

(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

DRAFT

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Stevens House
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 23524 Malibu Colony Road not for publication N/A
city or town Malibu vicinity N/A
state California code CA county Los Angeles code 037 zip code 90265

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	Signature of the Keeper	_____	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____			
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____			
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____			
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:) _____	_____			

Stevens House
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls concrete, wood, glass

roof concrete
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1968

Significant Dates

1968

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Lautner, John

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
removed from its original location.
a birthplace or grave.
a cemetery.
a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
a commemorative property
less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
Previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State Agency
Federal Agency
Local Government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Stevens House
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 11 344240 3766976
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Christy Johnson McAvoy, Managing Principal; Avigail Charnov, Associate Architectural Conservator
organization Historic Resources Group date May 2009
street & number 1728 Whitley Avenue telephone (323) 469-2349
city or town Los Angeles state CA zip code 90028

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Michael LaFetra
street & number 12256 Canna Road telephone (310) 471-3670
city or town Los Angeles state CA zip code 90049

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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Stevens House, Los Angeles County, CA

Section 7: Description

Summary

The Stevens House, a single-family residence designed by architect John Lautner, is located off the Pacific Coast Highway in the gated Malibu Colony, in Malibu California. The house was constructed in 1968. Set on the beach, the 3,366 square foot building occupies almost the entire width of its narrow lot, which measures 37.5 feet wide by 110 feet long. The front of the house is oriented north toward the mountains, while the back of the house faces south to the ocean. The house is two stories plus basement, arranged on five separate levels that include five bedrooms and five bathrooms. The structure of the house is composed of reinforced board-formed concrete. The unique roof design was achieved by using two offset, half-catenary concrete curved shells. The open floor plan allows the dining room and master bedroom to look out to the mountains in the north and to the ocean in the south. The roof design reflects its beach setting. Lautner described it as a house that “goes with the waves”.¹

Site

The Stevens House is located within a community of single-family residences. The house was carefully designed to provide both openness and privacy; particularly important due to the narrowness of the lot and the close proximity of the neighboring houses. The north façade of the house is set back from the street by a paved driveway, the width of the lot. The driveway is separated from the landscaped garden and house by a gated wooden fence. A concrete path and set of steps lead from the driveway up to the house. There is a small enclosed paved storage area behind the wooden fence. A concrete path along the front of the house passes under the entry staircase and leads down a set of steps into the basement.

The south façade of the house faces the ocean. The back patio has a lap pool, landscaping and deck, and stairs leading down to the beach. Narrow pathways lead along the east and west sides of the house with fences separating the property from its neighbors. Steps at the southern end of each path lead up to the back patio, pool and deck.

Exterior

The exterior of the house is divided into two units formed by two half-catenary concrete curves facing in opposite directions. The curves form the roof of the house and each rests on a vertical concrete wall. Trowel-finished gunite clads the concrete roof and walls. The finish materials consist of concrete, glass and wood. Where the two curves intersect, the elevations are exposed (facing north and south) allowing for windows. The irregular fenestration consists of windows ranging from entire window walls to multiples of wood sash awning windows. The north and south elevations contain large areas of glazed panels, creating glass walls. The freely composed wood mullions are radial rather than grid-like in emphasis. These large glass walls allow views of either the mountains (north) or the ocean (south) from almost any room on the main floor.

The main entrance to the house is located on the primary (north) elevation facing the street. The wooden entry door is reached by a poured concrete and metal staircase inlaid with matte-glazed Japanese ceramic tiles. The entry stair has a wood overhang formed by an upper floor bedroom and bathroom. The entire façade is clad with vertical wood paneling. The western side of the north façade is recessed leaving space for the front garden which is arched over by the curved concrete roof with rectangular reveals allowing light into the garden. The west-facing wall has a line of six

¹ “Building Types Study: Record Houses of the Year.” *Architectural Record*. Mid-May 1971, p45.

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awning windows that overlook the front entry stair and garden. The western wall of the north façade is composed entirely of wood framed glass window walls that curve as they meet the roof. For the most part the basement level is hidden from view. The eastern side of the north façade is punctuated with windows. There are two windows on the top floor, a sliding window on the first floor and a wood framed glass door and window at street level.

The east elevation has two sections. The northern section is a vertical concrete wall while the southern section is the curved part of the roof. The southern section arches over the swimming pool and has rectangular reveals that allow light onto the pool. These reveals have been filled in with angled opaque glass slats that provide privacy from the neighboring house. The northern section of the east elevation has two awning windows at basement level and an additional eleven awning windows punctuate the wall. There is a wood-framed glass-paneled door at the main floor. A cantilevered staircase leads down from this door to the path along the side of the house.

The southern elevation faces the ocean. As with the north elevation, the south elevation has two sections; the eastern section is recessed to accommodate the lap pool. This wall is clad with vertical wood paneling. There is a window wall on the top floor, and a wood-framed fixed window and a wood-framed glass-paneled door on the main floor. The west wall of the recessed pool area is formed of wood-framed glass walls and windows. The main and upper floors are divided by a horizontal line of board-formed concrete; a vertical board-formed concrete support beam on the first floor connects up to this dividing line. The western portion of the south elevation is composed of wood-framed window walls. The southeast corner of the window walls slides open. The upper floor and the main floor are separated by a vertical section of board-formed concrete.

The west elevation is concrete with very few architectural features. The north side of the elevation is curved, as it follows the northern roof arch and shelters the front garden. The utility meters for the house are located on this wall. The southern end of this elevation is a vertical concrete wall with a wood-framed window and a square-edged concrete chimney with stucco cladding. Where the two catenary arches meet, a north facing portion of the façade is revealed. This section is clad with vertical wood paneling with multiple windows of varying types; awning, sliding, operable and non-operable. At the basement level along the northern portion of the west elevation are a series of ten wood-framed awning windows. Each window has a thin metal flashing detail above it.

Interior

The interior of the residence features an open plan with one space flowing easily into the next. The main floor contains the public spaces (kitchen, dining room, living room and one bathroom), with private spaces (four bedrooms and three bathrooms) on the upper floor. The basement contains a sauna and workout room, a screening room, and a bedroom and bathroom. The two-story house contains five different levels. On the main floor the kitchen, dining room and bathroom are separated from the living room by a few steps. The slightly lower living room allows the dining room to experience clear views of the ocean. The upper floor is divided into three levels. The master bedroom, located on the south end of the house, is raised slightly above the other bedrooms two of which have sleeping lofts. The house is heated by radiant heating coming through the floor. There is no central air.

