



The City of Seattle

Landmarks Preservation Board

Mailing Address: PO Box 94649 Seattle WA 98124-4649
Street Address: 700 5th Ave Suite 1700

REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 14/11

Name and Address of Property: **Rohrer House**
122 37th Avenue East

Legal Description:

Lot 5 in Block 10, Wadell's Madrona Park Addition to the City of Seattle, according to the plat thereof recorded in Volume 11 of plats, Page 2, in King County, Washington.

At the public meeting held on January 5, 2011, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Rohrer House at 122 37th Avenue East as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25.12.350:

- B. *It is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the history of the City, state or nation;*
- D. *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, period, or of a method of construction; and*
- E. *It is an outstanding work of a designer or builder.*

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Location and Surroundings

The Rohrer property is located at 122 37th Avenue E., on the east side of the street. The property is located in the Denny-Blaine neighborhood in east central Seattle, just two blocks north of E. Howell Street, generally considered the boundary with the Madrona neighborhood. E. Florence Court, which runs east-west, intersects 37th Avenue E. in a T-intersection opposite the Rohrer property.

The Denny-Blaine neighborhood is bounded on the east by Lake Washington, on the south by E. Howell Street, on the west by 34th Avenue, and on the north by Lake Washington Boulevard E., Hillside Drive E., and E. Prospect Street. Although much of the neighborhood slopes east toward Lake Washington or northeast toward Lakeview Park, in the immediate vicinity of 122 37th Avenue E.. the terrain is relatively flat and 37th Avenue E. is level from

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E. Denny Way (one block south of the Rohrer property) to E. John Street (one block north of the property).

Lots on the streets in the east and northeast parts of Denny-Blaine are sometimes irregular responding to the slopes, but along 37th Avenue the lots are more often rectangular (or occasionally have one angled side to conform to the street pattern). The residential fabric is consistently built up with houses regularly spaced as was common in the early decades of the twentieth century. Streets have curbs and sidewalks making a neighborhood that can be characterized as "pedestrian friendly." Vegetation is generally mature, reflecting the long-term stability of the area.

Because the area was primarily built up in the years between 1900 and 1920, there are only a few homes reflecting later periods; most of these can be characterized as in-fill and most generally fit into the neighborhood pattern.

Rohrer House Exterior and Site

The Rohrer property at 122 37th Avenue E is a rectangular lot that measures 68 feet north to south and 112 feet west to east. The west property line is the east side of 37th Avenue E. The Rohrer house lot is essentially level, but its elevation is roughly 10 feet above 37th Avenue E. On the west end of the lot, adjacent to the sidewalk along 37th Avenue E., the property rises in a slope to the elevation of the yard 10 feet above the street.

The Rohrer house is a roughly L-shaped building that responds directly to the form of the rectangular lot. The living areas of the house are all located one level above the street and open to the private yard that faces to the south and west. The one-car garage (actually a carport since it is open and has never been enclosed) is located at sidewalk level under the living room. The basement is at this same level under the rest of the house.

A well-designed spatial sequence leads from the street level and sidewalk up a series of steps, along the solid north wall, to the front entrance on the north side of living-dining rooms. Only after passing through the front door, does a visitor discover that the entire south wall of the living and dining rooms is glazed, and that the interior space extends through the glazed wall out to the private terrace and garden. This terrace, lawn and garden clearly read as a seamless extension of the interior space of the living and dining rooms. The west end of the living room, above the carport entrance below, is closed, so the spatial integration of the interior and exterior living areas is completely invisible from the street.

The patio extending from the living and dining rooms is adjoined by an area of lawn. The yard is enclosed along its perimeter with plants along the south and west creating the sense of an "outdoor room." Many of the plants are 50 to 60 years old, so are well-established.

East of the house is a second garden area. This was used for many years as a vegetable garden. A "utility yard" area is found in the northeast corner of the property accessible from the kitchen.

The roof has a very shallow slope over the living room but is otherwise relatively flat. In an interview in September 1999, John Rohrer recalled that this was one of the earliest flat-roofed houses in Seattle approved for an FHA mortgage.

