

# Appeal of City-Initiated Designation of 517 Aragon Avenue (LHD 22-013)

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## Owner's Presentation

May 23, 2023  
City Commission  
Agenda Item F-2  
Legislative File 23-5526

# How We Got Here

- My wife and I have lived in Coral Gables for several years—even before we married.
- In November 2022, we found the opportunity to make Coral Gables our permanent home.
- We purchased 517 Aragon Avenue with the dream of designing and building a new home.
- As an architect myself, I was surprised when the administration started the designation process.





# Presentation Overview

1. Legal Criteria
2. Architectural Review
3. Closing Remarks
4. Reserved Time After Public Comment

# The City's Legal Requirements (Code Section 8-103)

2/14/23, 11:30 AM

Print

## Section 8-103. Criteria for designation of historic landmarks or historic districts.

Districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects of national, state significance **if they possess integrity** of location, design, setting, manner of construction, or other characteristics, and their associated properties **must have significant character, interest or value** as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural **heritage of the City, state or nation.** For a multiple property nomination, eligibility will be based on the establishment of historic contexts, of themes which describe the historic relationship of the properties. The eligibility of any potential local historic landmark or local historic landmark district shall be based on meeting one (1) or more of the following criteria:

“if they possess integrity”

“must have significant character, interest or value...”

historical, cultural significance:

1. Is associated in a significant way with the life or activities of a major historic person important in the past;
2. Is the site of an historic event with significant effect upon the community, city, state, or nation;
3. Is associated in a significant way with a major historic event whether cultural, economic, military, social, or political;
4. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community; or
5. Is associated in a significant way with a past or continuing institution, which has contributed, substantially to the life of the City.

B. Architectural significance:

1. Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more distinctive architectural styles;
2. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction;
3. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder; or
4. Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

**“Significance” and “Integrity” are  
Threshold Legal Requirements**

# “Significance” But to Who?

2/14/23, 11:30 AM

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## Section 8-103. Criteria for designating historic districts.

Districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects of local importance are of historic significance if they possess integrity of materials, workmanship, or association. In order to qualify for designation as a historic landmark district, individual properties must have significant character, interest or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural heritage of the City, state or nation. For a multiple property nomination, eligibility will be based on the establishment of historic contexts, of themes which describe the historical relationship of the properties. The eligibility of any potential local historic landmark or local historic landmark district shall be based on meeting one (1) or more of the following criteria:

To the “heritage  
of the City”

# HPB and Staff Found 517 “Significant” to Coral Gables as an Example of “Minimal Traditional” Architecture





# “Minimal Traditional” Design

- A response to the Great Depression and new FHA loan requirements
- Cost effective approach to popular, better-defined architectural styles.
- No hard-and-fast set of guidelines.
  - Staff’s report acknowledges that the “Minimal Traditional style was **flexible**.” *See Staff Report pg 6.*



# “Minimal Traditional” Design

- County’s Historic Preservation Design Guidelines provide a similar description.

Minimal traditional is a catch-all term for early to mid-20th century structures built with economy but based on traditional massing. These may include influences from American vernaculars, like American Colonial, Spanish or Mediterranean Revival, the Bungalow, Ranch and Postwar Modern, but they comprise only nominal stylistic features and a general avoidance of ornament. Decoration may include roof vents, scuppers, attached planters, bay windows, screened porches, areas of exposed brick or oolitic stone, and decorative front door.

In South Florida, Minimal Traditional dwellings were popular from the 1930s-1950s as popular enthusiasm waned for styles like Mediterranean Revival, Art Deco and Streamline. Pragmatic and modest, Minimal Traditional approaches were used in many new subdivisions of the region’s burgeoning suburbs.

Minimal Traditional comprises elements of other styles that are used in minimal ways to uplift an otherwise straightforward boxy architecture. They conform to period building type, construction type, and tastes, but are uncommitted in terms of style; they are often eclectic and may seem like a restrained mashup of other styles. Constructed using a masonry shell, their interior partitions, floors and roofs are generally built of wood framing.



# Has the building at 517 Aragon Retained Its “Integrity”?

- Significance alone isn't enough. The Code also requires **“Integrity.”**
- City has only ever designated three “Minimal Traditional” buildings.
- At HPB, we did a deep dive into all three others and saw they retained integrity.
- If time allows, we are prepared and happy to do so today.

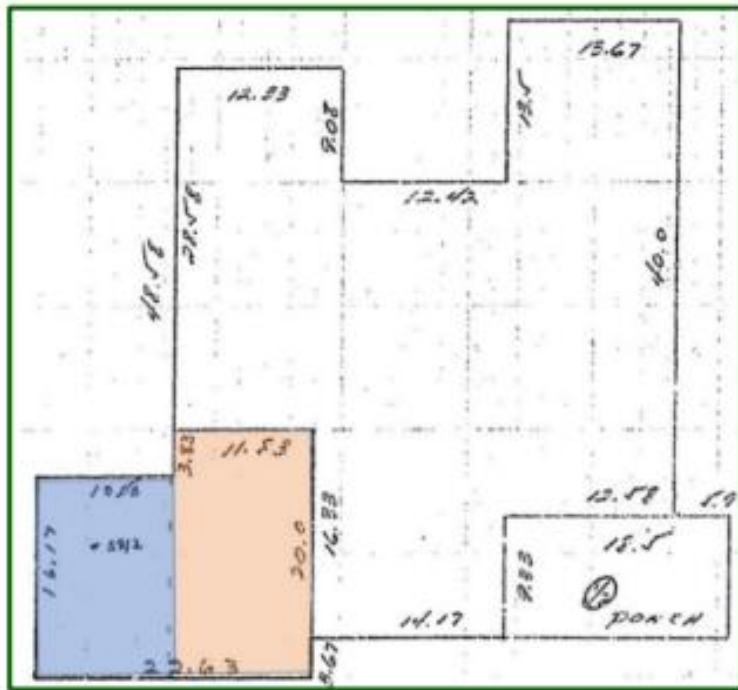


# How does 517 Aragon's "Integrity" compare to other buildings the City has designated?

1. **Other Sites Had Almost No Changes.** Each report had one paragraph reporting "no structural changes," "minimal alterations", "**routine maintenance.**"
2. **For 517 Aragon Staff Report Describes Additions / Alterations Over FOUR pages.** See Staff Report, Pages 13, 14, 15, and 16.
3. **Big Changes Over Four Decades.** Architect will review these changes.