Throughout the main level the floors are laid with matte-glazed Japanese ceramic tiles set in a herringbone pattern, which mirrors the pattern in the wood ceiling. The Japanese tile is also used to pave the main entry staircase and the back porch and pool deck. The three southern rooms that look out over the ocean each have large folding-fan style shades to cover the windows. The living room and master bedroom have glass window walls facing east to the pool. In

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the living room these two window walls slide open making the porch and pool deck a continuation of the living room. The dining room and northern most bedroom have glass window walls facing north to the mountains.

The main entry door on the north façade leads directly into the dining room with an arched board formed concrete ceiling. The walls of the main floor are composed of board-formed concrete, full glass windows and wood. To the east of the dining room is the small hallway that leads to the kitchen and bathroom. The kitchen features original wooden cabinets, tiled floor and wood ceiling. A horseshoe shaped cedar paneled staircase separates the living room and dining room from each other. This staircase leads to the upper floor bedrooms. A second adjacent horseshoe shaped staircase leads down to the basement. The dining room contains a built-in wood table with a concrete base designed by John Lautner.²

On the west wall of the living room there is a board-formed concrete fireplace with a domed concrete hood, a modern take on the traditional southwestern beehive style fireplace. There is a triangular-shaped cut out in the living room floor that is open and acts as a skylight to the basement. A built-in cantilevered wooden writing desk separates the north side of the open living room from the staircase.

The upper floor contains four bedrooms, two lofts and three bathrooms; the master bedroom and bathroom at the southern end of the house are raised a few steps above the other bedrooms. The southern portion of the hallway forms an overhang over part of the pool deck. There are glass panels in this section of the hallway that overlook the pool deck. The bedrooms and lofts all have carpeted floors. The ceilings are board-formed concrete except in the spaces under the lofts where the ceilings are plaster. The wall finishes alternate between wood paneling, plaster, board-formed concrete and window walls.

The three bedrooms are connected by a single corridor that is visible from the dining room but shaded from view by a screen of tilted cedar boards. There are two cedar-paneled closets located between the southern most and middle bedrooms. Two of the three bedrooms have sleeping lofts reached by staircases inside the rooms; the southern most bedroom has a spiral wooden staircase with a metal railing leading up to the loft while the northern most bedroom is reached by a linear staircase that runs east/west. The two loft spaces are divided by a wall with a clerestory window that allows light to flow from one room to the other; the top of the window curves with the ceiling. The southern and middle bedrooms share a bathroom; the northern bedroom has its own.

The basement contains an exercise room and sauna on the south side, and a bedroom, bathroom and screening room on the north side. The basement can be accessed from both the interior and exterior of the house. From the interior, a horseshoe shaped staircase with wood paneled walls leads to the basement. There are four rectangular glazed openings in the wall at the bottom of the staircase, and two storage closets at the end of the hallway, leading from the staircase into the basement.

The exercise and sauna room are separated from the hallway with a granite fin wall. The floors are of granite and a number of the walls are covered in full length mirrors. A wood paneled sauna room and granite shower stall occupy the west wall. Jute mats have been placed on the floors and certain partition walls. A wood paneled hallway leads from the exercise room to the bedroom, bathroom and screening room. The bedroom is carpeted, with a wood ceiling. The walls are also wood-board except for the exterior east wall which is of board-

² Alan Hess. The Architecture of John Lautner. New York: Rizzoli, 2003. p153.

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formed concrete. The west wall has built-in wood shelves. The screening room has a plaster ceiling, carpeted floor, and red-velvet lined walls. A laundry room is reached by an exterior pathway. The laundry room has plaster ceilings, floors and walls and two wood framed glass paneled entry doors, one on the north and one on the south.

Lautner carefully designed many aspects of the house focusing on the smallest of details. This included the doorknobs, many of which are fashioned of wood with metal fittings. He also designed built-in shelves and cabinetry some of which were updated or altered over time, often by him, but much of which appears to remain as it was originally. It is uncertain if the existing light fixtures are original to the house. There are matching light fixtures in many of the hallways including the upstairs hallway and the staircase hallway leading to the basement. These are wall sconces with copper shades that are bent vertically down the middle at a forty-five degree angle. Although the current track lighting in the living room is not original, photographs show older style track lighting in the same location.³

Alterations

There have been some alterations made to the house since it was constructed. The alterations have been kept to secondary spaces and have had little impact to the integrity of the house. Dates for many of these alterations are unknown either because no building permits were issued or they have been misfiled in the City and are inaccessible. Existing drawings show that Lautner designed at least one of the renovations; plans also show alterations that were never implemented. Existing dated drawings consist of original design drawings from 1967, Lautner-designed basement alterations from 1981, and lighting plans from 1995 designed by Mark Jackson. Drawings with no date or associated architect consist of bedroom alterations and a kitchen remodel that were carried out.

Figure 1. Building Permits

Date of Permit	Permit Type	Work to be Performed	Owner	Architect / Contractor
May 19, 1967	Building	Foundation	Dan Stevens	John Lautner
Nov. 9, 1981	Electrical	Electrical work	Dan Stevens	Alfonso M. Lopez
Dec. 14, 1981	Plumbing	Gas system, outlets	Dan Stevens	A&B Plumbing
Dec. 16, 1981	Plumbing	Water heater elect.	Dan Stevens	A&B Plumbing
Dec. 19, 1981	HV/AC	Jacuzzi Htr.	Dan Stevens	A&B Plumbing
Nov. 22, 1983	Waiver of coastal permit requirement	Renovate an existing master bath	Dan Stevens	John Lautner
Aug. 21, 1984 Canceled at owners request	Building	Remodel existing master bath	Dan Stevens	John Lautner
Sept. 26, 1985	Building	New Fence	Dan Stevens	John Lautner
Oct. 25, 1985	Electrical	Outlets, Lighting fixtures		Robin Electric Co.
Nov. 12, 1989 Expired	Building	Remodel of bathroom, eliminate a bedroom, and replace bathtub with a shower	Dan Stevens	

Figure 2. List of Existing Architectural Drawings

Date	Architect	Plan Type	Additional Information
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³ Julius Shulman, Jurgen Nogai, and Richard Olsen. *Malibu: A Century of Living by the Sea*. New York: Abrams, 2005. p108.