The house was designed to respond to the site, adjoining the patio and framing the yard on two sides. The south wall of the living and dining rooms is entirely glazed creating the feeling of the interior space extending to the outdoors.

The primary cladding material of the house is cedar in a vertical orientation. The cedar strips measure 3¼" wide. The flat face of each piece of cedar is 2¾" with ¼" bevel to each side -- two bevels together create the ½" wide V-groove at the joint between the cedar strips. On the exterior the vertical cedar is painted light gray. Matching cedar, with a clear finish, is also used on the soffit of the roof overhang above the glass wall along the south side of the living and dining areas. The cedar extends into the interior to form a portion of the ceiling of the living and dining rooms. Cedar is also used on the walls of these interior spaces, adding to the sense of a seamless inside-outside transition.

The cladding of the north wall of the living area, adjacent to the front steps (and corresponding to the fireplace wall on the interior), is vertically striated red brick laid up in running bond. According to the Rohrer family, this brick was recovered by John Rohrer from a demolished building. The individual units measure 4½" tall and 7½" wide; with ½" thick joints of gray mortar, the nominal dimensions of the brick are 5" x 8". Matching brick clads the north and south walls of the carport so that the interior of the carport appears as an extension of the exterior. Matching brick material is also used for the horizontal surface of the front porch and for the front steps.

The windows are steel. The windows of the bedrooms, kitchen and shared bathroom are all set in the cedar-clad exterior walls and are surrounded by a 1" thick band of cedar trim set flush with the wall surface. This trim is painted off-white. Windows of the bedrooms and kitchens are arranged in pairs grouped as horizontal bands of four windows. There are two horizontal bands of bedroom windows on the east wall of the bedroom wing and another two horizontal bands on the west wall of the bedroom wing. These bands have a height of 49" and a width of 133". The window pairs are each 66" wide; there is 1" steel support between each window pair. Each individual window is 33" wide with a 33" fixed upper pane and a 16" lower pane; half of the lower panes are removable from the inside and have screens on the outside. The horizontal band of four windows in the north wall of the kitchen is 133" wide and divided similarly to the bedroom windows, but the kitchen windows are only 42" tall, with a fixed upper pane 26" tall and a 16" lower pane; two of these lower panes are removable from the inside and have screens on the outside. The window in the south wall of the shared bathroom is 49' tall and 48" wide; the glass is translucent ribbed glass. The fixed upper pane is 33" tall; the removable lower pane is 16" tall and has a screen on the exterior.

The south wall of the living and dining areas is a glazed window-wall. The window-wall extends 94" (7'-10") from floor to ceiling and has a length of 28'-0". It is divided into seven equal panels by six steel pipe column supports 48" (4'-0") on center. Six of the panels are glazed; the fifth panel from the west is a door. Each of the six panels has a steel framed

window 47" wide, with an upper fixed panel 71" tall, and a lower pane 22" tall. The lower panes in the first, third and seventh panels (counting from the west) are removable from the inside and have screens on the outside. The fifth panel is a steel-framed door that swings outward. The door is 44" wide; the upper portion of the door is glazed; the lower 22" is a steel panel.

Other than the steel-framed glass door in the living room, the doors are solid core wood. The front door to the house measures 83" tall and 36" wide. The kitchen door is a solid core wood door measuring 80" tall and 32" wide; it has a fixed glass window measuring 41" tall and 23" wide. This door also has an outward-swinging aluminum screen door.

Alterations since 1949

The house remained unchanged until 1969-70 when the Rohrs added a bathroom to the master bedroom. The permit was issued 30 June 1969, and the project was complete by February 1970. The 1969-70 master bathroom addition was constructed on the south wall of the master bedroom slightly lengthening the east leg of the L-plan. The master bathroom addition is a trapezoid in plan measuring 8'-0" north to south and 15'-7½" east to west (at its greatest dimension). The exterior is clad in vertical cedar strips exactly matching the original house in size and color. The master bathroom addition has a narrow window in its south wall and a matching window in its short north wall. These windows are operable jalousie windows 49" tall and 16" wide. The master bathroom addition has a solid core wood door in the east-facing wall. This door measures 78" tall and 32" wide; it is topped by a horizontal transom with an operable jalousie window. This door also has an outward-swinging wood-frame screen door.