# Just One Illustration Here 737 Minorca v. 517 Aragon

## 737 Minorca's Renovations



**Figures 12: 737 Minorca Avenue**

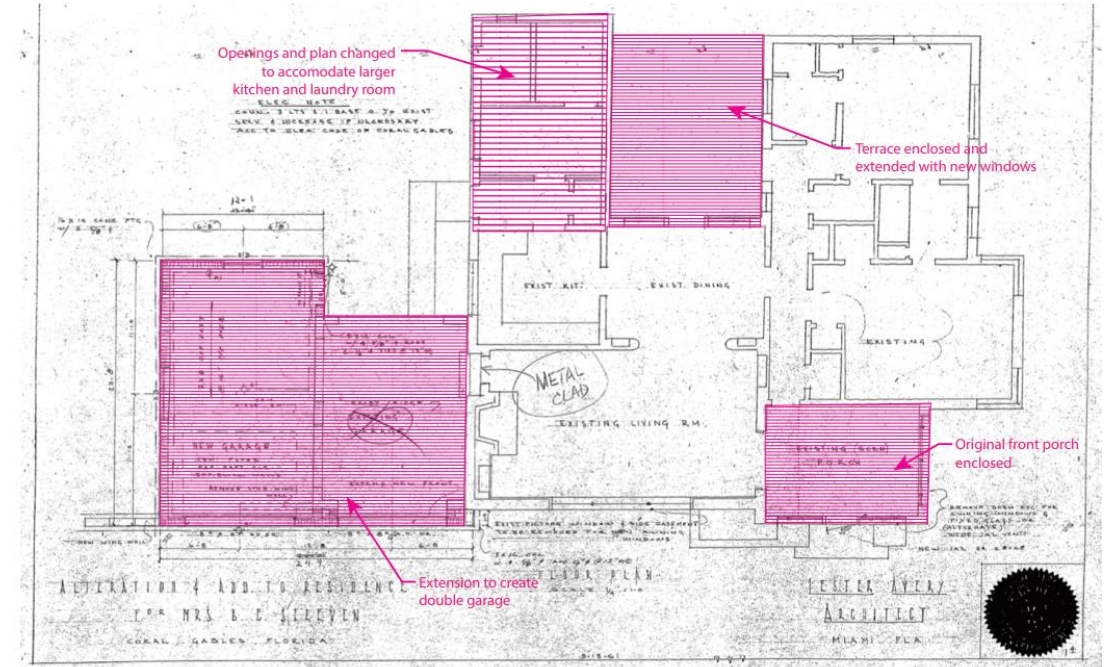
c.1960 Tax Card [left]  
**blue: 1939 Maid's Room Addition**  
**orange: Original Garage**

Property Survey, 2021 [right]

Courtesy of Form Tech Land Surveying, Inc.

## 517 Aragon's 1961 Renovation Alone

1961 Renovation Annotated





# Architectural Review and Inspection

## Found:

- **Lost Integrity**. Renovations have been so significant, the building can no longer be said to exemplify “Minimal Traditional.”
- **Modernizing Not Possible While Designated**. Doing so would take it further away from “Minimal Traditional”
- **Not Significant**. Minimal Traditional was not in George Merrick’s vocabulary.

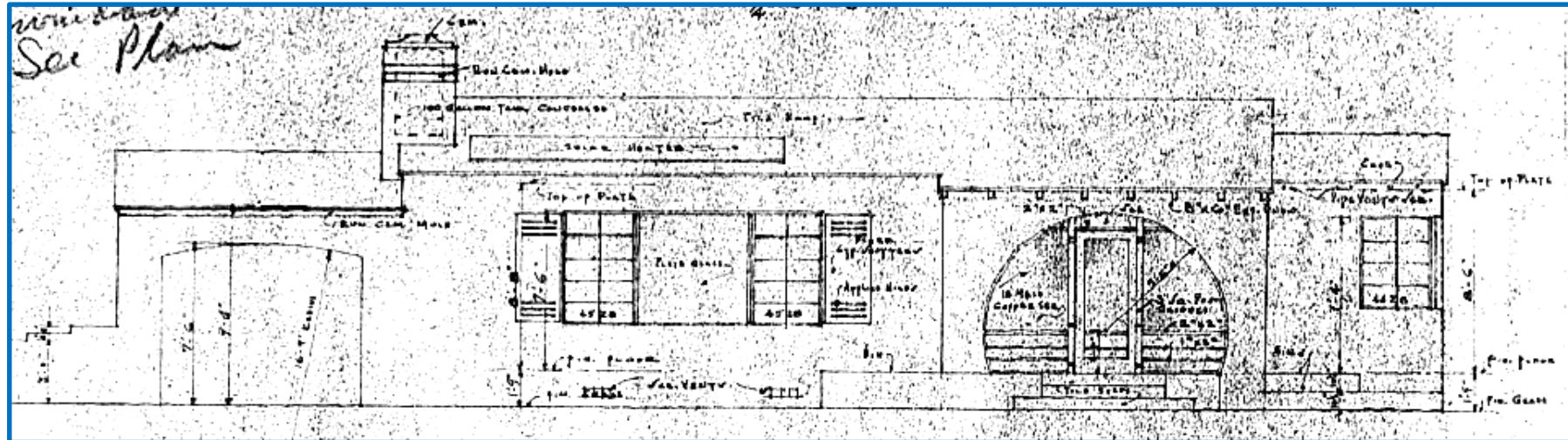


D E S I G N  
S P A C E  
A R C H I T E C T U R E

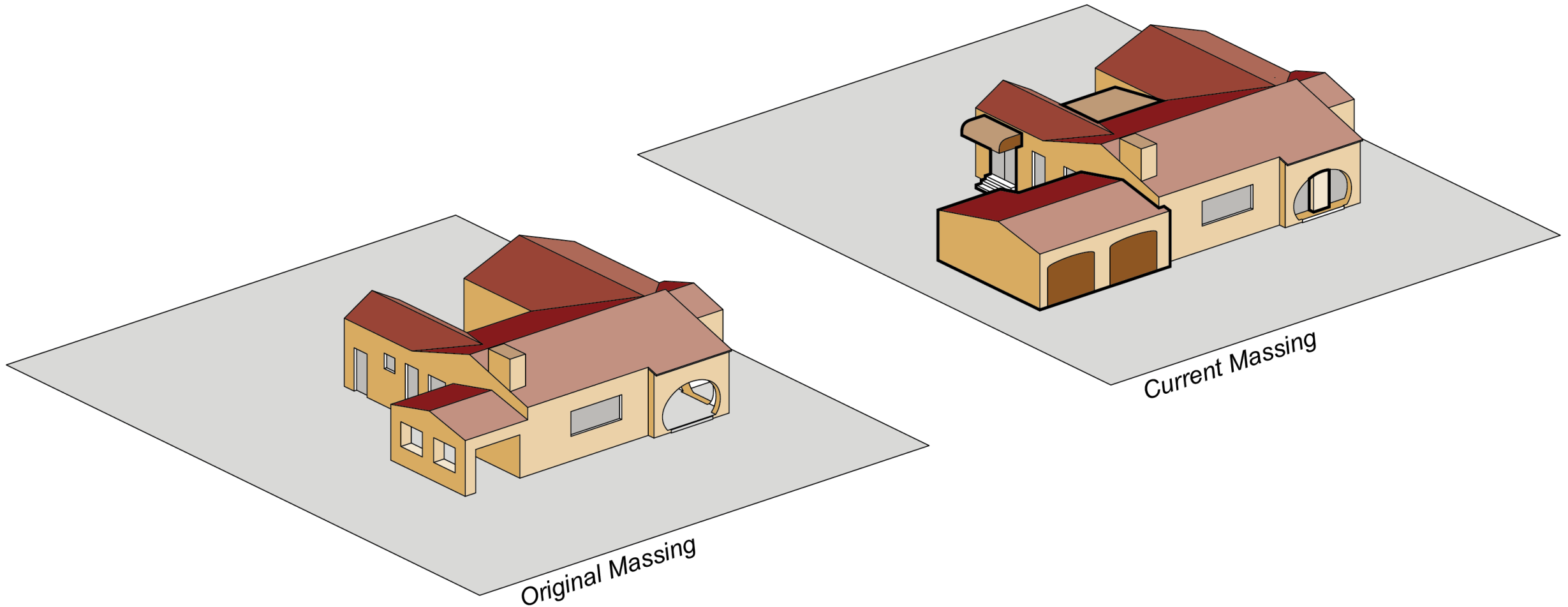
## ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