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1967	John Lautner	Original design drawings	
1981	John Lautner	Convert studio in basement to exercise room with spa, sauna and shower	Finishes: - Granite, jute and mirrored walls - Redwood sauna - Granite shower
Date Unknown	Drawings not signed or stamped ⁴	- Alter children's rooms - Kitchen remodel	
Date Unknown (1985) ⁵	Drawings not signed or stamped ⁶	- Alter children's rooms to writing room, full bath with dressing and studio - Alter master bath	- Proposal - Never built
1995	Mark Jackson	Lighting Plans	

From studying original and subsequent drawings and published photographs it can be estimated when alterations were made. It appears that several renovations were performed by the Stevens family not long after they moved into the house. It is unknown whether Lautner was involved in these renovations because no documentation was found, however Dan Stevens was purported to be devoted to Lautner and his architectural talent so it may be assumed Lautner or his office had a hand in the changes.⁷ In the living room a translucent covering was placed over the triangular opening in the floor. The concrete fireplace, located along the west wall was also altered. The original drawings and early photographs show that firebrick was used for the wing walls. The brick is now covered with concrete. Some of the shelving units have also been removed. The rectangular openings that arch over the pool were filled in for privacy with louvered opaque-glass slats.

The south side of the house originally opened straight onto the beach, creating a back yard of sand. Not long after the house was built and the tides continued to wash away the sand, Lautner returned to supervise the building of a wooden bulkhead designed by boat builder Duncan Stewart.⁸ The decking is composed of teak with a butyl caulking which adhered to the wood but resisted the salt and water. Because of the harsh elements, the project was approached like building a boat.⁹ Also at this time, Lautner designed the current terraced deck with short concrete walls, planters and concrete stairs that lead from the living room and pool deck down to a wooden deck from which a wooden ladder leads down to the beach.¹⁰ Lautner used the same Japanese ceramic tile as is used throughout the main floor to clad the terraced deck. The boards in the wooden deck are set in a herringbone pattern to match the pattern of the ceramic tile floors.

⁴ These drawings were most likely developed in the Lautner office according to architect Vaughn Trammell, who worked in Lautner's office from 1977-90. He was involved with the proposed bath remodel when Dan Stevens still owned the house. Oral interview conducted April 22, 2009.

⁵ Vaughn Trammell worked with Dan Stevens to develop the bathroom remodel. "Completed working drawings for the project architect. Saw project through construction bidding and permitting. The project was not built." Cited on his website: www.vtrammell.com/projects; accessed October 1, 2008.

⁶ These drawings were most likely developed in the Lautner office according to architect Vaughn Trammell. Oral interview conducted April 22, 2009.

⁷ Architect, Vaughn Trammell remembered Dan Stevens was a "big fan" and wouldn't make any changes without Lautner's approval. Oral interview conducted April 22, 2009.

⁸ Anecdotal evidence obtained from current owner.

⁹ Oral interview with Vaughn Trammell conducted April 22, 2009.

¹⁰ It can be surmised that Lautner designed the deck because of the seamless use of finish materials.

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In the basement, many original finishes were either removed or covered. Originally the basement contained a maid's room with a full bathroom, a children's playroom to the north of the stairs and the owner's studio to the south. The studio was converted into the exercise room and sauna which was designed by Lautner in 1981. The children's playroom is now a screening room and the current laundry room area was originally a carport. It is uncertain when these changes were made.

Small changes have been made to the kitchen. A washer and dryer (now in the basement laundry room) were originally located in a space now taken by a marble topped table with built-in benches on two sides. The marble tabletop matches the current counters, however historic photographs show that the counters were once topped with the same Japanese ceramic tiles used on the floors.¹¹ The utilities have been updated and some counters have been removed and altered but the general layout and the majority of the wall, floor and ceiling finishes and cabinetry remain the same.

In the dining room, a cast-in-place concrete light fixture has been replaced with a French chandelier.

The original master bathroom (with mahogany finishes and cabinetry) has been mostly replaced with new finishes and modern fixtures. There is a dropped ceiling over the master bathroom with an area above it that was called out in the original plans as storage space. The original design called for a drop down ladder to provide access to the 'attic' storage space. This space was closed up at an unknown date when the bathroom was remodeled.

The sleeping lofts above the three bedrooms have also been altered; according to the original plans there was a separate loft above each child's bedroom. Alterations combined the three lofts into two. The two lofts are reached from the rooms on the north and south ends of the hallway; the center room no longer has a loft.

The three original folding-fan window shades, of mahogany and sailcloth, on the southern side of the house have been replaced with fabric fans with narrow wood sticks that are visible only on the interior of the house.

¹¹ Julius Shulman, Jurgen Nogai, and Richard Olsen. Malibu: A Century of Living by the Sea. New York: Abrams, 2005. p110.

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Stevens House, Los Angeles County, CA

Section 8: Statement of Significance

Summary

The Stevens House is a significant example of the work of Los Angeles architect John Lautner, and an excellent example of Modernist residential architecture. The property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion C as the work of a master architect that possesses high artistic values. The house was designed by John Lautner, one of the twentieth century's and southern California's most important architects. He was a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, and adopted Wright's style of "organic architecture" which is evidenced in the philosophy and design of the Stevens House. He worked during the post-war period of second generation Modernist architects in southern California, however Lautner did not consider himself a Modernist. He distinguished himself from many of his peers by breaking out of the box and designing each project for the site and the client's needs. As a result, each building is distinctive and unique and holds its own mark of significance.

Completed in 1968, the Stevens House has not yet achieved fifty years of age. However, because of the substantial body of scholarly information on the impact and influence of John Lautner, sufficient time has passed to fully understand the property's historical significance. The property meets Criteria Consideration G because of its exceptional importance. The design is a highly innovative solution for the site and the client: a family house with ample light and views, and a pool, on a restrictive lot. The Stevens House was Lautner's first of several residential buildings he constructed in Malibu, and the first in the Malibu Colony. It was his first use of a reinforced concrete catenary curved shell which proved to be suitable for the harsh beach environment by resisting cracking through compressive strength, the ability to mimic the waves, and Lautner felt it could ride out a tidal wave as well by allowing water to flow through the house.¹²

The Stevens House retains a high level of integrity because it possesses all of its significant features and few alterations have been performed since the house was originally built. In addition, Lautner designed or supervised many of the renovations that were carried out. The property conveys all seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The period of significance for the house is the 1968 date of construction. This period does not include the alterations Lautner designed in 1981 or the alteration he is speculated to have made. While these alterations are important, they do not define the primary significance of the house, which is the overall design concept.