Over the years the Rohrer family developed the yard with plantings, largely with native plants.

Rohrer House Interior

The original area of the living floor was about 1250 square feet; when the master bathroom was added in 1969-70, the area increased to 1600 square feet. Located on this primary level are the entry, living and dining rooms, kitchen, two bedrooms with a shared bathroom, bedroom hall, and a master bedroom with the master bath. The basement level below includes the carport and basement.

The house was designed to respond to the site, adjoining the patio and framing the yard on two sides. The south wall of the living and dining rooms is entirely glazed creating the feeling of the interior space extending to the outdoors.

The design of the roof overhang and the glazed south wall of the living-dining areas appears to be an early example of passive solar design. At the summer solstice, no sunlight reaches the interior, but from October through March sunlight reaches deep into the interior heating the concrete floor and warming up the space.

The main floor is a dark brown stained concrete (with radiant hot-water in-floor heating). Interior walls in the living and dining rooms are of cedar strips, as is a portion of the ceiling. These are identical in width and profile to the exterior cedar, but on the interior have been left in their natural state. The fireplace is red brick matching that found on the north exterior wall and front steps. The interior walls of the kitchen and the bedrooms are stained plywood. The ceilings are painted plaster. The bathrooms have plaster walls and ceilings.

The west end of the lower level is the garage/carport. To the east of the garage/carport is the basement, a slightly irregular room that extends under the kitchen, bedrooms. A stair leads from the bedroom hall to the basement level. The walls of the basement are concrete block ("cinder block") construction. The basement is a large space with a separate enclosed boiler/utility room.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

John and Ruth Rohrer

John A. Rohrer (1914-2004) was born in Seattle, grew up in the Queen Anne neighborhood, and graduated from Queen Anne High School at the age of fifteen. His father was a carpenter who did some small residential contracting, so John Rohrer grew up familiar with building sites. He also showed an early talent for drawing. After two years working as a page at the Central Library, John Rohrer entered the University of Washington architecture program in 1932, in the same class as Paul Kirk, Bliss Moore, and George ("Pete") Wimberly (and just two years behind Victor Steinbrueck). As a student Rohrer excelled as a designer and delineator. Rohrer completed the program in 1937, graduating with a Bachelor of Architecture degree.

In 1938 John Rohrer married Ruth Campbell Williams (b. 1918), who had also grown up in Seattle and entered the architecture program in 1936. Paul Kirk was Rohrer's best man at the wedding.

After graduating, John Rohrer quickly became recognized for his skills as a delineator, and he would later recall that over the next several years he worked for eighteen different architects doing design and illustration--mostly renderings. After apprenticing with architect Fred Lockman and then with architect B. Marcus Priteca, Rohrer worked during the war years for the Austin Company as a drafter on defense projects. Rohrer was slated to go into military service in late 1945 or early 1946; with the unexpected end to war in August 1945 and demobilization thereafter, he remained in Seattle.

In 1946, Rohrer joined with Paul Kirk, James Chiarelli and others in renting space at Second and Cherry. Although these architects collaborated on larger commissions, they also took on individual projects, so the John and Ruth Rohrer house was solely John Rohrer's design.

In spring quarter 1948, with the encouragement of Victor Steinbrueck, John Rohrer joined the UW Department of Architecture faculty as a part-time instructor beginning a 36-year teaching career. Rohrer was a member of the younger generation who joined the architecture

faculty as the school expanded in response to the influx of returning G.I.s and the democratization of education in the postwar years. With his expertise in delineation, Rohrer was particularly interested in design communication. Together with other young faculty members, including George Tsutakawa, Wendell Lovett, Robert Hugus, Ron Wilson, and William Wherette, he participated in creating the first UW course in "Basic Design" in Fall 1948. The UW class in "Basic Design" was modeled after a similar course originally taught in the 1920s and 1930s at the leading German architecture school, the Bauhaus, and subsequently brought to the United States and implemented at Harvard's Graduate School of Design by Walter Gropius. The class taught basic ideas of abstract two-dimensional and three-dimensional composition that were considered the fundamental beginning to an education in modern architecture and design.

