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Jeff Webster and Kimberly Clemenson  
8 Rancho El Robledo  
Carmel Valley, CA 93924  
(805) 795-4631  
[jdwebster1962@gmail.com](mailto:jdwebster1962@gmail.com)

Craig Spencer  
Monterey County  
Housing and Community Development  
Phone: (831) 755-5233  
Email: [spencerc@co.monterey.ca.us](mailto:spencerc@co.monterey.ca.us)

Dear Craig,

On June 14, we submitted a request for designation of our main house, guest house and surrounding grounds as a Monterey County Historic Resource and also provided information relevant to receiving Mills Act status and benefits. In a reply on July 7, you communicated to us that our property exceeds the \$3 million residential property limit per Monterey County Code Section 18.28.80, and that we would need approval of an exception to the eligibility criteria in order to be considered. We provide information to support approval of an exception as follows:

- The first and best grounds for approval of an exception is that the main house, guest house and surrounding grounds are *“a particularly important resource such as the last or only example of its kind, and it represents an exceptional example of an architectural style, the work of a master, or is associated with the lives of significant persons or events important to history.”* In this respect, I’d offer Kent Seavey’s report. To summarize specific thoughts from Kent’s report through the lens of the Monterey County Code criteria:
  - *“The subject property is significant under California Register criterion 3, in the area of architecture, as perhaps the best and most intact example of an early (1939) California Ranch House design by Carmel master builder, Hugh W. Comstock.”* We have taken pains during restoration to ensure that the structures retain that “intactness” that Kent noted. Some examples of this are:
    - Fenestration is all original, and most of the original window panes remain
    - Hardware and doors are original, including hand forged hinges and latches
    - Original wood cabinets and floors remain, including a rare wide plank redwood floor in the living room and pine floors in the bedrooms
    - Original architectural features have been preserved and/or restored. The grape arbor and roof skylights were replaced as these were in a state of disrepair. The original breezeway was restored, having been enclosed by Elmer Ladd in 1967. Similarly, the pony wall and windows that had enclosed the loggia were removed and replaced with large glass panels that provide a look and feel more akin to the original structure.
    - The only visible difference between the adobe guest house as originally constructed and its current form are the updated electrical receptacles.
  - The main and guest houses are adobe structures (not post-adobe), and are exceptional examples of Hugh Comstock’s use of this architectural style. *“Unable to access commercial waterproof adobe bricks, the contractor invented his own sealing*

- solution, "Bitudobe" in the mid 1930's, and began producing the material at his own brick plant in Carmel Valley. In order to assure the structural stability of his now waterproofed construction material, the contractor initially employed the use of a concrete bond beam at the roof-wall junction of some residences. The subject property being of this type."*
- Hank Ketcham owned the property from 1955-1960, and lived there with wife and son, Dennis. During that same period, he created the still popular Dennis the Menace Park in the city of Monterey. The property appears in photographs and print in Ketcham's autobiography "The Merchant of Dennis." Other property owners have also been notable, but perhaps none with the broad appeal of Ketcham.
  - The property was featured on the cover of the December 1942 edition of Sunset Magazine. The accompanying article focused on the future of Western architecture and building materials, and employed Rancho El Robledo as an example of the kind of lifestyle the United States was fighting for during a time of war. The property also appears in other Sunset publications.
  - Kent summarizes that "*Rancho El Robledo **may be the best existing** example of a California Ranch House design by noted master-builder Hugh W. Comstock. The subject property and its immediate environment personifies the Ranch House aesthetic, reflecting a lifestyle of simplicity, privacy and informality close to nature, that began to take on a contemporary form in custom house design in the late 1920s and 1930s. El Robledo contributes to the understanding of a major architectural trend that went on to become one of the most dominant architectural forces in the suburban landscape of the nation. The residence retains a high degree of physical integrity and a strong sense of time and place and of feeling and association with the residential development of Carmel Valley."*
  - To the second criteria in Section 18.28.040, I'd offer that many of the materials of construction are no longer available, whether that regards the old-growth redwood timbers that constitute the living room floor, ceiling beams and joists, doors and lintels, the extensive use of wide-plank old growth redwood inside and out, the original fenestrations, the original adobe bricks, and the original hardware among others; special attention and protections have been and are required to maintain these in their near-original condition. Protecting the structures from the ever present risk of a fire, which could result in their permanent destruction, has also been of primary concern to us. Maintaining the cedar shingle roof in top condition, tree maintenance, having enough fire-retardant gel to coat the roof and siding, and maintaining a water system with hydrants around the house and with access to 10,000 gallons of water from tanks and 40,000 gallons of water from the pool are all steps needed to assure the safety of this Monterey County gem.
  - To the third criteria, we are more than excited to allow the annual access to the property at least once per year so that others can appreciate the simple beauty and nature of this truly special place- all the words above can't really express what it means to be here and see it. We believe providing this access will provide a significant public benefit for the County, its residents and visitors.

Finally, I'd just highlight that the spirit of the laws and code and the spirit with which we have carefully and caringly restored this important Monterey County resource are one and the same. We've already made the substantial investments of our time, emotional energy

(restoration took 5 years) and capital to restore Rancho El Robledo to what it is today. What we seek from Monterey County is their participation its preservation and maintenance through the Mills Act.

I hope that these points resonate with those who make these decisions, that we are able to obtain approval of an exception to the residential property limit, that we can get Rancho El Robledo on the Monterey County List of Historic Resources, and that we can access Mills act benefits to maintain and preserve this important place.

I welcome a visit by anyone who would like to see the property first-hand; we feel privileged to live here and love showing it off.

Respectfully,

Jeff Webster

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