Malibu Colony

The land of the Malibu Colony was purchased in 1891 by the wealthy Rindge family of Massachusetts. In 1926, facing financial constraints, May Rindge decided to lease standard 30-foot lots to a small number of the wealthy Hollywood elite on which to build vacation homes.¹³ During the 1920s, Los Angeles was considered an overnight trip from Malibu Colony. As the renters were spending money to build a home on a parcel of land they did not own, they did not expend great amounts of effort or money into the design of these homes. The homes during this period were characterized as beach cottage architecture.¹⁴ By 1936 May Rindge again found herself in financial straits and was

¹² Oral interview with architect Vaughn Trammell April 22, 2009. Mr. Trammell recalls while he was an architecture student in the mid-1970s at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Mr. Lautner gave a lecture and used the Stevens House as a case study citing a tidal wave as a distinct probability. He challenged his students to create an appropriate solution for the complicated oceanfront site.

¹³ Julius Shulman, Jurgen Nogai, and Richard Olsen. Malibu: A Century of Living by the Sea. New York: Abrams, 2005. p20.

¹⁴ Ibid. p22.

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forced to sell the land; the Malibu Colony was created. Those who bought land in the Malibu Colony generally built Spanish or Modern style homes on the narrow lots. Ownership of the land led the wealthy residents to expand building larger houses and adding luxuries like tennis courts to the Colony.¹⁵

With the construction of John Lautner's Stevens House, the wealthier elements of Malibu society began to rethink the type of structure that could be built on the narrow lots. Well-known architects were hired to design unique homes for these lots. The gated Malibu Colony continues its exclusive tradition today, remaining home to many famous movie stars and members of the Hollywood elite. The Stevens House was not the first to break the mold, but it sparked an architectural competition among Malibu's wealthier inhabitants. The Stevens House was the first home Lautner designed in Malibu, and the only Lautner house built in Malibu Colony, however he designed a number of other residential buildings in Malibu.¹⁶ These buildings include the Garwood Residence, 1970; the Segel Residence, 1980; the Krause Residence, 1982; the Ring Residence, 1984, the Sagheb House, 1990. Architectural historian David Gebhard noted in his guide to Los Angeles architecture that, "The Malibu Colony continues to acquire houses of distinguished design. ... Within it are houses designed by John Lautner, Richard Meier, Craig Ellwood, and others. Since the 1960s, John Lautner has designed and overseen a number of fascinating houses on the Malibu coast. Most of these are of reinforced concrete devised in a highly organic form."¹⁷

Stevens Ownership and Chronology

The Stevens House has only had three owners; the original ownership lasted for thirty-six years. Hired by Mr. and Mrs. Dan Stevens to design their family home, Lautner informed them that they could have either a cave or a fishbowl; they choose a fishbowl.¹⁸ Apparently not the first architect to be asked by the Stevens family, he was the only one able to design their desired home on the small restrictive lot. Mr. Stevens lived in the house with his wife and children until they divorced. Following the divorce, Stevens remained in the house eventually remarrying. Upon his death, the house was left to his second wife. In addition to their family home, Lautner also designed a flower shop (Flowers that Bloom in the Spring Tra-La, Brentwood, CA, 1982, altered beyond recognition) and two un-built hotels for Dan Stevens. Mrs. Stevens sold the residence in 2004 to Steve Austin, who updated the bathrooms and converted part of the basement into a screening room. The current owner, Michael LaFetra, purchased the house in 2007. Mr. LaFetra, a knowledgeable enthusiast of Southern California modernist architecture, plans to restore the Stevens House to the 1968 period of significance using the original design drawings.

John Lautner

John Edward Lautner was born in Michigan in 1911 to John and Vida Lautner. He was one of two children. In 1934, Lautner married Mary Faustina Roberts with whom he had five children, four daughters and two sons. Divorcing in 1950, he would later marry the wife of a former business associate.

From 1933 to 1939, Lautner apprenticed with Frank Lloyd Wright as a Taliesin Fellow in Wisconsin and Arizona. During this time he served as supervisor to the architect on such projects as Fallingwater (Mill Run, PA, 1935) and the

¹⁵ <http://www.malibucomplete.com/mc_history_dev_colony.php> accessed on November 14, 2008.

¹⁶ Lautner designed or remodeled a total of thirteen residential structures in Malibu.

¹⁷ David Gebhard, Robert Winter, *Los Angeles: An Architectural Guide*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1994. p1.

¹⁸ Alan Hess, Alan Weintraub. *The Architecture of John Lautner*. New York: Rizzoli, 2003. p98.

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Johnson Wax Museum (Racine, WI, 1936-39). He moved to Los Angeles, a city he claimed to hate, in 1938, and continued to work for Wright until he established his own practice constructing his first independent home in 1940.¹⁹

Lautner worked at the same time as the second generation of modernist architects in southern California; the students of the founders of the movement. Yet Lautner does not fully fit into this category. He was one of the few students who moved beyond his teacher, taking in what Wright had to teach him and developing it into his own style.²⁰ “Of all the architects who passed through Wright’s sphere, only R.M. Schindler, Bruce Goff (who never studied or worked with Wright), and Lautner managed to drive Wright’s ideas beyond the master.”²¹ Lautner worked on a number of Wright projects in Southern California including the Sturges House (Los Angeles, CA, 1939), Bell House (Los Angeles, CA, 1940), Eaglefeather (Malibu, CA, 1941), Ennis House (Los Angeles, CA, 1941)²², and Mauer House (Los Angeles, CA, 1941-46).²³

Lautner’s professional association with Wright ended in 1943.²⁴ During World War II, with non-military construction at a standstill, Lautner was forced to find jobs in the defense industry where he gained experience in contracting and superintending. In 1944, due to personal financial concerns, Lautner joined the architectural firm of Douglas Honnold. The two worked well together, designing houses and commercial buildings including two Coffee Dan’s restaurants (Los Angeles, CA, 1946).²⁵ The designs for the Coffee Dan’s restaurants established the basis for his later designs for Henry’s Drive-ins and Googie’s restaurant.²⁶ Lautner ended his connection with Honnold in 1947. Following his break with Honnold, Lautner established his own architecture practice that same year.²⁷

In 1947, Lautner completed two of his first major commissions, the Carling House in Los Angeles and the Desert Hot Springs Motel. He did not become a licensed architect until 1951 when he finally passed the structural portion of the examination. Some of his most notable southern California projects include the Desert Hot Springs Motel (Desert Hot Springs, CA, 1947), the Gantvoort House (La Canada Flintridge, CA, 1949), Googie’s coffee shop (Los Angeles, CA, 1949; demolished 1989), Crenshaw Methodist Church (Los Angeles, CA, 1956), the Pearlman Mountain Cabin (Idyllwild, CA, 1957), the Chemosphere/Malin House (Los Angeles, CA, 1960), the Elrod House (Palm Springs, CA, 1968), and the Walstrom House (Los Angeles, CA, 1969). Lautner was appointed a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects for Excellence in Design in 1970. He was named Olympic Architect for the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.²⁸ In 1993 he was presented the Gold Medal from the Los Angeles AIA chapter for his lifetime achievement. He was working on a number of projects when he died in 1994 at the age of 83.

