald and Helen, House

Name of property

Alameda County, California

County and State

Photography Continuation Sheet

The following information applies to all photographs:

Donald and Helen Olsen House
Berkeley, Alameda County, CA
Bruce D. Judd, FAIA
August 3, 2008

- Photo 1 – Contextual view of house, looking east.
- Photo 2 – Contextual view of house, looking northeast.
- Photo 3 – Contextual view of house, looking southeast.
- Photo 4 – Stair leading from street to house, looking east.
- Photo 5 – Driveway and carport, looking east.
- Photo 6 – Carport detail, looking northeast.
- Photo 7 – Carport detail, looking southeast.
- Photo 8 – Carport detail, looking north.
- Photo 9 – Southwest corner window detail, looking northeast.
- Photo 10 – South façade, looking northeast.
- Photo 11 – East façade, looking southwest.
- Photo 12 – North façade, looking west.
- Photo 13 – North façade, looking southwest.
- Photo 14 – Entrance stair from lower level.
- Photo 15 – Entrance stair from main level, looking east.
- Photo 16 – Entrance stair, looking east.
- Photo 17 – Clerestory windows over stair, looking southwest.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET**Section Current Photographs Page 2Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Name of propertyAlameda County, California
County and State

-
- Photo 18 – Dining room from living room, looking north.
- Photo 19 – Dining room, looking west.
- Photo 20 – View of living room and office from dining room, looking southeast.
- Photo 21 – Living room from dining room, looking south.
- Photo 22 – Living room from office, looking west.
- Photo 23 – Column and beam detail in living room, looking southwest.
- Photo 24 – Office from living room, looking east.
- Photo 25 – Column and beam connection detail over entrance, looking southwest.
- Photo 26 – Hallway to bedrooms, looking east.
- Photo 27 – Column and beam detail in hallway, looking east.
- Photo 28 – Master bedroom, looking southeast.
- Photo 29 – Study, looking southeast.
- Photo 30 – Guest bedroom, looking southeast.
- Photo 31 – Lower level bathroom.
- Photo 32 – Upper level bathroom.
- Photo 33 – Kitchen, looking east.
- Photo 34 – Sliding doors between dining room and kitchen, looking northeast.
- Photo 35 – Helen Olsen's studio, looking southwest.
- Photo 36 – Lower level bathroom.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 10000812

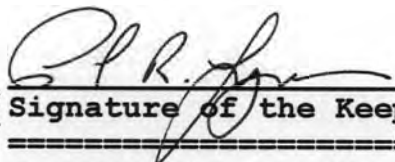
Date Listed: 10/1/2010

Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
Property Name

Alameda CA
County State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

10/1/2010
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Geographic Data:

The correct acreage is: *less than one.*

The UTM Coordinates were verified using GoogleEarth; they do not, however, correspond to those identified using the submitted USGS map, which would align more closely to: 10 564060 4194350

These clarifications were confirmed with the CA SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Olsen, Donald and Helen, House
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: CALIFORNIA, Alameda

DATE RECEIVED: 8/19/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/16/10
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/01/10 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/03/10
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000812

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

 ACCEPT RETURN REJECT DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Donald and Helen Olsen House meets National Register Criterion C at the local level in the area of Architecture. The 1954 home is an excellent local example of Miesian, International Style residential design, a rather rare architectural form in the Berkeley Hills, where the softer Bay Tradition or Bay Region Style of the modern movement held greater influence. The work of respected local architect and teacher, Donald Olsen, who studied under Gropius at Harvard, the house reflects the strict formalism characteristic of the Miesian style with smooth wall surfaces, flat roof, boxy volume, stark white color, and lack of exterior ornamentation other than the defining steel structural elements and extensive glass walls. A "glass box on stilts," the design was widely praised in architectural journals. Although still living, Olsen is largely retired (last design commission completed 2001) and the house clearly reflects a discrete, early period within his significant professional design career.

