

Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Craftsman Court on the Scottsdale Historic Register

Craftsman Court

7121-7141 E. 5th Avenue, Scottsdale, Arizona
Scottsdale Historic Register No. SHR -02-12
Zoning Case No. 8-ZN-2002

Background

An intensive survey of the downtown of Scottsdale was conducted by the City Historic Preservation Office staff with assistance from Arizona State University interns, local historians and architects during the period 2000-2001. The goal of the survey was to identify those properties that might be eligible for listing on the Scottsdale Historic Register. Approximately 750 properties, built for commercial use, were studied with particular emphasis on those properties that related to Scottsdale historic development as an "Arts Colony and Tourist Destination." The Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission and the members of the Commission's Historic Register Committee periodically reviewed the research collected and conducted field studies of the survey properties. Their relative significance and integrity were analyzed and compared. As a result of this effort, approximately two dozen properties were identified that merited further consideration for designation to the Scottsdale Historic Register for their association with important historic events and representation of the architectural influences that shaped Scottsdale development during the post World War II era. Craftsman Court was among those properties that were identified as having both historic and architectural significance and a high degree of integrity.

Description

The Craftsman Court complex is located on a .82 acre sized parcel at the southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Craftsman Court in Scottsdale, Arizona. It is listed under Maricopa County Assessor parcels #173-50-105, 173-50-112A and 173-50-121. The complex is a circle of seven contemporary buildings around an open patio with grass, benches and water features.

The complex was originally constructed beginning in 1955 as a demonstration studio space, one of the early and most prominent of those that developed along Fifth Avenue for Scottsdale's popular artisans. It is still used for retail crafts space today, now operating as the "Kiva Center".

The setting, along a corner of the Fifth Avenue intersection with Craftsman Court, has a pedestrian-oriented character. Street parking offers a buffer between moving traffic and the shoppers. Wide concrete sidewalks beneath the buildings' overhanging eaves and large picture windows with merchandise displays lure foot traffic to the buildings and into the courtyard. The courtyard landscaping includes grass, flowering plants, and palm trees and benches on the edge of water features constructed with desert stone, ceramic tile and glass blocks.

The retail spaces are inside seven different contemporary styled buildings arranged around a patio that flows through the courtyard. Two buildings are located on the west end of the complex with the broadside of their roof toward Craftsman Court. Two additional buildings connect to the rear building and there are two others along the east edge of the complex. A final, seventh building is located in the middle on Fifth Avenue. The roof styles vary within the bounds of contemporary architecture, ranging from flat, to extremely low-pitched gable to low-pitched with gable ends all facing toward Fifth Avenue. The roofs are built up with fine red stone aggregate and have wide overhanging eaves with exposed wood materials underneath. Large wood or concrete block posts support the overhangs and create shaded walkways. Metal grillwork has been added to screen the mechanical equipment on top.

Most of the walls are constructed with painted concrete blocks, either eight inches square or eight by sixteen inches. For variation in form and materials, one structure with a flat roofline has a taller two-story volume and walls constructed with tongue and groove wood siding. There is an extensive use of window glass, often stretching from the floor to the gable ends underneath the roof.

History

By the mid-fifties Scottsdale was a major tourist destination with a glamorous reputation bolstered by its first-rate resorts, well-known artists and downtown shopping district. This development context is described with detail in a separate Arts Colony and Tourist Destination report. So popular were they that the town was featured in two national publications in 1956. *Life* magazine touted “the conspicuous glitter” of “the gold-plated town of Scottsdale, Arizona” and *People and Places* devoted an entire issue to Scottsdale’s craftsmen and downtown demonstration studios and specifically mentioned Craftsman Court and Lloyd Kiva New. Exclusive merchandise outlets in Hollywood and on New York’s Fifth Avenue sold the unusual pieces made by Scottsdale’s artisans. In 1957 *Westways* magazine even noted that the town had more artists per square block than any other American community.

As a result of the artists’ influence, a special type of retail establishment began to proliferate in downtown Scottsdale during the fifties. These were combined shops and workspaces where craftsmen and artists offered their original works for sale and passersby could watch them create art pieces. The concept for this first appeared after the war, with the opening of the Arizona Craftsman Council building in a former market where local artisans came together and opened their studios to the public. With the assistance of Tom Darling many nationally known artists became involved in the Council and the sale and demonstration of their work including Lloyd Kiva New, Wes Segner, Phil Sanderson, Lew Davis and Mathilde Schaefer. The concept proved enormously successful with tourists and when the original building burned down in 1950, the popular establishment was rebuilt at Scottsdale Road and the new Fifth Avenue with funding assistance provided by Mrs. J. Fowler McCormick. Initially the relocated Crafts Center was located in a small complex of frame buildings designed by Wes Segner. As the studio/retail concept continued to draw shoppers and art aficionados, a new contemporary complex of buildings “with an old west accent” was constructed at the southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Craftsman Court Road in 1955. Designed by architect T.S. Montgomery, its modern design reflected the philosophical approach employed by many of the artists in their work as they interpreted traditional arts and crafts in contemporary mediums of fashion and design. The complex originally functioned as demonstration craft studios and provided office space for two architects. Today the complex is still used as retail space but with less focus on demonstration crafts.

Significance

Craftsman Court is significant for its association with Scottsdale’s development as an arts colony and tourist destination and its association with a number of prominent artists like Lloyd Kiva New, who was a champion of the emerging Indian crafts movement in postwar Scottsdale and nationwide. The Modern architecture of the complex is also illustrative of the historic development of the community during this important period of Scottsdale’s history. In addition to blending with the desert landscape and dignified western design motif adopted by downtown businesses in the fifties, the contemporary architecture reflected the growing stature of Scottsdale’s craftsmen, as they became well known fine art artisans.

The physical features of the complex continue to convey its historic associations and the complex maintains a high degree of integrity. It is the location of a nationally famous retail center with studios of artisans who demonstrated, made and sold their work. Its original setting among Scottsdale's famed Fifth Avenue shops of other crafts studios, retail space, and art galleries is retained. Its plan of the building's arrangement, clustered around an open patio, and its design of wide overhanging eaves to shade the passerby and full length window walls, continue to convey its historic use as a demonstration crafts-studio complex for the shopping public. The low pitched gable and flat roof styles, broad eaves, use of varying sizes of concrete block, and extensive utilization of glass also reflect the physical design features and materials that make the contemporary complex architecturally significant.