One of Lautner’s most notable designs was for Googie’s (demolished), a Los Angeles coffee shop designed in 1949. The name of the restaurant became synonymous with space age, car culture architecture.²⁹ As defined by Alan Hess, author of *Googie Redux*, “Googie’s is a sub-category of mid-century Modern that is bolder, more exaggerated in

¹⁹ Julius Shulman, Jurgen Nogai, and Richard Olsen. *Malibu: A Century of Living by the Sea*. New York: Abrams, 2005. p104.

²⁰ Alan Hess. *The Architecture of John Lautner*. New York: Rizzoli, 2003. pp156-157.

²¹ Alan Hess. *The Architecture of John Lautner*. Cited in *Malibu: A Century of Living by the Sea*. New York: Abrams, 2005. p104.

²² In 1941, Lautner joined with Lloyd Wright on a project to redesign the Ennis House; the design was never implemented.

²³ Nicholas Olsberg, editor. *Between Earth and Heaven: the Architecture of John Lautner* New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2008. p51.

²⁴ Ibid. p228.

²⁵ Alan Hess. *The Architecture of John Lautner*. New York: Rizzoli, 2003. p27.

²⁶ Alan Hess. *Googie Redux: ultramodern roadside architecture*. San Francisco, California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2004. p70.

²⁷ Nicholas Olsberg, editor. *Between Earth and Heaven: the architecture of John Lautner* New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2008. p228.

²⁸ ArchitectDB <<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/php/architect/record.phtml?type=architect&architectid=70>> accessed on November 26, 2008.

²⁹ Alan Hess. *The Architecture of John Lautner*. New York: Rizzoli, 2003. p28.

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forms.”³⁰ Although ridiculed by many, the style was taken up by numerous architects becoming a symbol of the commercial strip and the 1950s; fitting squarely into the car-oriented culture of the period. Lautner’s Googie’s, the prototype for and namesake of the style, was constructed of steel and glass as wood and concrete were more expensive and harder to obtain, due to supply shortages. Lautner’s design changed the expected orientation of a diner; patrons no longer faced the kitchen and serving areas, but rather faced out, to the street. The signage was designed as an integral aspect of the building. By 1952 steel was in short supply.³¹ However Googie architecture continued to be constructed with whatever materials were available.³² The buildings had large signs and interestingly shaped roofs and walls. The streets of Los Angeles were lined with Googie style drive-ins, diners, and coffee shops. Douglas Haskell, editor of *House and Home*, wrote in 1952 that Googie architecture had “brought modern architecture down from the mountains and set ordinary clients, ordinary people free.”³³ Lautner’s designs for coffee shop architecture may have sparked a popular design movement, but it proved to be a means for him to move forward with his career designing custom residential architecture.

John Lautner designed over fifty architecturally significant structures in the Southern California area alone. His focus was primarily on residential architecture, but he also designed a few restaurants and commercial buildings as well. The majority of his work was in Southern California, however he also designed structures throughout the world.³⁴ From his arrival in Los Angeles Lautner clearly stated that he hated ‘ugly’ Los Angeles architecture: “Oh, it was depressing...it was so ugly I was physically sick for the first year I was here...if you tried to figure out how to make a row of buildings ugly, you couldn’t do any better than it’s been done [here].”³⁵ Despite his dislike of Los Angeles buildings, his numerous modernistic structures fit right into the local architectural landscape as Los Angeles has one of the country’s most impressive collections of modern architecture.

Lautner, one of the twentieth century’s and southern California’s most important architects, is also perhaps one of the most misunderstood. Lautner’s designs deal with the interplay of space, nature, the built environment and human beings. His designs are an exploration of the interaction between land and space; they reflect the scenery while functioning as a shelter from which one is to look out upon and partake of that scenery.

During his lifetime, Lautner’s designs were often seen as foolish and silly structures built for the rich Hollywood elite. Lautner usually worked from minimal plans, finalizing many of the details on site. He enjoyed experimenting with new ideas and materials, and designed a wide variety of building types and styles. In general he emphasized the interior space created by the building rather than the structural forms.

Lautner’s designs are often described as futuristic, a portrayal that greatly troubled him. He felt that describing his buildings as futuristic was a misunderstanding of their purpose. Lautner preferred the label “organic architecture” a term coined by Frank Lloyd Wright. His designs were based on free form plans, were remarkably varied and were unique for each job. He enjoyed trying out new materials and ideas; some worked and some did not. His designs were

³⁰ Whitney Friedlander. “Go on a SoCal hunt for Googie architecture.” *Los Angeles Times* May 18, 2008: Travel. <<http://articles.latimes.com/2008/may/18/travel/trw-gogie18>> accessed on November 11, 2008.

³¹ Nicholas Olsberg, editor. *Between Earth and Heaven: the architecture of John Lautner* New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2008. p83.

³² Alan Hess. *Googie Redux: ultramodern roadside architecture*. San Francisco, California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2004. p68.

³³ Douglas Haskell *House and Home*, February 1952. Cited in Alan Hess. *Googie Redux: ultramodern roadside architecture*. San Francisco, California: Chronicle Books LLC, 2004. p69.

³⁴ John Lautner designed projects in Jerusalem, Israel (Low Cost Housing 1969, 1970); Hawaii, USA (Science Building Hilo Campus, 1970); Acapulco Guerrero, Mexico (Residence, 1973); Buenos Aires, Argentina (Cabin, 1972-76).

³⁵ John Lautner as cited in: Alan Hess, Alan Weintraub. *The Architecture of John Lautner*. New York: Rizzoli, 2003. p21.