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept Criterion AC

REVIEWER Paul R. Lusignan DISCIPLINE HISTORIAN

TELEPHONE _____ DATE 10/1/10

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.













771

























































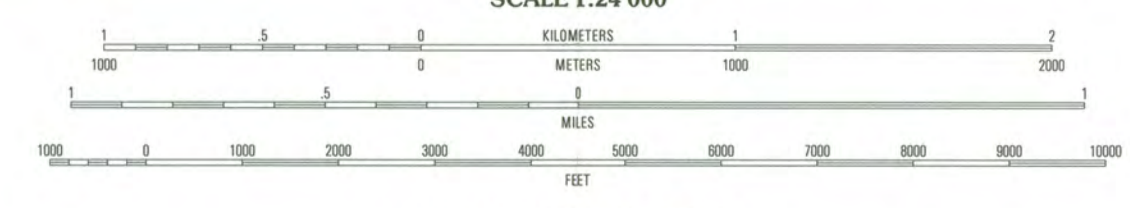
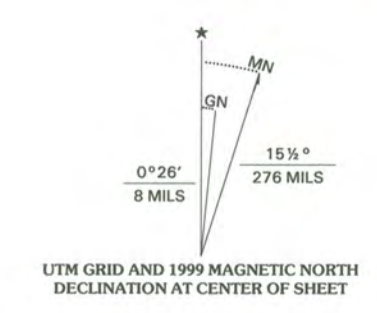






Zone 10
Easting 563 975
Northing 4194 517

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
Topography compiled 1947. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1993 and other sources. Photospectroscopy using imagery taken 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. PLSS and survey control current as of 1959. Boundaries revised 1999
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27). Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 10 19 000-foot ticks: California Coordinate System of 1977 (zone 3)
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map



SCALE 1:24 000
CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET
SUPPLEMENTARY CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048



QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3	1 Petaluma Point
			2 Mare Island
			3 Benicia
4	5	4 San Quentin	
		5 Briones Valley	
		6 San Francisco North	
6	7	7 Oakland West	
		8 Oakland East	

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway hard surface
Secondary highway hard surface
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
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January 3 2009

Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA
State Historic Preservation Officer
P.O.Box 94296
Sacramento CA 94296

RECEIVED

JAN 05 2009

OHP

Dear Mr. Donaldson:

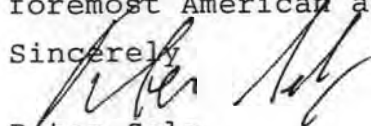
This letter is to support the nomination of Donald Olsen's house at 771 San Diego Road in Berkeley to the National Register of Historic Places.

I have taught the history of 20th Century art and architecture at this University for some thirty years and have always place emphasis on the International Style of architecture in my courses and seminars. Donald Olsen's house, built in 1954 is an outstanding example of this significant period in the history of 20th Century architecture. Olsen was one of the first students of Walter Gropius when the latter, first director of the Bauhaus, first came to teach at Harvard. Olsen himself then taught here at Berkeley and transmitted his own interpretation of these principles to generations of students.

His own house is without doubt a prime example of the International Style. Its proportion, distribution of solids and voids, its functional fenestration and fullness of light, and its relationship to the natural surroundings of hillside, creek and trees make it a superb paradigm of modernist architecture. It is, furthermore, a fine and comfortable residence for its occupants.

I myself was so taken with Donald Olsen's work, that, when I decided to commission a house for my family and myself in 1969, I asked Donald Olsen to be the architect. I have lived in this Olsen house since that time and am glad to say that it was a good choice to ask one of the foremost American architects to design it.