*Conducted by Joe Cardona, AIA, NCARB*

# Minimal Traditional



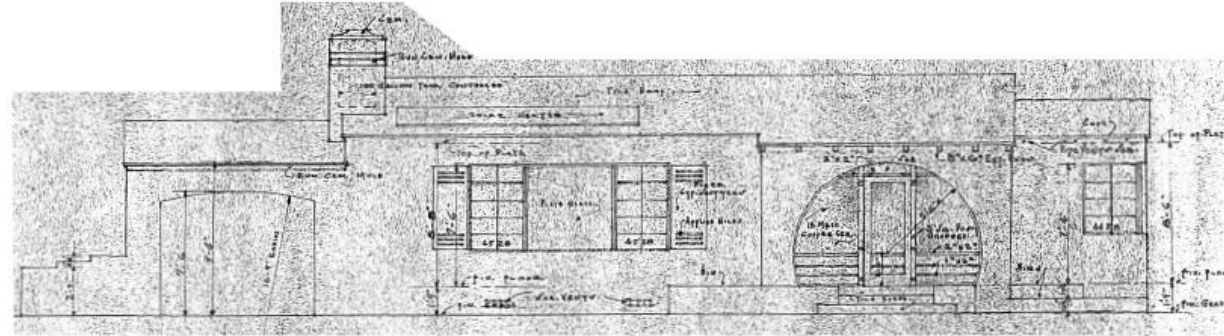
# Building Massing Study



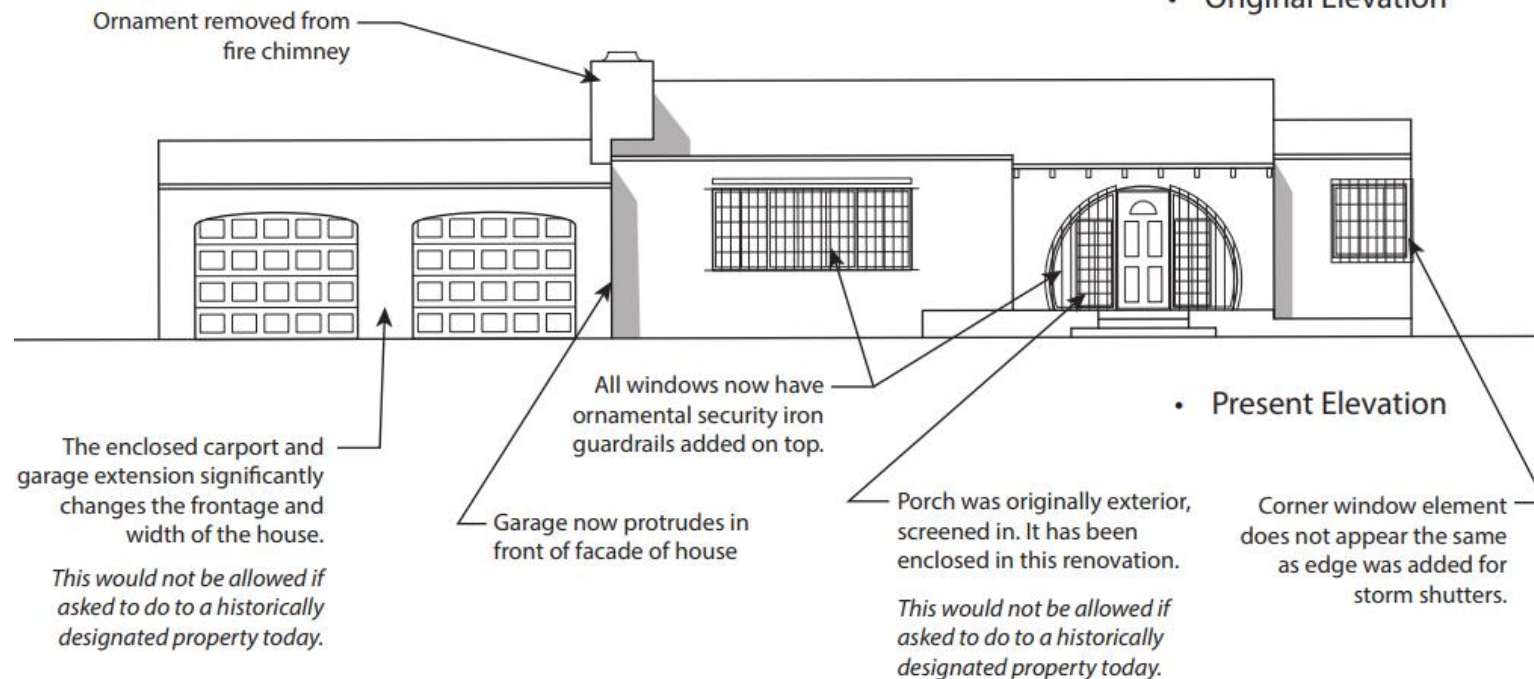




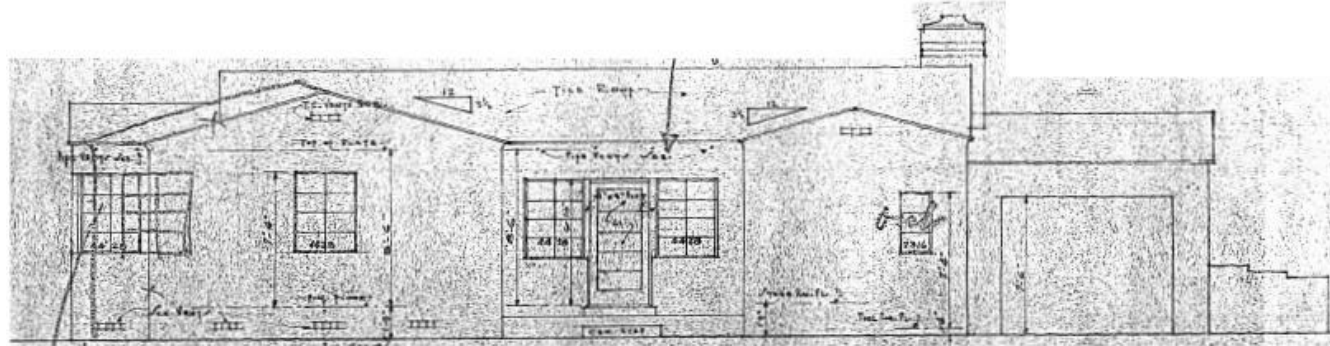
# Building Then and Now: South Elevation