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an exploration of the interaction between people, buildings and the surrounding environment. When the terrain was too steep to build a traditional building Lautner came up with the design for the Chemosphere, which sits atop a single steep pylon. When the lot was too narrow for a standard house and swimming pool he designed the Stevens House with the pool tucked under the roof. His designs often played off the surrounding environment like the curved roof of the Stevens House that reflects the waves of the ocean. His buildings interact with nature, working with the surrounding environment.

The requirements for the Stevens House included living, dining and kitchen areas, five bedrooms and bathrooms, a painting studio, children's playroom and a swimming pool. Lautner recounted how he responded to these requirements in his monograph:

A lot of this size has always been the same: impossible! My first bout with the site and the requirements made me aware of just how difficult it would be to put all desired rooms and spaces on this property, particularly considering building setbacks and height limits. A prior architect had given up on including a pool. When I was first called in, I asked the owner to avoid telling me what he had heard, but rather to express his needs, whatever they might be. He did so, and I went to work on them.

Given the effects of salt air and the resulting maintenance problems, concrete seemed to be the best material to use. Concrete also allowed us to build a catenary curved shell, a form structurally in compression throughout, so there would never be any cracks or leaks following completion. The catenary curve resembles a wave which was suitable for the beach environment. The orientation of the shell reverses in the middle of the house, opening spaces to the ocean on the one side and the mountains on the other. Using five levels in this concrete structure, physically small but unconfined rooms were designed, fitting all the owners' needs.³⁶

The one-of-a-kind Stevens House is a true reflection of Lautner's adaptable and ever-changing style and unique designs. Lautner viewed each new site as a challenge. His goal was not to find a way of adapting the land to the building but to adapt the building to the land. At the Stevens House, he used the movement of the waves to create a roof design that allowed the structure to be open and spacious feeling even on a very narrow lot. His design also allowed him to include the ubiquitous California swimming pool into the restrictive, narrow lot.

The Stevens House was published in *Architectural Record* in 1971 as one of twenty exceptional houses selected for that year's awards of excellence and design. They praised the "wave-like concrete structure" which allowed "the intersecting curves [to] expose elevations having windows. The living room and master bedroom thus gain views to the mountains as well as the beach and one of the children's rooms has a direct outlook on the ocean. This provision of light and views near the middle of the house is one of its best features. A conventional box-like structure on a lot like this one... would have major openings only at the ends." The article concluded by stating, "It is remarkable that a house on such a small lot has five bedrooms. The architect says this house 'became not only an exceptionally free solution for the site and client but an interesting and practical potential for high density living.' If similar houses were placed side by side there would be no windows looking into neighbors' windows and each house would have more light, privacy and better views."³⁷

³⁶ Frank Escher, editor. *John Lautner, Architect*. London: Aretmis London Limited, 1994. p165.

³⁷ "Building Types Study: Record Houses of the Year." *Architectural Record*. Mid-May 1971, p45.

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Because of the variety of designs and styles employed by Lautner his work was difficult to categorize during his lifetime and therefore little scholarly work was previously published. However, with the benefit of time and recognition his work is currently well documented. John's eldest daughter, Karol Lautner Peterson, set up the John Lautner Foundation in 1996 following the death of her father in 1994. The foundation was established as a non-profit institution "to celebrate and maintain the work of one of this century's most creative American architects...The foundation serves as a resource for information about Lautner works and intends to increase active participation in the preservation and maintenance of Lautner buildings."³⁸ A number of exhibitions have been produced to showcase his work.³⁹ The most recent exhibition took place in 2008 at the Hammer Museum of the University of California, Los Angeles. The exhibition, entitled "Between Earth and Heaven: The Architecture of John Lautner," was a major retrospective of John Lautner's career. The introductory text of the exhibit characterizes the importance of Lautner's work in the following way:

His designs are known for their radical innovation with specific attention to materiality, space and a consciousness of the natural environment...While Lautner has attained a cult-like status in the world of architecture and design, until now his achievement remains little known and often misunderstood by the public at large...An aesthetic, philosophical and social visionary, Lautner made buildings that continue to amaze architects and patrons alike with their formal variety and freedom, their structural originality and their sculptural force. Lautner's work has come to represent some of the most important examples of architecture in Southern California...Lautner is often referred to as an architect's architect and many renowned practitioners, such as Frank Gehry, have cited him as an abiding influence. One can see the influence and legacy of his vision time and again in the work of architects that have followed him.⁴⁰

Each building highlighted in the exhibition was represented by several original drawings with supplementary written narration. The Stevens House was included in the exhibition, as well as featured in the accompanying book.

Seven of Lautner's buildings are locally designated Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments (HCM): Sheats (L'Horizon) Apartments (HCM-367, Los Angeles, CA, 1948); Mauer Residence (HCM- 481, Los Angeles, CA, 1946); Midtown School (four buildings), (HCM-553, Los Angeles, CA, 1960); Malin (Chemosphere) Residence (HCM-785, Los Angeles, CA, 1960); James Goldstein Office (HCM-829, Los Angeles, CA, 1989); Wolff Residence (HCM-852, Hollywood, CA, 1961); Harpel House (HCM-896, Hollywood, CA, 1956). The City of Malibu, where the Stevens House is located, does not have a preservation ordinance therefore it is being nominated for inclusion in the National Register.

Two of his buildings are included in the 2008 Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) for Los Angeles County: 932 Rome Dr. (Los Angeles, CA, 1947) and Familian House, (Beverly Hills, CA, 1970). 932 Rome Dr. is listed as 7R, *Identified in reconnaissance level survey: not evaluated*; The Familian House is listed as 5S2, *Individual property that is eligible for local listing or designation*.

Lautner's work has been published in magazines and the subject of museum exhibitions. His buildings have appeared in many films and commercials, including *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971, Elrod House), *Body Double* (1984, Malin

³⁸ <<http://www.johnlautner.org/wp/?p=10>> accessed on November 24, 2008.

³⁹ A list of exhibitions showcasing the work of John Lautner can be found in: Nicholas Olsberg, editor. *Between Earth and Heaven: the Architecture of John Lautner* New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2008. p228.

⁴⁰ <<http://www.hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/139/>> accessed on November 14, 2008.