Sincerely,

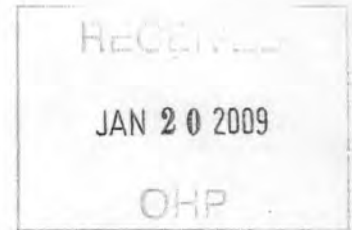

Peter Selz
Professor Emeritus of Modern Art

is in "e" binder

Dave Weinstein
155 Ashbury Ave.
El Cerrito, CA 94530
davidsweinstein@yahoo.com
www.davidsweinstein.com

January 16, 2009

Milford Wayne Donaldson
California State Parks
Office of Historic Preservation



Re: National Register nomination for Donald and Helen Olsen House

Dear Mr. Donaldson:

As a frequent writer about California architecture (historical articles in the San Francisco Chronicle, also articles in CA Modern magazine, and the books "Signature Architects of the San Francisco Bay Area" and "Berkeley Rocks: Building with Nature") I would like to comment on the Olsen House application because of the home's importance in Bay Area architecture.

I profiled Olsen for the Chronicle and in "Signature Architects."

The house makes clear that Bay Area Modernism includes more than the woodsy, vernacular style. It has become a landmark in the Berkeley Hills thanks to its prominent placement above a park and because of its singular look.

The house provides a unique vision of Donald Olsen's work, showing off not just the purity of his style but also its wit. His placement of a classical sculpture of a goddess in a spot in his living room that is clearly visible to passersby – and the way he presents the interior so it is seen by passersby – illustrate much about his architectural personality.

It is too bad Olsen never got to build one proposed house, for an Italian-American family, that would have placed a Venetian canal complete with gondola between living room and kitchen.

Olsen is an important and under-appreciated architect, better known to many for his teaching and his philosophy than for his built work. This is one of his most important buildings, a relative rarity of its type in Northern California, and it heartily deserves the honor being proposed.

Thank you!



Dave Weinstein

CORNELIA HAHN OBERLANDER, C.M., LL.D.(HON), FCSLA, BCSLA, FASLA

Landscape Architect

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Tel: (604) 224-3967 Fax: (604) 224-7347
E-mail: coberlan@interchange.ubc.ca

January 21, 2009

JAN 26 2009

Mr. Milford Wayne Donaldson
State Historic Preservation Officer
Office of Historic Preservation
P. O. Box 942896
Sacramento, California
942966-001 U.S.A.

In Support of the Donald Olsen House, 771 San Diego Road, Berkeley, Ca.

Dear Mr. Donaldson

I strongly recommend the above named property to be included in the National Register of Historic Places. I have often visited the house since it was built in the 1950's. The design truly expresses the International Style taught to us at Harvard University where Mr. Olsen studied under Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer. The design is a perfect interpretation of modern architecture adapted to the California climate. Therefore this house should be included in the National Register.

Sincerely yours,

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander

Cornelia Hahn Oberlander CM, FASLA FCSLA BCSLA

**Donald and Helen Olsen House
Berkeley, Alameda County
Staff Report**

Constructed in 1954, the Donald and Helen Olsen House is a single family residence designed and built in the Modernist Style by its owner, Donald Olsen.

Modern, clean lines set the house apart from the architectural landscape of Berkeley. Situated on a wedge-shaped lot in the hills above the city, the house's white palette stands out against the surrounding trees and greenery. Steel I-beam construction, uncommon at that time for residential design, allowed for unobstructed interior spaces and large glass exterior walls that provide views of the house's natural surroundings. Flexibility also governs the design. Moveable panels and bookshelves double as walls and echo the modern ethos. Additionally, the modest size of the house and the use of Concrete, glass, and wood are in keeping with the utilitarian ideals of the style. The House exemplifies the clarity, transparency, flexibility, and efficiency of the Modernist aesthetic, which reveals a philosophically rigorous belief in the responsibility of architecture to reflect and further the social and material advances of one's time.

