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Narrative Description:

The work of the Seattle architectural firm of Steinhart, Theriault and Anderson, and specifically the design efforts of Robert D. Theriault, can be broadly characterized as a Pacific Rim approach to mid-century modernism. The Normandy Cove Recreation Building, known as the Cove Building, is an excellent example of both his work and this style.

Located on an expansive waterfront site of 17 acres, the building is the only community club within the city limits of Normandy Park and has always been a local landmark and gathering place since its completion in 1959. The site is comprised of the shoreline and estuary, a large open field at the forefront of the building, a meandering Walker Creek directly in front of the entrance porch, a large pond, and numerous walking paths through the woods and along the shore.

The building appears to sit lightly on the property, supported by a combination of wood pilings and a post-and-beam pole structure. The front porch, that extends the full width of the long west-facing façade, appears to float above the landscape due to the cantilever design. The effect is increased by the outward leaning of the railing detail and the exposed ends of the cantilevered beams.

The Pacific Rim influences are both very inclusive and apparent in this building, ranging from Asian influences, to Native American art and architecture of the Northwest Salish tribes, to modernism. The project combines these references in a style undeniably modern but also uniquely Northwest.

From a modernist perspective, the building follows the simple rule of form-follows-function in a very clear way. Under a large, singular, low-sloped gable roof, the building is a simple rectangle of 60 feet by 96 feet. It clusters "service" areas, including entry, kitchen and restrooms at the south end of the building, with the "served" north half of the building reserved for one large gathering space under exposed roof framing that reaches 20 feet at the ridge.

Owing to the magnificent view of the shoreline and Puget Sound, the entire west wall of the main space is a combination of fixed and sliding glass doors. The openness of this west façade helps articulate the post and beam nature of the structure while also allowing a natural flow of people and activities to extend out onto the massive porch when the weather permits.

An unusual metal-clad fireplace centered on the east wall of the main space is the focal point and community hearth. It is angular in both plan and section and has a large open firebox, reminiscent of some of the unusual fireplaces in the Usonian Houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright's influence is

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perhaps also evident in the decorative waterspouts (see detail on sheet A5 of the 1958 construction drawings), which carry rainwater from the roof in a dramatic free fall to the ground.

From records at the time, community member, Ruth Walck, was assigned the task of researching a suitable theme for the planned building. Since there had been much evidence of Indian campsites on the waterfront site of the new building, she felt a theme encompassing Salish culture and the local lore of previous camps would add “interest and atmosphere” to the Cove Building. Mr. Theriault appears to have taken that direction and inspiration to heart.

While Mr. Theriault’s residential work displays a modernist Northwest approach with Japanese architectural influences, this building also references the Native American history of this particular site. It is interesting to note that a house of the same era designed by Paul Thiry, and located just south of this site, also includes a direct reference to Salish art in an otherwise very modernist house.

While virtually all of the firm’s work can be considered modern, many of Mr. Theriault’s houses have a delicate style and details, including roof elements, that are clearly a nod toward the architecture of the far-east. On the Cove Building, however, those details appear in a slightly grander and different way, recalling the decorative art of the Salish tribes.

The almost 30” deep main ridge beam cantilevers beyond the building’s east and west walls and the decorative ends were detailed (see sheet A7 of the 1958 construction drawings) to resemble the head and tail of a salmon. It is said that local residents carved the ridge beam under his direction and the detail in the construction set supports that.

The wildlife metaphors also extend to a very subtle detail on the waterspouts, as they are clearly noted as having an “eye” (see detail 14 on sheet A5). The incorporation of these elements on this particular project is unique in the work of Steinhart, Theriault and Anderson and is evidence of the inclusion of a Salish theme in an otherwise modernist scheme.

There is high grillwork in a louvered chevron shape just under the ridge on the north and south elevations. These can be manually opened to vent the interior space, but also provide decorative details (see sheet A7) to support the design. While similar to some of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, where the chevron design was often used for window fenestration and stained glass, it also has the graphic quality of a Salish basket design.

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The churches, schools, commercial buildings and houses of Steinhart, Theriault and Anderson exhibited a modest and sensitive approach to the advancing modernism of the 1950's and 1960's. In the Cove Building, the spectacular site and Salish influences added interesting layers to the design approach that create a building unique to the portfolio of Robert D. Theriault. The Cove Building is a long-standing centerpiece and gathering space for the community of Normandy Park in the best tradition of the earlier long houses of the Salish tribes.

Robert Dennis Theriault

Robert Dennis Theriault was born May 28, 1922 in Tacoma Washington. He graduated from Lincoln High School in Tacoma, where he was a high diver and tennis player. He attended the College of Puget Sound from 1938 to 1939 and dreamed of a career as a forest ranger, but was diverted by World War II.

He entered the Army Air Force December 24, 1943. While training as a B-29 Navigator/Bombardier, he met the love of his life, Lt. Jane Wagner, an army flight nurse from Wisconsin. They met at an Army dance in Hays, Kansas. "The moment I saw that girl, I knew I would marry her," he often said. They were soon married on base before Bob finished training in Hondo, Texas, and was then sent overseas to Saipan Island in the Marianas.