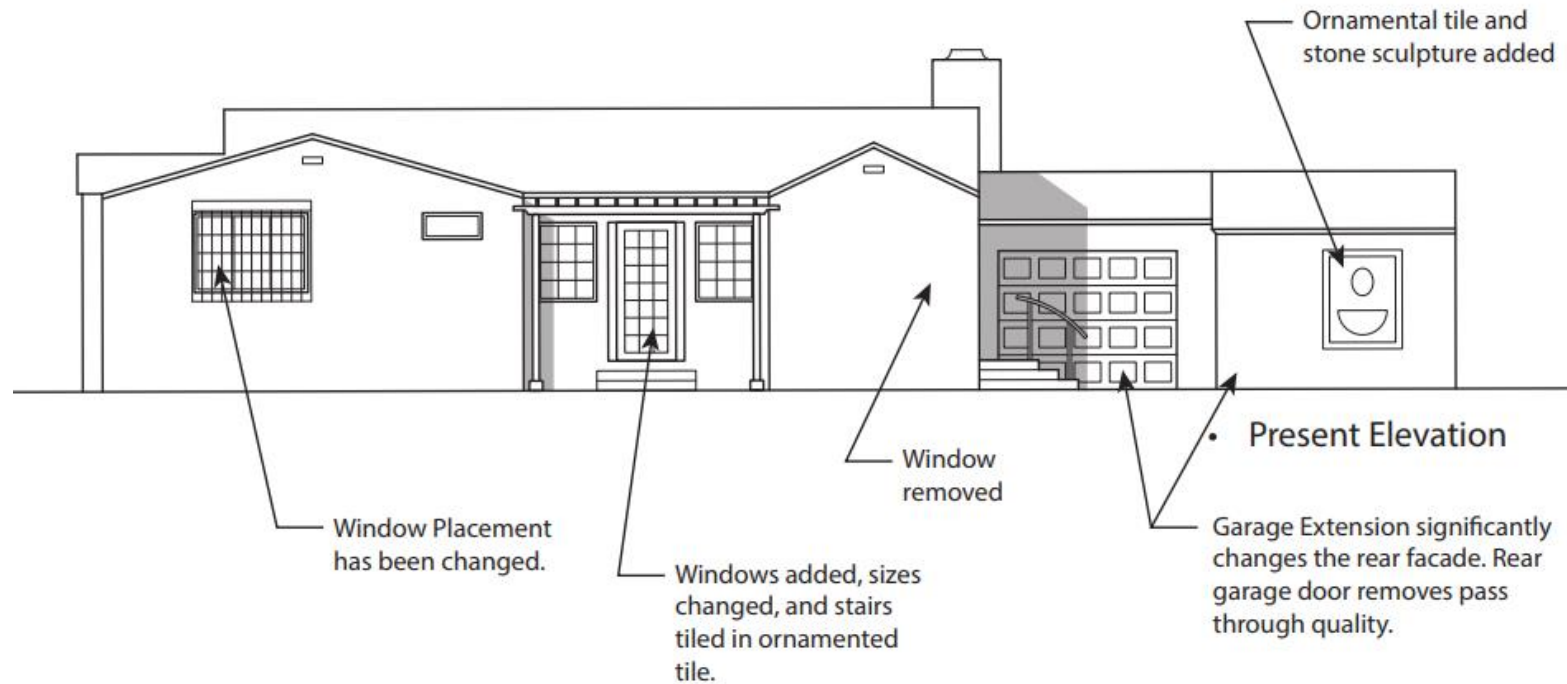
• Original Elevation



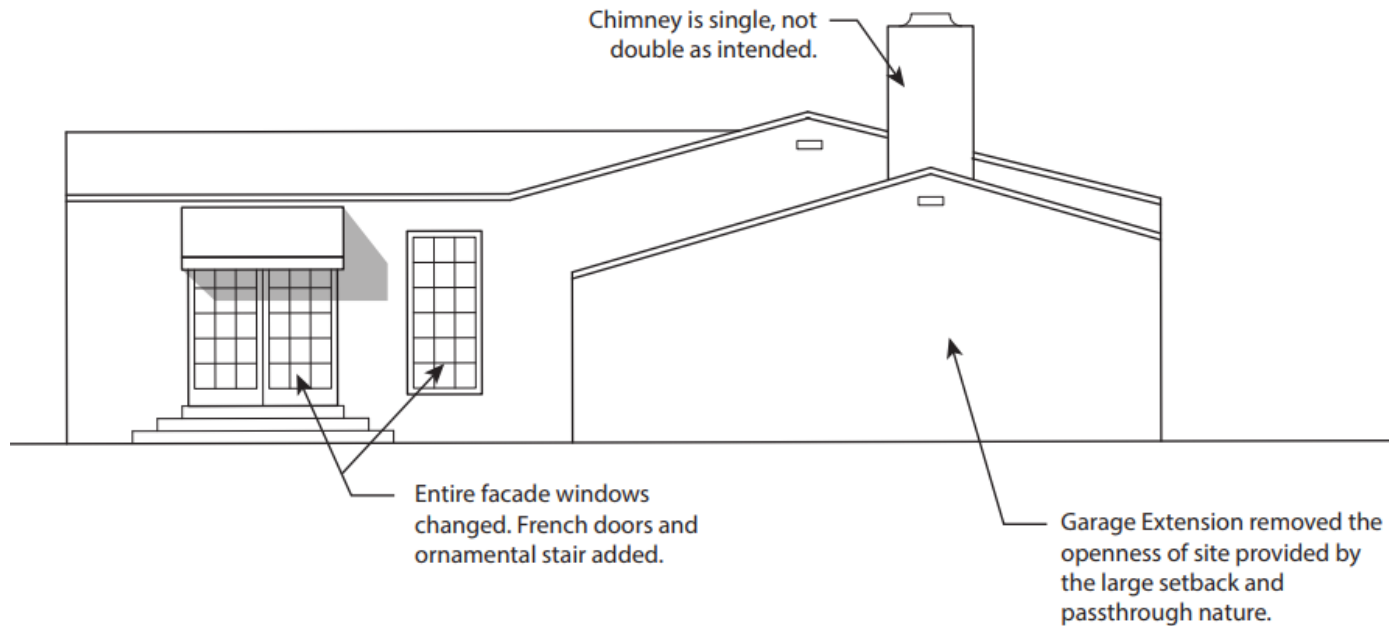
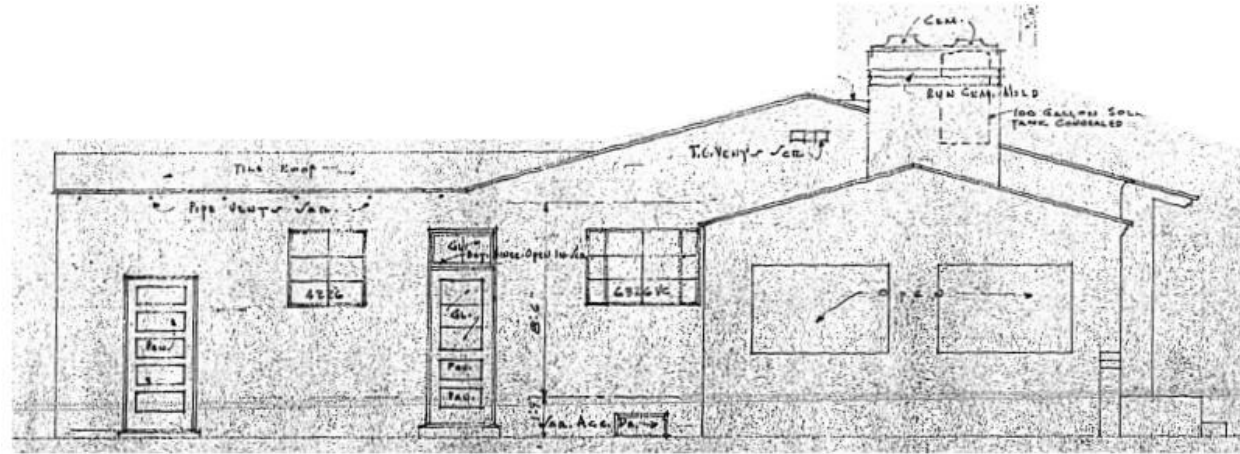
# Building Then and Now: North Elevation