Nominated to the National Register under criterion C, the Olsen House is significant as the work of an important figure in the history of mid-twentieth century Bay Area architecture and is representative of the International Style. The house is also significant in the evolution of residential development and design on the local level. The building's design and Mid-century Modern detailing represent a type, period, and method of construction emblematic of its era. Upon completion, the Olsen House was widely published in architectural journals and continues featured on museum and architectural tours of the Bay Area. The house has been continuously occupied by the Olsens since its completion and with the exception of minor alterations, is in excellent original condition. The Olsens support this nomination

Donald Olsen was named professor emeritus in 1990 and has not practiced architecture for 13 years. Staff recommends the State Historical Resources Commission determine that the Olsen House meets National Register Criterion C at the local level of significance and recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register.

Jay Correia
State Historian III
January 6, 2009

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

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August 18, 2010

Dr. Stephanie Smith Toothman, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service 2280
1201 I (Eye) Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Subject: **Donald and Helen Olsen House, Alameda County, California
National Register of Historic Places Nomination**

Dear Dr. Toothman:

Enclosed please find the **Donald and Helen Olsen House** nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. On January 27, 2009 in Sacramento, California, the California State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance. The motion to approve the nomination included direction to staff to expand the statement of significance prior to forwarding the nomination to your office.

Over a period of several months our office was in contact with the architectural firm that had prepared the original nomination on a pro-bono basis with the assistance of interns. Additional work was needed to edit through minor inconsistencies. We are very pleased to submit the completed nomination to you at this time.

The Olsen House is significant as the work of an important figure in the history of mid-twentieth century Bay Area architecture and is representative of the International Style. The house is also significant in the evolution of residential development and design on the local level. The building's design and Mid-century Modern detailing represent a type, period, and method of construction emblematic of its era.

Donald Olsen was named Professor Emeritus in 1990 and retired from active practice in 1996. He has concluded his professional career, and has not practiced architecture for 13 years, a sufficient amount of time in which to objectively assess his complete body of work and contributions to twentieth century architecture.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact Jay Correia of my staff at 916-445-7008.

Sincerely,

Milford Wayne Donaldson, FAIA
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures

THE BERKELEY DAILY PLANET

THE EAST BAY'S INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

FRONT PAGE OPINION COLUMNISTS ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CONTENTS FULL TEXT

Page One

Landmarks Commission Embraces Modernism

By Riya Bhattacharjee
Wednesday March 11, 2009



James Samuels
Donald and Helen Olsen house, at 771 San Diego Drive.

The home of Berkeley architect Donald Olsen became a city landmark Mar. 5 in a move that marked the embrace of a new era of design.

SHARE

The Donald and Helen Olsen House, designed and built by the former UC professor in 1954, earned the designation in a unanimous vote by the Berkeley Landmarks Preservation Commission. In bestowing the honor, the commission expanded its focus to include postwar modernist architecture.

Commissioner Carrie Olson said the Olsen House was just the second modernist residence to be landmarked in the city, the first being architect William Wurster's Jensen Cottage on La Vereda.

It offers a break from "fussy architecture," she said at the meeting. According to the landmark application, the home's design features an interplay of solids and voids, bringing forth the idea of minimalism, as articulated in Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's maxim "less is more."

To the casual observer, the house, at 771 San Diego Drive, has the appearance of a glass box on stilts.

"It has a unique character, which makes it look underdone, but it is not," said Steven Winkel, commission chair.

Berkeley architect and Planning Commissioner James Samuels, who wrote the local landmark application, mentions in the document that the significance of the building's design can be attributed partly to the fact that it was built at a "benchmark moment" in residential American architecture of the 20th century.

"Coming upon the Olsen House," the nomination says, "one is immediately reminded of the revolution which occurred in all the arts at the beginning of the last century, no more forcefully than in architecture."

It goes on to discuss how revolutionary architects of the early 20th century, including Walter Gropius, Pierre Jenneret, and Mies, broke from the past and designed a completely new genre of architecture, revolting against the "superficial application" of the Greco-Roman orders, Gothic romanticism, Renaissance classicism, and vernacular domestic architecture.