From 1948 to 1984 John Rohrer taught drawing, illustration, and architectural design in the Department of Architecture. In 2004, after Rohrer's death, former Architecture Department Chair Dan Streissguth recalled, "He influenced the student life and ultimately the professional life of hundreds of students over the years."

John Rohrer was among the young architects who were active in the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (predecessor to AIA Seattle) in the postwar era. In 1950, he was a member of the chapter committee that re-established the Honors Awards program, along with Fred Bassetti and Victor Steinbrueck.

As was typical for UW faculty in the period, Rohrer continued his independent practice of architecture, providing design and illustration services on a freelance basis. Although he was often initially hired for his rendering and delineation skills, he frequently offered design suggestions that more often than not were accepted by the architects for whom he worked.

Over the years he occasionally took on architectural projects under his own name. Unfortunately, no list of his projects has been discovered. A very few early Rohrer projects have been identified: renovation and addition to the Pius X Mission School, Skagway, Alaska, dating from 1946 (in association with Roger Gotteland; possibly unbuilt); the Warehouse and Office Building for R. M. Buntin at 305 9th Avenue N. dating from 1948-49 (and a north addition 309 9th Avenue N dating from 1952); the Henry Goodman residence at 7126 Empire Way (now Martin Luther King Way), dating from 1950 (demolished). None of these projects has the remarkable character of the house John Rohrer designed for his own family, although the Buntin warehouse is an interesting early example of a light industrial building with a modern curtainwall.

Throughout his career, Rohrer was very interested in anthropology and Northwest Native American traditions. Other than his family's house, John Rohrer always believed his most important commission was the longhouse at Tillicum Village on Blake Island, that he designed in 1961 (in association with Sullam & Aehle).

From 1955 to about 1961, John Rohrer was designer at NBBJ. After that he continued to practice as a sole proprietor with his own office. He primarily worked as a delineator and

design consultant. Rohrer maintained an office, accepting architectural illustration commissions, until the late 1990s.

John Rohrer died of cancer in 2004. Ruth Rohrer continued to live in the house until late 2009.

Design and Construction of the Rohrer House, 1948-49

During the War, the Rohrer family had lived in Holly Park defense housing project. By fall 1948, however, John Rohrer had the promise of a stable income from his UW position. He and Ruth had two children, Judith Campbell Rohrer (b. 1943) and John Scott Rohrer (b. 1946). Like many young families in the years after the war, the Rohrers wished to have a new home.

In January 1948, John and Ruth Rohrer purchased a vacant lot at 122 37th Avenue N. (now E.) in an older, ethnically mixed area, on the edge of Seattle's Denny-Blaine neighborhood. Ruth Rohrer recalls that it was a "tax lot," a lot on which taxes had not been paid and ownership had reverted to the city. This lot had likely not been developed because the land sloped up from the sidewalk; the buildable area was a full story above the street.

John Rohrer's construction drawings are dated April 1948, with revisions dated September 1948. The building permit was issued on 17 August 1948. Construction, by contractor Hull and Anderson, took place in 1948-49. The Rohrer family moved into the house in September 1949, before the fall school term began.

Restoration after May 2010 Fire

On May 21, 2010, at 5:00 a.m., a portion of the west end of the house was damaged by fire. At the time the house was vacant and was being prepared to be offered for sale. The floor refinisher left some oil-soaked rags in the carport and the fire began by spontaneous combustion. Fortunately damage was primarily cosmetic and was limited to the western two feet of the roof, the exterior of the outside west wall, the ceiling of the carport, and a portion of the plaster ceiling of the living room.

The damaged areas were accurately restored to match the original between June and September 2010, so today no evidence of the fire remains. The house remains intact--unchanged since 1950, other than the 1969-70 master bathroom addition.

Ownership of the Rohrer House

The Rohrer house was owned by the Rohrer family until December 2010. In December of 2010, Ruth Rohrer sold the house to Patricia Scarce and John Goodmanson.