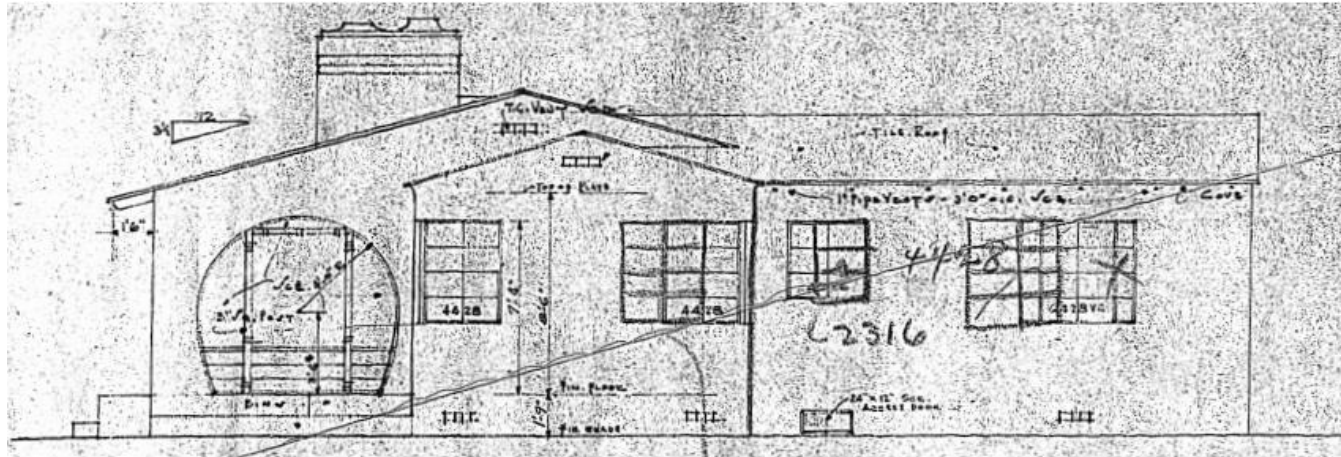
- Original Elevation



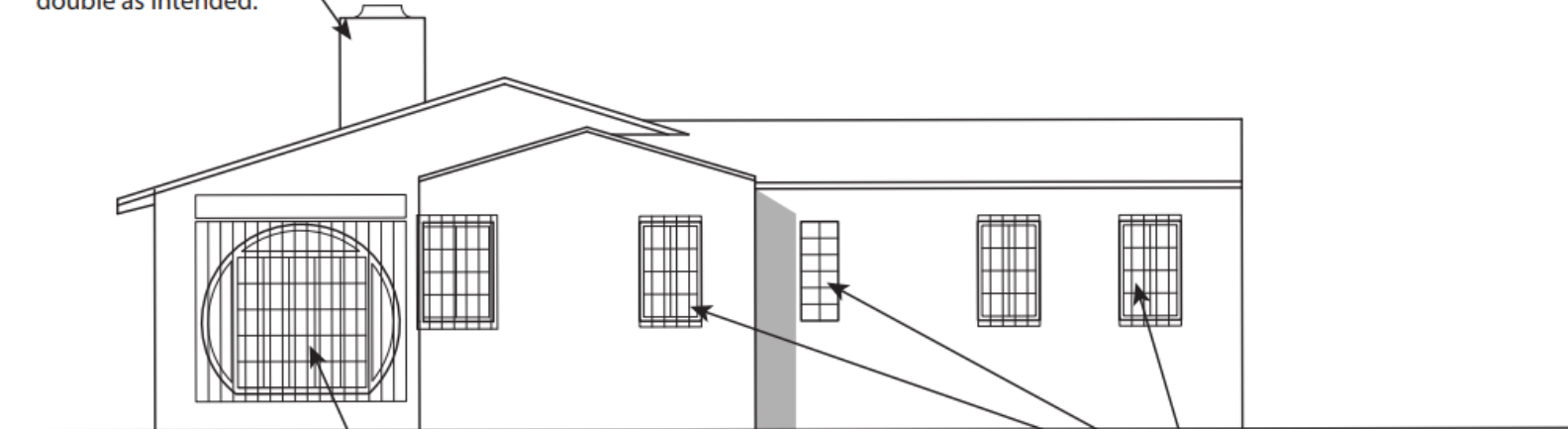
# Building Then and Now: West Elevation



# Building Then and Now: East Elevation



Chimney is single, not double as intended.



Screened porch enclosed and air conditioned.

Window openings completely changed.

# Alterations Analysis: Garage Addition



Garage extension removes original carport, changing intention and facade significantly.

Garage sits proud from original facade

# Alterations Analysis: Garage Addition



New addition removes transparency of facade, and openness to backyard.

# Alterations Analysis: Enclosed Front Porch



Exposed rafters show intention of ornamentation on home, not minimal traditional modern touches.

Semi-Circular entry difficult and expensive, not cost-effective as per minimal traditional historic trend.



# Alterations Analysis: Enclosed Front Porch

Roof area missing any insulation when enclosed



Entry courtyard was originally screened in, and now is interior.



Air vents added when porch enclosed.

# Alterations Analysis: Enclosed Back Porch

Roof area missing any insulation when enclosed



Rear courtyard originally screened in, and now opened into the home. New tile looks laid, and AC added in room.



Air vents added when porch enclosed.