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House / Chemosphere), *Less Than Zero* (1987, Silvertop), *The Big Lebowski* (1998, Sheats-Goldstein Residence), *Twilight* (1998, Jacobson House), *Charlie's Angeles, Part II: Full Throttle* (2003, Sheats-Goldstein Residence), *Happy Endings* (2005, Schaffer House).⁴¹ Many are included on architectural tours of Los Angeles, and have been featured in articles and magazines and in exhibitions around the world. *Architectural Record* chose the Stevens House as one of twenty houses of the year in its Record Houses of 1971 issue.⁴²

Conclusion

The Stevens House is highly representative of the work of John Lautner. As with each of Lautner's houses, the Stevens House is unique in its design. The way the concrete catenary curved shells allow for the swimming pool to be tucked under the roof and for the northern and southern ends of the house to be open to the ocean and the mountains, the design allows for an open feeling house on a very closed-in lot. Lautner employed the waves of the ocean in the design of the house. He used the natural environment that was around him confirming the design to the environment rather than the environment to the design. He altered notions of what constitutes and confines space, eliminating constricting forms such as walls and ceilings and had the willingness to work with new materials that allowed arcing rooflines and graceful patterns to take form. The Stevens House was the first structure that Lautner built in Malibu and the only one constructed in the Malibu Colony.

The Stevens House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion C as an exceptional example of the work of architect John Lautner and of Modernist residential architecture in Southern California. His philosophy was to design each house specifically for the site and the client's needs -- "My work is always for the client and determined by their requests."⁴³ The design of the Steven's House is unique because of its restrictive site and what the client wanted from that site. This creative thinking has created a varied and exceptional body of work. Even though he disliked having a style attributed to his work, and in retrospect his work defies categorization, it is Modernist by nature because of the period in which he worked and the influence he received from studying under Frank Lloyd Wright. Like other Modernists he created open floor plans, used glass and concrete and steel. However, Lautner's main concern was his use of space and its relation to nature, of finding ways to connect the interior with the exterior and making the architecture part of its surroundings.

Although the Stevens House is less than fifty years old, it is an exceptional example of the work of Lautner and his contribution to the Modernist idiom and sufficient time has passed to understand the property's historical significance. Lautner's work is currently well documented with several scholarly books and articles published, in addition to well researched exhibitions. Because his first buildings date to the 1940s it is possible to take a longer look back at his career and understand his philosophy that is evident in his later designs including the Stevens House. The property meets Criteria Consideration G because of its exceptional importance. The design of the Stevens House is an innovative and successful solution for the site and the client; a large family house with ample light and views, and a pool, on a narrow restrictive lot. It is a striking example of nature drawn inward; the catenary curved shells bring light, space and nature into the deepest recesses of the house and provide the necessary privacy from nearby neighbors. The

⁴¹ Movies featuring Lautner buildings. <<http://www.johnlautner.org/wp/?p=32>> accessed on November 26, 2008.

⁴² "Building Types Study: Record Houses of the Year." *Architectural Record* Mid-May 1971, pp44-47.

⁴³ Frank Escher, editor. John Lautner, Architect. London: Aretmis London Limited, 1994. p125.

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Stevens House would be the first of Lautner's work to achieve National Register status, an honor long overdue for an architect of Lautner's stature and remarkable design capabilities.

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Section 10: Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

LAND OF MATTHEW KELLER IN THE RANCHO TOPANGA MALIBU SEQUIT LOT COM S 821.22 FT AND N 76°25'30"
W 215 FT FROM ENGR STA 944 + 81.47 IN C/L OF MALIBU RD (PER ... SEE MAPBOOK FOR MISSING PORTION
... LOT 3

APN: 4458-004-038

Verbal Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire city lot historically associated with the Stevens House.

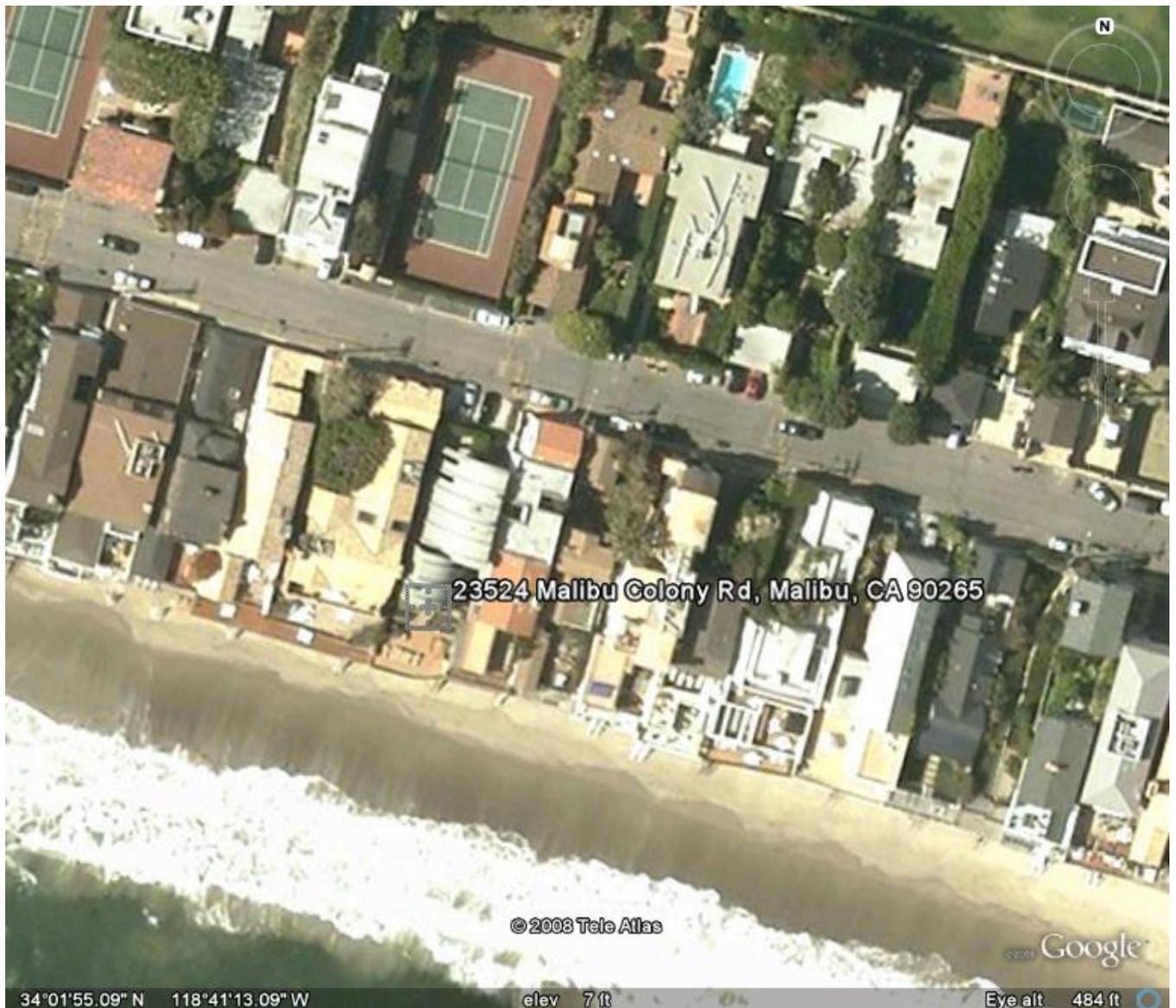
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Sketch Map