Samuels said at the meeting that the Olsen House transcends the idea of a modernist structure.

"It's just as good today as it was 55 years ago," he said. "It's a testament to the quality of design. It stands out because it didn't give way to any clichés. It's an uncompromised design."

Part of a group of midcentury glass houses that laid the foundation for 1920s experiments by Mies, Le Corbusier and Gerrit Rietveld, the Olsen House, according to the nomination, makes an aesthetic statement that is remarkably different from that of Bay Area architects Bernard Maybeck and Julia Morgan.

A pending nomination for the National Register of Historic Places, by Bruce Judd of Architectural Resources Group and three UC Berkeley graduate students, says that its "volumetric form, flexible internal plan and sense of efficiency" were a result of the economy.

Perched in the North Berkeley hills, the Olsen House is a single-story white building—a "floating glass box," as described by the nomination—which once had spectacular views of the San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge, now obscured by trees.

The national landmark application says that the house, which was built on a tight budget, is part wooden beams and part steel columns—comparable to the supporting columns at Corbusier's Villa

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Savoie—instead of a “prohibitively expensive” steel frame.

“It’s a lot harder to do this house today because the building codes have changed, and earthquake resistance has increased,” said Samuels.

Architect Pierluigi Serraino, who included the house in a book on modernist Bay Area architecture, said that the Olsen House is a link between European and East Coast modernism.

“By landmarking it we [are] sending an important message to the community and at the state level,” he said.

The Olsen House has also been featured in *Architectural Digest*, the Swiss design magazine *Bauen+Wohnen* and in the Japanese magazine *A+U*.

“It feels like part of a fabric of the community to me,” said Olson, whose father is also a modernist architect. “There has not been a house like this before, and there will not be one later. We have tried to look at the next generation of houses that will be landmarked in Berkeley, and I think it’s the right thing to landmark this.”

Hailed by architects as one of the best examples of modernist domestic architecture in the San Francisco Bay Area, the house is a striking work of art that represents many of the basic tenets of the modern movement in its purest form.

Samuels said that the home’s design took the “modernist idiom to an entirely different level” by creating “an illusion of weightlessness” that is pure geometry.

“In general we look back 40 years when we want to landmark a house,” Carrie Olson said, adding that when the preservation movement started, almost 35 years ago, the commission concentrated on houses built in the 1880s, 1890s and 1910s. “This is something we have known is coming. The Olsen House is a building of the future—it’s a box, but a very clever box built with a unique structural system, which is structurally sound.”

Gary Parsons, vice chair for the commission, drew attention to the staircase at the center of the house, which is lit by clear glass windows on all four sides.

“As we move into the ‘50s, we will be landmarking a lot of interesting and not so interesting houses, and this sets the bar quite high,” said Winkel.

Samuels, who worked with Olsen on different projects in the ‘70s, told the *Planet* after the meeting that he had wanted to get the building landmarked to protect it from any kind of change in the future.

“It’s the first of its kind—a totally consistent design,” he said. “No gesture toward any other period. It’s pure and simply modern.”

Donald and Helen Olsen, who were present at the meeting, thanked the commission for its support.

“I have reached an age where I have lost my hearing,” said Donald Olsen, who taught at UC Berkeley for 36 years and has lived in the house with his wife for the last 55. “Besides enjoying the views, we have had a wonderful time with all the visitors who have come to see the house from all over the world. Landmarking it will enhance the quality of the house and the neighborhood very well.”

Originally from Minnesota, Olsen was a student of Walter Gropius’ at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the 1940s and went on to work with Eero Saarinen and at Skidmore, Owings and Merrill’s San Francisco office. He received the National American Institute of Architects’ Honor Award for the Herman Ruth House in 1968.

He has taught and traveled widely in Europe, where he was influenced by the works of Mies, Le Corbusier and other modernist architects.

Most of Olsen’s work is archived at UC Berkeley.