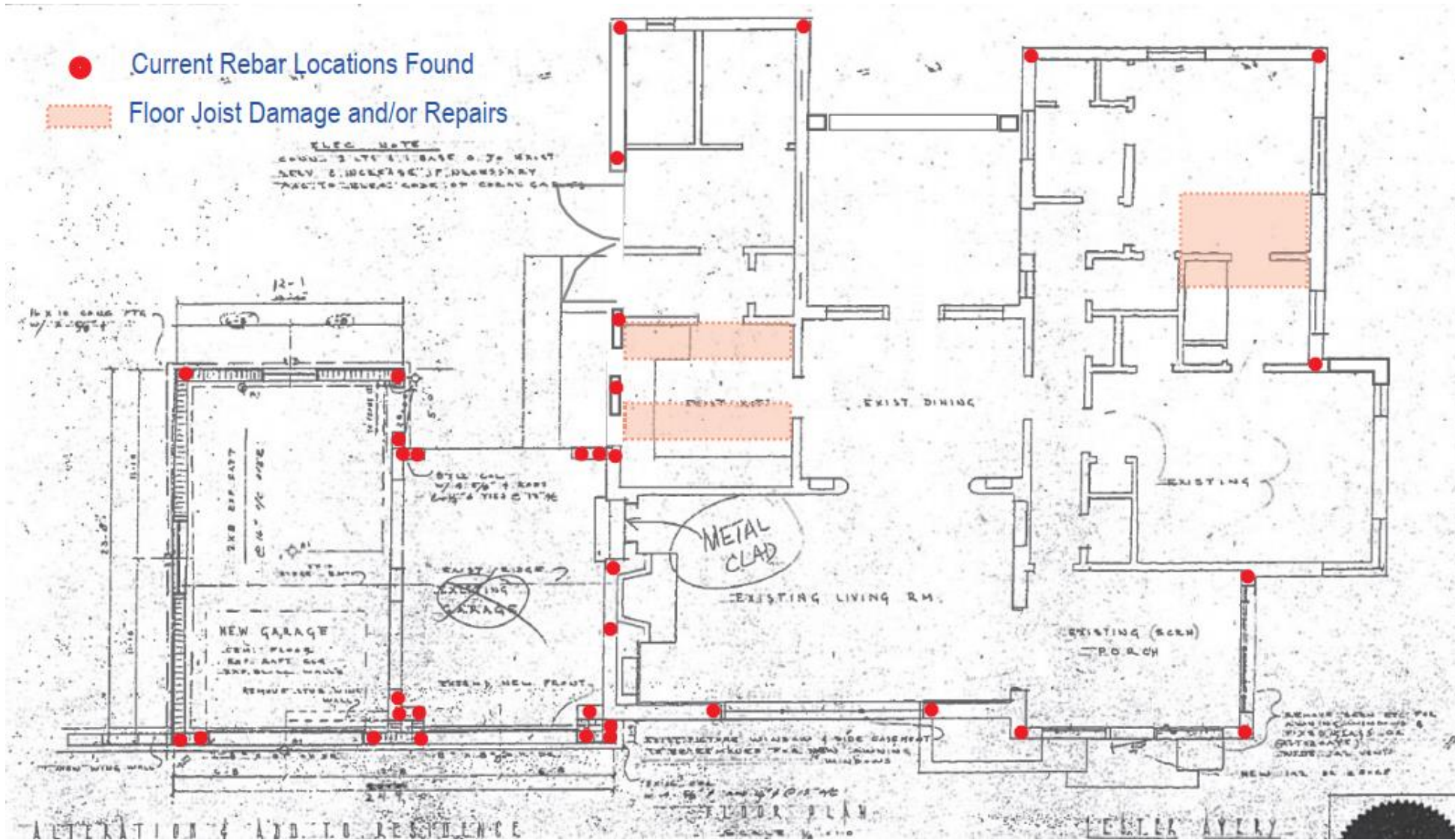
# Alterations Analysis: Openings, Embellishment on All Sides



Openings on Kitchen remodel changed West facade extensively. Openings cannot be reversed without extensive concrete work and cost.

Ornamental stairs added in extension

# Existing Structural Conditions



# Existing Structural Conditions: Flooring, Foundations



# Existing Structural Conditions: Foundations



# Building Reversibility or Restoration



- In reviewing for reversibility or restoration per Department of the Interior Standards, we found it to be **financially infeasible**. Doing so would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and work to actually remove value from the property as it would be eliminating interior space and removing a 2-car garage.
- We also looked into updating the home with modern finishes, redoing the electrical, AC, and plumbing, and adding the appropriate amount of bedrooms via a rear extension and that was estimated to be around **\$1,000,000** and not be able to hold the value in appraisal, as it would still be an older, smaller home.

# Closing Words From The Home Owners

## Shaan and Pooja Patel







# Closing Comments

- 1. Designation Was Not Legally Warranted** – The Property is not Significant and it's lost Integrity
- 2. Rehabilitation, Restoration, or Addition Is Not Viable,** While Maintaining Building's Integrity.
- 3. Significant Loss to the City** – Opportunity for New Families, New Investment, Life

Thank You!

We are available for your questions and we reserve time to rebut comments by staff and the public.

**Following Slides for Reference, if Needed,  
During Discussion with the Board**



Image C

This image shows the wood floor joists with degradation as well as various attempts to "scab" the joists, presumably due to excessive deflection.



Image D

This image shows the wood floor joists with degradation as well as various attempts to "scab" the joists, presumably due to excessive deflection.



Image E

This image shows several "S Tile" roofing tiles either broken or damaged.



Image F

This image shows several "S Tile" roofing tiles either broken or damaged.



Image G

This image shows several "S Tile" roofing tiles either broken or damaged.

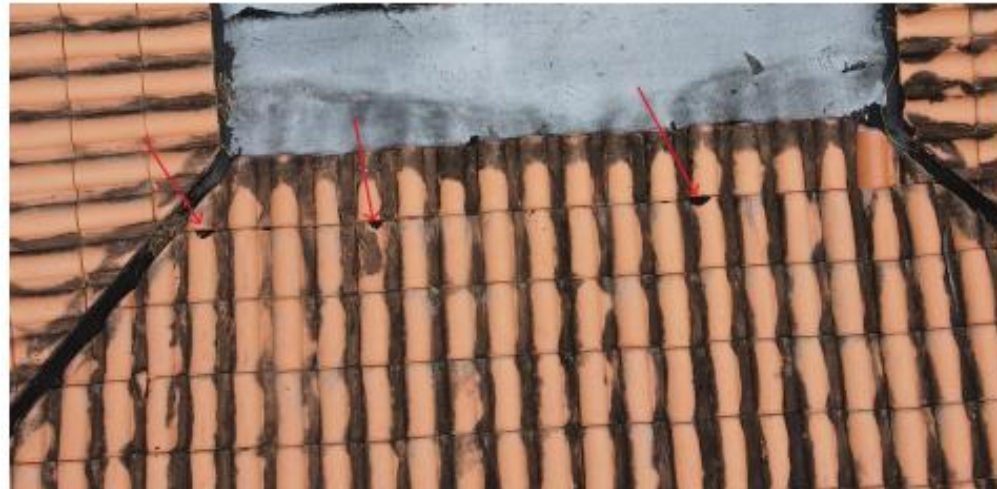


Image H

This image shows several "S Tile" roofing tiles either broken or damaged.



Image 1

This image shows several "S Tile" roofing tiles either broken or damaged.





Image J

This image shows the overall roof shot of the existing roof in need of replacement.

# Alterations Analysis: Interior Garage



Side entry to home visible, originally accessible from exterior.