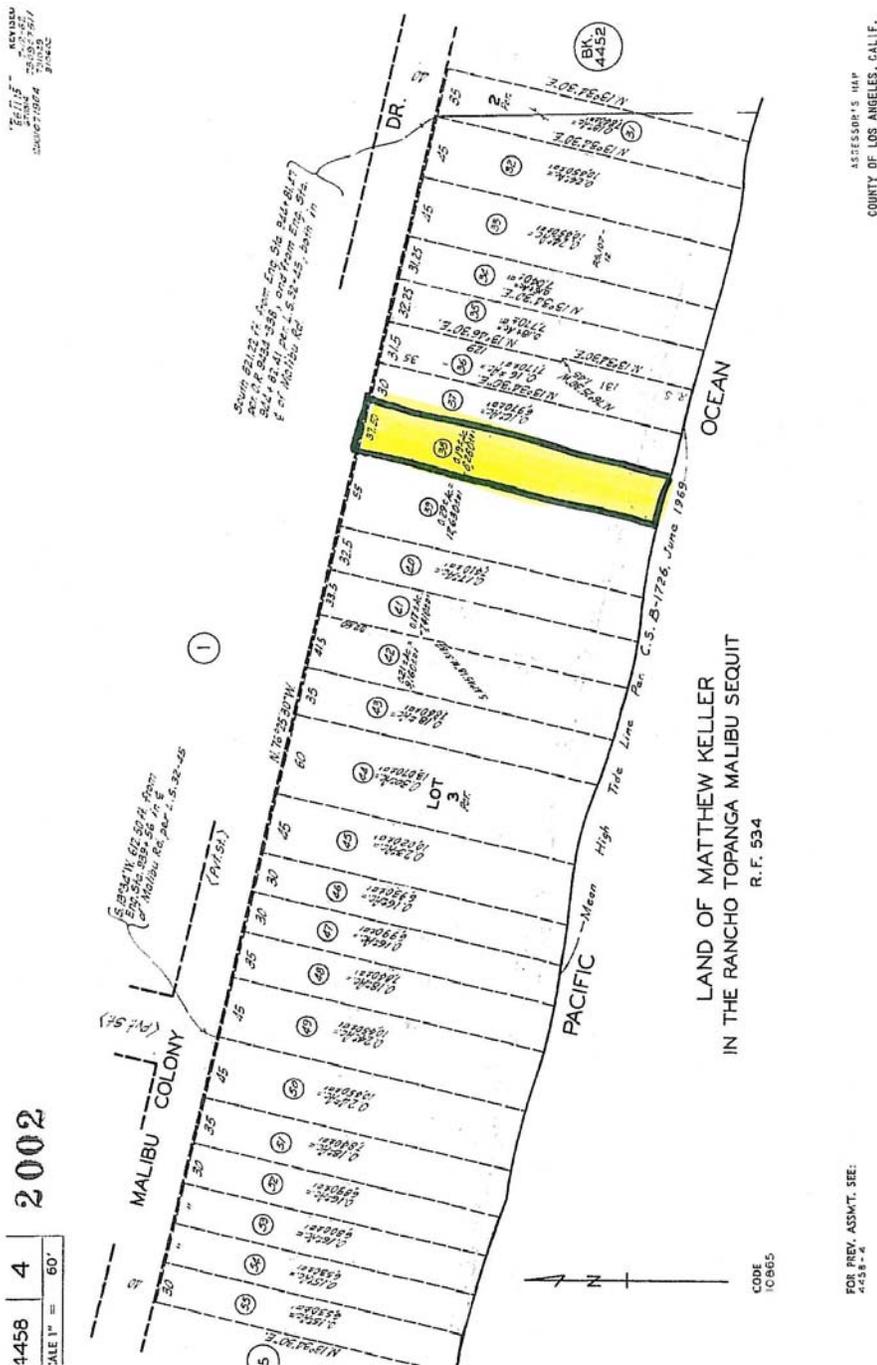


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Additional Documentation: Photographs

Name: Stevens House

Location: Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: Carly Caryn

Date of Photographs: August 2008

Location of Negatives: Historic Resources Group
1728 Whitley Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90028

1. North and West Elevations; View: Southeast
2. North and East Elevations; View: Southwest
3. East and South Elevations; View: Northwest
4. South Elevation; View: Northwest
5. South Elevation; View: North
6. Pool, South Elevation; View: Northeast
7. Pool, South Elevation; View: Southwest
8. Rear deck, South Elevation; View: East
9. Rear deck, South Elevation; View: Southwest
10. Front entrance gate, North Elevation; South
11. Front entrance garden, North Elevation; North
12. Front entrance, North Elevation; View: South
13. North Elevation windows; View: Southwest
14. Front door and dining room, ground level; View: North
15. Front door and dining room, ground level; View: Northeast
16. Staircase from dining room, ground level; View: South
17. Front door and kitchen entrance, ground level; View: Northeast
18. Kitchen, ground level; View: Northwest
19. Staircase from living room, ground level; View: Northeast
20. Living room, ground level; View: South
21. Living room, ground level; View: Southwest
22. Living room fireplace, ground level; View: Southwest
23. Living room and pool, ground level; View: North
24. Living room from staircase, ground level; View: South
25. North windows and hall decorative detail from staircase; View: North
26. Hall to master bedroom, upper level; View: South
27. Master bedroom, upper level; View: Southwest
28. Master bedroom, upper level; View: Northwest
29. Central hallway, upper level; View: North
30. Little room with stairs to south loft, upper level; View: South

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31. South loft; View: Northeast
 32. South loft; View: Southeast
 33. Bathroom (off little room & bedroom #2), upper level; View: Northeast
 34. Office with stairs to north loft, upper level; View: Southwest
 35. North loft; View: Southwest