Denny Blaine Neighborhood

The Denny-Blaine Lake Park subdivision was platted with streets following the contours of the land as it slopes down to Lake Washington. The result is an area of winding streets, occasional cul- de-sacs, and a few hillside parks mixed with the houses. At the top of the bluff, where the land was more level, the street pattern is more regular.

A notable feature of the Denny-Blaine subdivision are the parks that spread out along the hillside. Whitman Place, also known as Denny- Blaine Place, is located at the shore of Lake Washington. Directly uphill is Viretta Park, named for Viretta Denny. Next is Stevens Park, or Triangle, named for Isaac Stevens, Washington Territory's first governor. Also included is Minerva Fountain and Park, now a Metro stop. Finally, Children's Park, dedicated by Charles and Viretta Denny in 1901, is located at the east end of Howell Street on the lakeshore.

Many residences were constructed in the Denny-Blaine and Madrona neighborhoods in the years between 1900 and 1930. The most common residential style in the area can be characterized as Craftsman, reflecting the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Storey houses (Seattle Landmarks), dating from 1903-5, are located on Dorffel Drive. Elbert Blaine's wife Minerva (Stone) Blaine sold the Epiphany Episcopal Church its site on Denny Way in 1909. The first church building, now the chapel, is also by Ellsworth Storey. Residential buildings constructed after World War I reflect the historical eclecticism of the 1920s.

The Denny-Blaine neighborhood was largely built out before the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s. As a result, the residential fabric was fairly consistently built up. Only a few vacant lots remained, and some of these saw construction in the late 1930s. Paul Thiry's own house, a notable work of International Style modernism, dating from 1936, is located in Denny-Blaine. However, a small number of lots, such as the one on which the Rohrs built, remained vacant until after World War II.

Modern Architecture

Modern architecture traces its roots to progressive tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including those in the United States. What we now call the Modern Movement coalesced in Europe in the mid to late 1920s. Notable works of this period, such as the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany, designed by Walter Gropius, would have worldwide influence in the ensuing years.

By the 1930s, the Modern Movement began to spread across the globe, often generating new regional variants. In the Western hemisphere, the earliest work showing the influence of Modernism was found in Mexico and Latin America, along with a few residential buildings in Los Angeles. By the early 1930s, works showing the influence of European Modernism appeared on the East Coast and, simultaneously, a regional version of modernism emerged on the West Coast, initially in California and subsequently in Oregon and Washington.

In the post-World War II period, the primary approach to Modernism in the United States was strongly influenced by examples from Europe and by new materials and technologies. This technologically-influenced international approach to modern architecture has been called the "International Style." Paul Thiry is the architect most often associated with the emergence of International Style modernism in the Puget Sound region. In Seattle, this approach was most evident in works such as the Museum of History and Industry (Paul Thiry, 1947) and in office buildings such as the Norton Building (Skidmore, Owings and Merrill with Bindon & Wright, 1956-59). Many of the buildings of Century 21, the 1962 Seattle World's Fair (Paul Thiry, supervising architect), also reflected the technological emphasis of the period.

Simultaneously, the residential and small institutional designs of the postwar period in the Pacific Northwest show the emergence of regionalism within modernism. In regionalist works Seattle's architects sought to create architecture responsive to the region's climate, to available materials, and to the specifics of individual sites. The postwar period was an era of low energy prices, so houses could be developed with open plans, natural materials, large areas of glass, and a visual flow of space from inside to outside.

Development of Modern Architecture in Seattle and Environs

The earliest houses in Seattle with a modern vocabulary date from the mid 1930s. Typical is the Paul Thiry house dating from 1936 which is an asymmetrical white box that reflects the influence of the International Style, the approach to modern architecture that came to the United States from Europe. Also dating from 1936 is the Ambrose and Viola Patterson residence in Laurelhurst, designed by Jack Sproule and reflecting Ambrose Patterson's awareness of modern architecture in Europe from his years studying art in Paris.

The earliest attempts to create a modern architecture that was regionally responsive in Seattle and the Puget Sound region date from the end of the 1930s. Houses by Lionel Pries and by others suggest the influence of modern regionalist approaches in northern California and in Oregon (in California in works by William Wurster and in Oregon in works by John Yeon and Pietro Belluschi). However, regionalist modernism in Seattle did not become a dominant tendency until after World War II.