Original opening seen as rectilinear, not eyebrow as original plans intention.



New column and wall tied into original column with rebar and cannot be separated without extensive cutting, reconstruction, and cost.

Garage protrudes from original facade

# Alterations Analysis: Openings on All Sides



Openings on East wall changed over renovations. Openings cannot be reversed without extensive concrete work and cost.



Openings on rear wall changed extensively. Openings cannot be reversed without extensive concrete work and cost.

# “Minimal Traditional” Design – Coral Gables Precedents



**501 Aragon Avenue, 1938**  
**Architect: Leroy K. Albert**  
**Designated: 2016**



**1700 Cortez Street, 1940**  
**Architect: H. George Fink**  
**Designated: 2008**



**737 Minorca Avenue, 1937**  
**Architect: William Merriam**  
**Designated: 2021**

# “Minimal Traditional” Design – County Examples



North Shore Crest Historic District



Biscayne Park



North Miami



North Shore Crest Historic District



North Shore Crest Historic District



North Miami

# 737 Minorca Avenue - LHD 2021-12



**737 Minorca Avenue, 1937**  
**Architect: William Merriam**  
**Designated: 2021**

# 737 Minorca Avenue – Excerpts from Staff Report for LHD 2021-12 (Page 15)

## Additions / Alterations

From a comparison of historic photographs and the architectural plans with the extant home, as well as an examination of building permits and records it is determined that the property at 737 Minorca Avenue has retained its historic integrity for over eight decades. The following discusses notable alterations or work undertaken on the property.

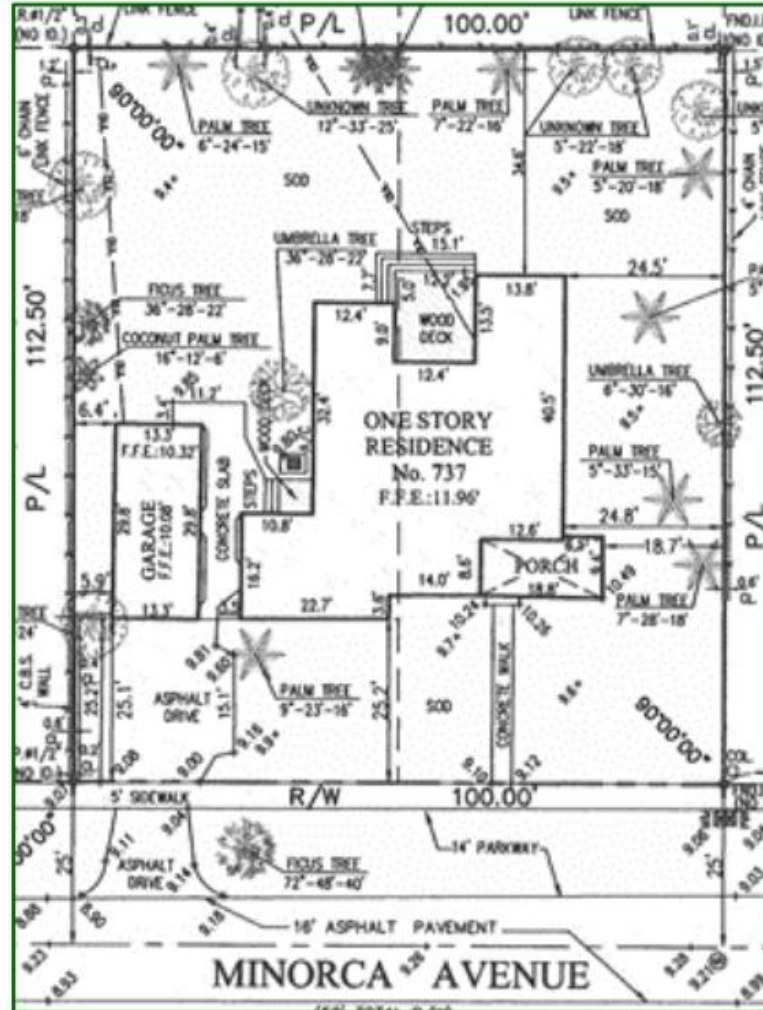
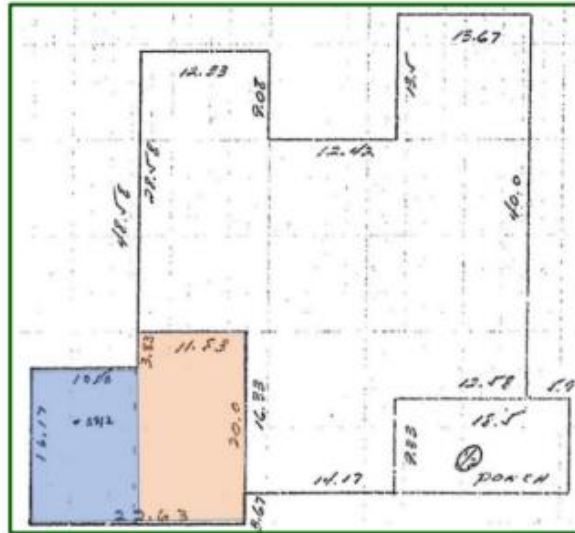
# 737 Minorca Avenue – Excerpts from Staff Report for LHD 2021-12 (Page 15)

Record books document the original permit for the home was filed in March 1937 (Permit #5377) by architect, William Merriam for Captain Christopher Story. This permit has not been located to date. As discussed above, Story also contemporaneously built the adjacent home at 731 Minorca Avenue. Both homes had the same floor plans but with different exterior styling. (Figures 6) Permit #5383 for 731 Minorca Avenue has been located and it appears that Merriam used the drawings

In January 1939 Captain Story added a maid's room west of the original garage (Permit #5812). The addition is denoted in blue in Figures 12. The c.1940 photo in Figures 8 shows it just after completion. In 1957 a detached garage was built immediately west of the home by architect Tyrus Tripp (Permit #14914) (Figures 11 & 12) These permits have not been located to date.



# 737 Minorca Avenue – Excerpts from Staff Report for LHD 2021-12 (Page 15)



**Figures 12: 737 Minorca Avenue**  
**c.1960 Tax Card [left]**  
**blue: 1939 Maid's Room Addition**  
**orange: Original Garage**  
**Property Survey, 2021 [right]**  
*Courtesy of Form Tech Land Surveying, Inc.*

# 1700 Cortez Street – LHD 2007-14



**1700 Cortez Street, 1940**  
**Architect: H. George Fink**  
**Designated: 2008**

# 1700 Cortez Street – LHD 2007-14

## ADDITIONS / ALTERATIONS

There have been few substantive changes to the structure at 1700 Cortez Street over the past 67 years other than what would be considered routine maintenance (painting, re-roofing, roof repairs, etc.). At some point, air-conditioning wall units and metal awning windows were added.

In 1951, the addition of a second garage with a study and bathroom was made to the structure, abutting the western wall of the existing garage.

In 1990, a request for a building site separation was reviewed by the Planning and Zoning Board. The Board passed a motion stating that “Application No. 499-P requesting that Lots 9 and 10 shall be considered two building sites, one consisting of Lot 9 and one consisting of Lot 10 be denied.” The matter was scheduled for consideration during the regular City Commission meeting of July 17, 1990. On July 13, 1990, a letter was received by the City Manager’s office withdrawing the request for a building site separation.

