



**Painter Preservation**  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION & URBAN DESIGN

January 18, 2023

Spokane Historic Landmarks Commission  
c/o Megan Duvall, Historic Preservation Officer  
Spokane City Hall  
808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd  
Spokane, WA 99201

### **Re Meenach-McClure House, Spokane Register of Historic Places Nomination**

Dear Commissioners,

I am fully supportive of the nomination of the Meenach-McClure House to the Spokane Register of Historic Places, as an outstanding example of architect Royal McClure's work and an exemplary example of Contemporary architecture in Spokane. I have a few comments on the nomination, beginning with a note that the modern residence should be nominated under Category C as the work of a master and as possessing high artistic values, in my opinion, rather than embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, as stated in the nomination. Additional comments are as follows.

A Spokane Register nomination stands as the history and documentation for a particular building (or buildings). It is important that it is accurate not only for the history of the building (or district), but also because it is part of the public record that is Spokane's architectural history. Future researchers and historians will make use of the information. The comments below are offered in the spirit of creating and clarifying this record.

The house is designed in the Contemporary style, which is the correct name for the architectural style of this building that dates to its period of construction in the post-World War II era. The term "Mid-Century Modern" is not an architectural style; rather, it is a present-day term that is a short-hand way of referring to modern buildings that may be designed in the Contemporary or other styles of the era. Also, the term "Miesian influences" is not a widely accepted term. In this nomination this term is used to refer to the extensive window wall on the north side of the house. "Miesian" refers to buildings designed or inspired by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who practiced in Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was appointed the head of the Illinois Institute of Architecture in the US in 1938, where he designed much of the campus. His work is most closely identified with institutional and commercial work, but he also designed residences. Character-defining features include cubic building forms with flat roofs, expressed structure in a regular rhythm of bays, and extensive glazing. A residence that could be referred to as "Miesian" would typically display a simple volume with these qualities. A portion of a building with a glazed window wall, which is a relatively common feature in Contemporary residences, although not usually as dramatic as the one seen on this residence, would not necessarily be "Miesian."

Put another way, there is no "Mid-Century Modern era's Contemporary style with Miesian-style influence" (p. 13) because the Contemporary style did not occur in the Mid-Century Modern era. The post-war era might more appropriately be referred to as the modern era of design in the US. This is defined in the quote from the National Trust for Historic Preservation provided in the nomination (p. 16). Further, while modern design gained widespread popularity in the US, and particularly in the PNW, after World War II, the period of significance is not 1945 to 1985 (p. 15). Modern residences were being designed on the west coast in the late 1920s. The emergence of modern design in western Washington is often attributed

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to the design of architect Paul Thiry's own house, constructed in 1936. Early modern design in Spokane is seen in the 1942 residence of J. Emil Anderson, who also designed the 1941 Davenport Parking Garage (no longer extant), which displayed a dominant curtain wall. For further information on the history of modern design in Spokane, see the historic context statement and survey report entitled *Spokane Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Architectural Survey Report* (Painter Preservation with helvetica, 2017).

It is not clear what the "identifying elements of the Contemporary style with Miesian-style influences" (p. 17) refers to. It is not clear whether these characteristics are intended to reflect the subject building or the style in general (which as noted, is "not a thing"). The list of characteristics is also not internally consistent. A much better description of the Meenach-McClure house' characteristics is found in the two paragraphs on p. 18.

In terms of the discussion of the work of Royal McClure, it would be a good idea to include the architects and firms with whom he collaborated for certain projects. Further references to his body of work and to others with whom he worked on specific commissions can be found in *Spokane Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Architectural Survey Report* (Painter Preservation with helvetica, 2017).

Additional minor comments on terminology will be provided to the Historic Preservation Office in a memo.

Diana Painter is the Principal Architectural Historian for Painter Preservation, a historic preservation firm she founded in 2002. Experience in documenting modern resources includes the Spokane Register nomination for Royal McClure's Studio Apartments (2022); the *Spokane Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Modern Context Statement and Inventory* (2017, awarded the Washington State Historic Preservation Officer's Award for Outstanding Achievements in Historic Preservation and the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, Commission Excellence Award in 2018); and the King County Multiple Property Document for mid-century resources (2021). Additional historic context statements and multiple property surveys and inventories for modern resources include projects undertaken for the city of Monterey, the State of Montana, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, the City of Oregon City (awarded a Oregon Heritage Excellence Award in 2012), the city of Tacoma, and the several cities in Nevada, including Las Vegas.

Sincerely,



Diana J. Painter, PhD  
Owner/Principal Architectural Historian