Characteristics common to residential works of Northwest regionalist modern architecture in the years from 1946 to the early 1970s include use of natural materials (primarily wood), open or flowing plans (at least in the "public" spaces within the house), large areas of glass, planning in response to the particular site, indoor-outdoor connections and very often orientation to a view. However, a close review of the chronological development of regionalist modern architecture in the Seattle area suggests works after about 1951 were slightly different from that that came before. After 1951, wood post-and-beam construction became increasingly ubiquitous, very often with the structure exposed as a feature of the architectural interior.

Before 1951 works that can be characterized as regional modern architecture have open plans that are responsive to sites and views, and use natural materials, usually wood, but structure

is seldom if ever expressed. There are comparatively fewer works in these five years (1946-51) that have all these modern regionalist features. Architects in this period were still finding their way to a fully realized architecture that was modern but also regional. Thus, the Rohrer house, which is a well developed example of regional modernism, is notable for its completion at such an early date: 1948-49.

John Rohrer's Approach to Architecture

John Rohrer was a 1937 B.Arch. graduate of the University of Washington Department of Architecture. He was a member of the generation of graduates whose training was framed by a pedagogy based in part on the methods of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, but increasingly influenced by the new directions of modern architecture. Other architects who were educated at the UW in the 1930s included Minoru Yamasaki, James Chiarelli, Paul Kirk, A. Quincy Jones, Roland Terry, and Victor Steinbrueck.

In Rohrer's years at UW, the five core faculty in the Department of Architecture were Harlan Thomas, Arthur Herrman, Lancelot Gowen, Lionel H. Pries, and Henry Olschewsky. Lionel Pries was the inspirational leader of the program, and he most shaped the thinking of Rohrer and his classmates. In *A Guide to Architecture in Washington State* (1980), Sally Woodbridge and Roger Montgomery described Pries's influence on his students as "profound" (p. 21).

In the teaching of Pries and the other faculty, John Rohrer and his fellow students encountered an emphasis on design solutions and design vocabularies appropriate to the problem, responsive to site, and incorporating the landscape. Shaped by the influence of Pries and the other faculty, those who graduated from the UW in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s would create a regional version of Modern architecture that was romantic as well as rational, and that specifically responded to the local and the particular. These were characteristics of the regionalism that emerged in full force in the 1950s in the Northwest. The Rohrer house, designed in 1948 and completed in 1949, was an early example of the Northwest regionalism that would fully emerge in the mid-1950s.

The Rohrer House and Modern Architecture in the Pacific Northwest

An Early Work of Regional Modernism: The John and Ruth Rohrer house is a notable early example of the emerging Northwest regional modern architecture of the post-World War II era (work that some would later characterize as "Northwest Style").

As late as 1953, there was a debate about whether a Northwest regional variant of modernism was developing. When the American Institute of Architects held its national convention in Seattle in 1953, the April issue of *Architectural Record* published essays in response to the question, "Have We an Indigenous Northwest Architecture?" Paul Thiry spoke in favor of the existence of a Northwest architecture, but Victor Steinbrueck was skeptical. Within a few years, Steinbrueck would no doubt have agreed that a regional variant of modernism had emerged, but his skepticism in 1953 shows that the Rohrer house, dating from 1948-49, was a notable forward-looking project. Steinbrueck certainly thought the Rohrer house was

exceptional--he included it as one of the buildings in his *A Guide to Seattle Architecture, 1850-1953*, the first guidebook to the architecture of Seattle (as published, this guide included 102 buildings).

Design in Relation to Site: The integration of inside and outside became a familiar feature of Northwest regional Modernism in the 1950s and 1960s. The Rohrer house provides an exceptional early example of integration of inside and outside with its seamless connection between the living and dining rooms and the patio and yard. This approach likely reflects ideas conveyed by Lionel Pries in his teaching in the 1930s. It might also possibly reflect the influence of some of Frank Lloyd Wright's L-shaped Usonian houses of the period, where integration of interior and exterior space was a frequent motif.