# 501 Aragon Avenue – LHD 2016-018



**501 Aragon Avenue, 1938**  
**Architect: Leroy K. Albert**  
**Designated: 2016**

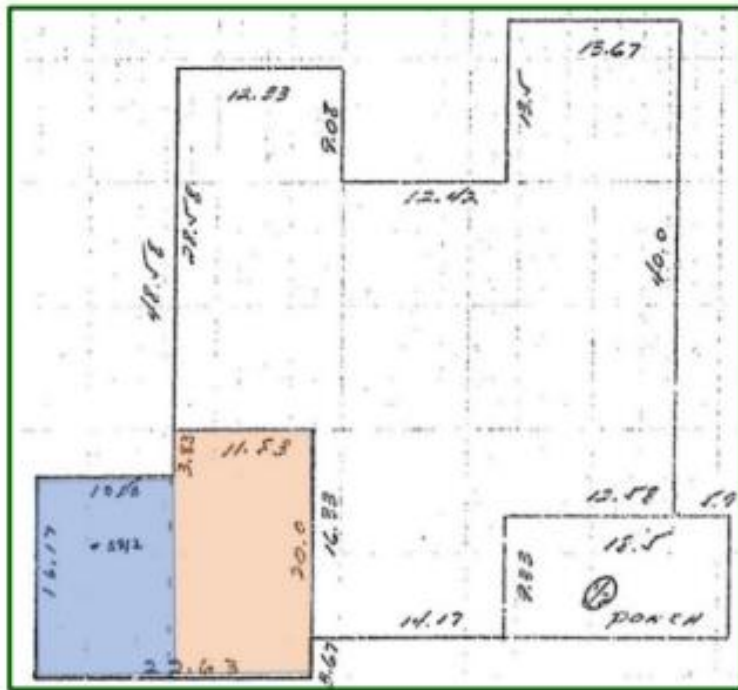
# 501 Aragon Avenue – Excerpt from Staff Report for LHD 2016-18 (Page 12)

## Additions / Alterations

Comparison of permit drawings and historic photographs with the extant home demonstrates the high degree of integrity this home as retained over the years. No structural additions have been made to the residence and alterations have been minimal as well. The alterations primarily include the enclosure of the carport and rear screened porch, the wrought iron installation in 1988, the removal of the wood members at the front entry porch, and the construction of the shed roofed enclosure to the rear. Other minor alterations include reroofing, painting, sewer connection, and installation of metal awnings.

# How does the Subject Property Compare?

## 737 Minorca's Renovations



**Figures 12: 737 Minorca Avenue**

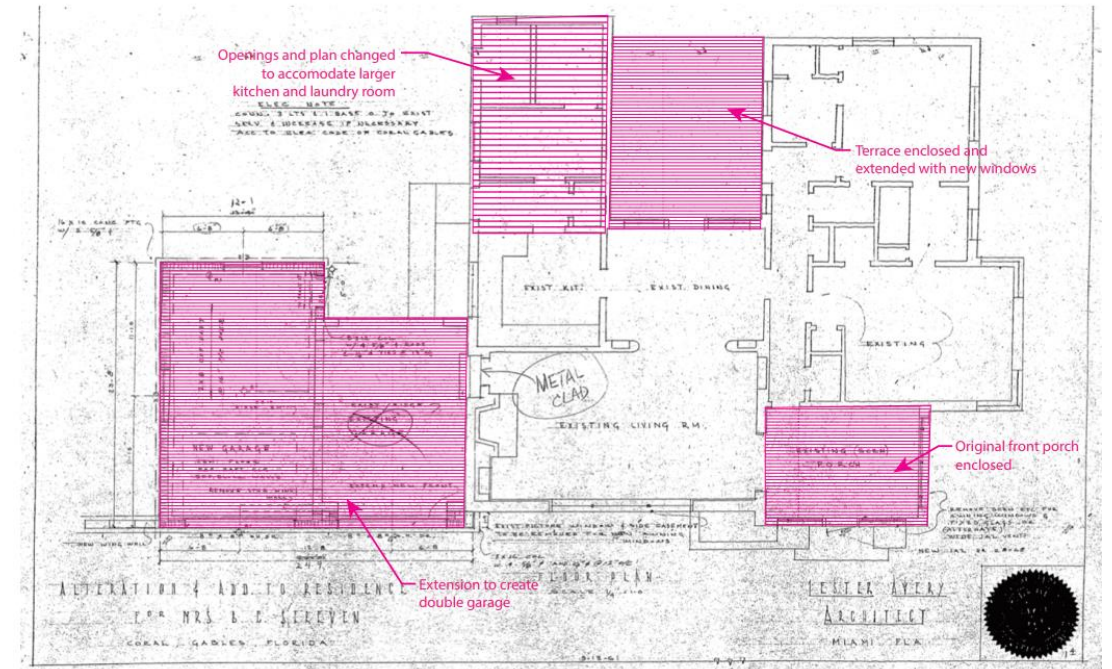
**c.1960 Tax Card [left]  
blue: 1939 Maid's Room Addition  
orange: Original Garage**

**Property Survey, 2021 [right]**

*Courtesy of Form Tech Land Surveying, Inc.*

## 517 Aragon's 1961 Renovation Alone

1961 Renovation Annotated





# As Our Architect Takes, Let's Review Code Once More So It's Fresh On Your Minds

1. Possess **INTEGRITY**– It hasn't lost its original style.  
[This building has had 3 redesigns in 3 eras--the 30s, 60s, & 90s. Where is the integrity?]
2. Be **SIGNIFICANT** – It significantly add to all the other great
3. **EXEMPLIFY** a style – It is a prime example of a trend  
[After multiple renovations, does this building exemplify a style that prioritized simplicity?]
4. **PORTRAY** an era of history – It brings us back to that particular era  
[Does this building fit in the Great Depression? The 60s? The 90s?]
5. **EMBODY** distinguishing characteristics – Capture what makes a style special  
[Does a building with multiple “upgrades” embody a “minimal” style?]



# The City Code's Minimum Legal Requirements (Section 8-103)

Districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects of national, state and local importance are of historic significance if they possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, or association.

**In order to qualify for designation** as a local historic landmark or local historic landmark district, individual properties **must have significant** character, interest or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural heritage of the City, state or nation.

*For a multiple property nomination, eligibility will be based on the establishment of historic contexts, of themes which describe the historical relationship of the properties.*

The eligibility of any potential local historic landmark or local historic landmark district **shall be based on meeting one (1) or more of the following criteria:** ...





# Legal Criteria: Historic Preservation Staff Recommends Designation for Three Reasons

1. **Exemplifies** the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community (Code Section 8-103(A)(4))
2. **Portrays** the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more **distinctive architectural styles** (Code Section 8-103(B)(1))
3. **Embodies** those distinguishing characteristic of an **architectural style**, or period, or method of construction (Code Section 8-103(B)(2))

*See Staff Report pp. 2, 19*