Lt. Theriault flew 35 missions as a Navigator/Bombardier in the Pacific during World War II, sometimes flying 18 hour missions over open ocean. His airplane, a Boeing B29 in the 500th Bombardment Group, had the call number of Z Square 29. It was named Rabbit Punch by the crew. Robert designed the logo that was painted on the nose of the huge four-engine bomber. Lt. Theriault was the recipient of both the Distinguished Flying and Air Medals with five Oak Leaf Clusters. He flew on the historic March 9/10 Tokyo mission and many other dangerous flights from Saipan to Japan and back, an almost 3000 mile round trip. He would often write his wife on the long trip back from Japan, and once told his son that he wrote on the way back because he thought it might be a waste of time to write on the way to the target. Rabbit Punch was rammed over Tokyo on a photographic reconnaissance mission by Japanese Ki-45 Dragon Slayer, a two engine high altitude fighter. The ramming took out both engines on the same side of the plane. Rabbit Punch was one of the few B-29s with both engines out on the same side that was able to get back to base.

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In December of 1945, Theriault returned from the war to his family in Seattle. He attended the University of Washington on the G.I. Bill. He worked as an architectural draftsman and his wife worked as a nurse at Harbor View Hospital during school.

He graduated in 1950 with a degree in Architecture and was awarded the AIA Medal for Architectural Excellence in that same year. He was a member of the Tau Sigma Delta Architectural Honorary and became a registered Architect in Washington State in 1950.

After graduation, Theriault was employed by E.G. Putman Engineer for 11 months and Alfred F. Simpson Architect for nearly four years, initially during school and later as an architectural and structural designer, drafter, renderer and in 1950-1952 as a job supervisor. He apparently left that firm to join Steinhart Stanley & Theriault Architects, as a founding partner in 1953-1954.

Theriault continued as a partner in the firm's successor companies, including Steinhart Theriault & Anderson in 1960-1970; and Steinhart Theriault & Associates from 1970 to mid 1980's. He and his family resided in the city of Normandy Park in a house that he designed. Theriault was a well-known member of the Normandy Park Community Club and designed the Normandy Cove Recreation Building, known as the Cove Building. He was a Corporate Member of the American Institute of Architects and a member of the King County Building Code Advisory Committee and the Board of Adjustments and Planning Commission, City of Normandy Park. He later became the Registrar Architects and Executive Secretary to the Board of Registration for Architects, Washington State.

Constructed designs by Steinhart, Theriault or Anderson, as individuals or as a firm, include the following:

Schools

Benson Hill Elementary School

Cascade Jr. High School

Cottege Lake School

Highlands Elementary School

Highline Maintenance and Transportation Facility, Burien WA

Highline High School (1957)

Kellogg Middle School (1962)

Kenneydale Elementary School

Leota Elementary School

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Mt Rainier Sr. High School
Pacific Jr. High School (1961)
Shoreline Community College Campus
Sunny Terrace Elementary School
Sunset Jr. High School
Sylvester Jr. High School (1953)
Tyee Jr. High School
Woodside Special Services School

Churches

Broadview Lutheran Church
Calvary Lutheran Church
Glendale Lutheran Church

John Knox Presbyterian Church Addition
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church Addition, Sea-Tac, WA
South Minster Presbyterian Church
St. Paul's Catholic Church, Seattle
The Fifteenth Church of Christ Scientist
The Fourteenth Church of Christ Scientist
Trinity Lutheran Church, Whidbey Island
United Presbyterian Church

Office and Community Works

Burien 400 Shopping Center, Burien, WA
Colonial Shop and Interior, Burien, WA (Burien 400)
Community Senior Center, Olympia, WA
Home Savings Bank, Seattle, WA
Hubarro & Burns Lawyers
International Portable Bank, Kent, WA
Mobile Home Clubhouse
Normandy Cove Recreation Building, 1500 SW Shorebrook Dr., Normandy Park (1959)
Rainier Bank, 1st Avenue, Seattle, WA
Seattle Public Library, Broadview, WA
Seattle Public Library, Burien, WA

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Swedish Club, Seattle, WA (1959)

Westside Bank, Kent, WA

STA Office Building, 1264 Eastlake East, Seattle, WA 98102, near Lake Union. **This building is currently the subject of a Landmark Nomination in the City of Seattle.**

Theriault designed a number of 'Pacific Rim' style exclusive personal residences that included clean and simple modern designs, Japanese traditional elements, and warm and organic materials like cedar and stone that are native to the Northwest. Design influences from Northwest First Nation tribes were included in many of his designs. He was very interested in the local Northwest Tlinget, Makah and Canadian Haida tribal designs, especially the totem graphics and the sophisticated way that they used the local woods like fir, alder and cedar in almost all aspects of their artistic, boat, basket, housing, clothing and tool design.

Residences designed by Robert D. Theriault include,

Theriault Residence: 18585 Marine View Drive, Normandy Park , WA (built by I. E. Theriault, father of Robert Theriault)

Barton Residence: 18610 Marine View Drive, Normandy Park, WA

Roe Residence: 19435 Normandy Park Drive, Normandy Park, WA

Dr. Larson Residence: 20600 6th Ave. SW, Normandy Park WA

Einar Anderson Residence: Three Tree Point, Burien WA

Anderson Residence: Des Moines, WA

Theriault took great joy in the outdoors all of his life, especially fly-fishing, back packing, gold panning, flying gliders and sailboat racing, even in the harshest storms on Puget Sound, like the Columbus Day Storm in 1962 that recorded 46 fatalities.

Theriault retired to South Whidbey Island and enjoyed a wide and loving circle of friends and extensive travels to Europe, Hawaii and within the United States. His fishing trips often took him to Alaska to drift for days down various rivers while fly-fishing for salmon. He passed away on Whidbey Island on November 12, 2005. Theriault's memorial was attended by friends and family at the Trinity Lutheran Church on South Whidbey Island, his last architectural design, completed at the age of 80.