The Rohrer house features a well-designed entry sequence leading from the sidewalk and driveway up to the front door on the north side of the house, without offering a hint of the open interior and garden. When a visitor passes through the front door, the visitor suddenly perceives the integrated interior and exterior almost as a kind of "oasis" set apart from the city. This approach to arrival and entry likely reflects Rohrer's awareness of the work of Lionel Pries (and possibly of Wright). Both designed houses in the late 1940s with the front entrance in a relatively opaque exterior wall; only on passing through the front entry into the private interior does a visitor realize that the house opens seamlessly to a private garden or private outdoor space. In the Rohrer house John Rohrer shaped these ideas as his own, responding to the specific configuration and topography of the lot on 37th Avenue E to create a unique design.

Materials: The Rohrer house features the use of vertical cedar siding on the exterior and in the interior public areas fostering the sense of a seamless connection of exterior and interior. Cedar and other native woods were readily available in the postwar era and the use of natural materials, especially wood, would become a hallmark of Northwest regional modernism.

John Rohrer's design for his own house anticipated what would become a common feature of the Northwest regional architecture beginning in the 1950s.

Scale: The Rohrer house living floor measured 1250 square feet initially, and with the later addition measures 1600 square feet. Yet the Rohrer house living and dining rooms have a sense of spaciousness as they connect to the patio and yard. The house is a reminder that living a full life does not require an oversized house. Rather, comfort and graciousness are characteristics that can be imparted through well-designed architecture.

Contemporary Publication of the Rohrer House

A photograph of the bookcases in the Rohrer house appeared in the article, "Bookcases - with or without books," in *Sunset* magazine in October 1950. The first guidebook to Seattle architecture, *A Guide to Seattle Architecture, 1850-1953*, was written by Victor Steinbrueck and published for the national AIA convention held in Seattle in 1953. This guide included only 102 buildings. The Rohrer house was among those included (page 31).

In June 1954, *McCall's* magazine presented the Rohrer house in a two-page essay titled "Built Around a Garden." The writer, Mary Davis Gillies, noted, "The way this Seattle house was placed on its lot provided its owners with a garden that serves as an outdoor living room eight months of the year. It's made to order for today's casual living." By 1954 the features of the Rohrer house had become fairly common in the modern residential architecture of the Northwest. The *McCall's* article made no mention that the Rohrer house was nearly five years old when it appeared in the magazine. The truly prescient character of the design, notable in 1948-49, was never really publicized.

Summary of Significance

The John and Ruth Rohrer house is a notable and early example of the regional version of Modern architecture that emerged in the Pacific Northwest in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It is an extraordinarily intact example of a postwar regional modern residential design.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: The Landmark Nomination for the Rohrer House was prepared by Jeffrey Karl Ochsner in October 2010 (on file with the Historic Preservation Office for the City of Seattle). The Designation Report is based on the information provided in the Landmark Nomination.

Original drawings for John and Ruth Rohrer house, 1948 (four sheets; Sheet 3 missing); and addition, 1969 (one sheet); in possession of Ruth Rohrer.

Property card and historic photographs for 122 37th Avenue E, Seattle; at Puget Sound Branch, Washington State Archives.

Architectural photographs in Dearborn-Massar Collection, Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries.

Building permits, City of Seattle, Department of Planning and Development, Microfilm Library.

"Bookcases - with or without books." *Sunset* 105/4 (October 1950): 36-39. (This article includes a photo of the bookcases at the Rohrer house.)

Victor Steinbrueck, *Guide to Architecture in Seattle, 1850-1953* (New York, Reinhold Publishing, 1953), 31.

Mary Davis Gillies, "Built Around a Garden," *McCall's* 81/9 (June 1954): 94-95.

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, "Built around a Garden': The John and Ruth Rohrer Residence, Seattle, 1948-49," *Column 5* (journal of the Department of Architecture, University of Washington) 23 (2009): 58-61.

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The features of the Landmark to be preserved include: The site, the exterior of the building, and the following elements of the interior: the living and dining rooms.

Issued: January 19, 2011

Karen Gordon
City Historic Preservation Officer

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