

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

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PLEASE NOTE

National Register of Historic Places (National Register) nominations are considered **drafts** until listed by the Keeper of the National Register (Keeper). Nominations can be changed at the State Historical Resources Commission meeting based on comments received by, but not limited to:

- Local governments;
- Owners;
- State Historic Preservation Officer;
- Office of Historic Preservation Staff;
- State Historical Resources Commission; and
- General public.

National Register nominations may also be changed by the Keeper prior to listing. Nominations needing substantive changes may require recirculation to all interested parties for additional review and comment.

California Register of Historical Resources nominations are considered **drafts** until approved for listing or formally determined eligible for listing by the State Historical Resources Commission. Nominations can be changed at the State Historical Resources Commission meeting based on comments received by, but not limited to:

- Local governments;
- Owners;
- State Historic Preservation Officer;
- Office of Historic Preservation Staff;
- State Historical Resources Commission; and
- General public.

California Points of Historical Interest nominations are considered **drafts** until approved for listing by the State Historical Resources Commission and the Director of California State Parks. Nominations can be changed at the State Historical Resources Commission meeting based on comments received by, but not limited to:

- Local governments;
- Owners;
- State Historic Preservation Officer;
- Office of Historic Preservation Staff;
- State Historical Resources Commission;
- General public.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 any 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 Gill, Merwyn C., House

Other names/site number _____

2. Location

Street & Number 1385 El Mirador Drive

Not for Publication N/A

City or Town Pasadena

Vicinity N/A

State California Code CA County Los Angeles

Code 039

Zip Code 91103

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 forth 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 _____

Date _____

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government _____

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

Signature of commenting official/Title _____

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of Keeper _____

Date of Action _____

 entered in the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain): _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> total

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

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

roof Plastic/tempered Masonite panels. asphalt, polyurethane foam, fiberglass

walls Glass, stucco, fiberglass, plastic, wood

walls _____

other _____

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

Please see Section 7 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)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B 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.
- C
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)	Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
Architecture	N/A
Period of Significance	Cultural Affiliation
1964	N/A
Significant Dates	Architect/Builder
1964	Buff, Straub and Hensman

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

Please see Section 8 Continuation Sheets.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Please see Section 9 Continuation Sheets. Please see the MPS form .

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: City of Pasadena Planning Department

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 1.14

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	11	391331	3		
2			4		

 See continuation sheet.Verbal Boundary Description
See continuation sheet.Boundary Justification
See continuation sheet.**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title	Barbara Lamprecht and Daniel Paul, Architectural Historians	
Organization	Jones & Stokes	Date April 4, 2008
Street & Number	811 W. 7 th Street, Suite 800	Telephone 213-627-5376
City or Town	Los Angeles	State CA Zip Code 90027

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.

Photographs

Representative photographs of the property.

Property Owner

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

Name	Merwyn C. Gill, Gill Family	
Organization		Telephone (62) 796-2825
Street & Number	1385 El Mirador Drive	
City or Town	Pasadena	State CA Zip Code 91103

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 listings. 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.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to range from approximately 18 hours to 36 hours depending on several factors including, but not limited to, how much documentation may already exist on the type of property being nominated and whether the property is being nominated as part of a Multiple Property Documentation Form. In most cases, it is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form to meet minimum National Register documentation requirements. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

*Gill, Merwyn C., House
Los Angeles County, California*

Section 7 Page 5

MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Description

Summary Paragraph

The Gill, Merwyn C. House is identified as Assessor Parcel Number 5705-010-009, located at legal tract number 14495 of lot 8. This is the parcel historically associated with the property. The property is located within the corporate limits of the City of Pasadena, California; specifically, within that portion of the city west of the Arroyo Seco. The property is located at 1385 El Mirador Drive in Pasadena, California, on the north side of El Mirador Drive, between Wellington Avenue and Rutherford Drive. The lot is a flag lot with a narrow portion extending north from El Mirador Drive to the main portion of the lot, which is located behind (north of) properties with direct frontage on El Mirador Drive.

The M.C. Gill house is a 2,600-square-foot, post-and-beam, flat-roofed, one-story house on a gently sloping “flag” lot located on the hills in the Linda Vista area of west Pasadena. The house is marked by strong, bold horizontal lines, many experimental materials, subtle change in elevation, and volumes that project from the larger enclosure as either exterior or interior rooms. This house reflects masterful work, a close collaboration with a sophisticated, technologically innovative client for over half a century, and incorporates highly custom work, rich and/or avante materials, and a setting whose tropical and extensive landscaping has gained national renown. As with most Buff, Straub, & Hensman designs, the house both feels embedded in nature while taking advantage of sweeping views of the mountains, using glass for view walls and translucent or opaque walls elsewhere. The house has had some interior alterations and minor exterior changes, all joint collaborations between architects and client, which do not affect the home’s integrity. It continues to convey its historical significance.

Description

The sense of procession and the realization of landscape as a critical interstitial element in unifying building and setting is illustrated here to an unprecedented degree in the firm’s work thus far. The long driveway, almost an easily missed from the street, approaches the house on a broad curve that becomes tangent to the long protected walkway on the west side of the house. This leads south to the garden area defining the public entrance, where one turns 90 degrees to the east to reach the front door, sheltered by a broad roof overhang.

The house features strong directional circulation paths for the public route into the house, beginning with the long walkway aligned with the west side of the carport. The east side of this broad path has plastic panels (now altered, see below). Shielding the house, they are set between wood posts, setting up a sense of rhythm for the visitor by introducing the 8’ module used throughout the design. The canopy above is walnut planking that is separated by a short gap from the panel wall, providing daylight on both sides. This path, which defines the west edge of the outdoor rooms noted above, makes a right turn to a slightly narrower path that leads into the house and that is defined by a smaller module, introducing a more domestic scale into this house, notable in feeling much larger than it is. Several smaller unconditioned spaces provide immediate intimacy with nature in the bedrooms, all oriented to preserve privacy.

The house is arranged as a T, with the living room and master suite contained in the stroke and the rest of the spaces, including the carport, in the stem. This stem is not arranged in a rigid linear way but as a series of interlocking volumes of “positive” and “negative” spaces, some of which are conditioned, “habitable” space. Others, unconditioned and exterior, are used for landscaping, terraces and patios that serve to simultaneously separate and connect the conditioned interior spaces. These volumes step out or in as outdoor “rooms.”

A rectangular family pool oriented north-south terminates the plan on the south.

A modernized Japanese influence is very evident here. For example, the south elevation features five bays of eight feet. Four bays are glass floor-to-ceiling opening to a balcony with a simple wood fence that is sheltered by the roof of the same depth as the balcony. A fifth and centered bay, a two-story wall of white-painted stucco steps out to the line of the roof/balcony, and

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*Gill, Merwyn C., House
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Section 7 Page 6

MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

serves to divide the elevation and balconies into two equal and identical parts. This small volume's east wall is opaque and acts as a small landscaped garden visually and physically available to the galley master bathroom immediately adjacent to the north. East of this volume's wall lies the balcony to the living room. The staircase acts to unify the composition, giving this elevation a taut yet calm effect. The fifth bay is also distinguished from the others in that in front of it, a series of wide steps leading from the east-most balcony, slightly deeper than that on the west, to the pool area and family space tucked into the hillside below the top stoke of the "T" that defines living room and master suite. The line of the balcony is further strengthened by the wide wood fascia band at the floor line, below the simple wooden fence. Overall, the elevation is reminiscent of the 17th century Katsura Imperial Villa.

The original and extant materials of the house contribute to its significance as character defining feature. Of primary importance are plastics of various compositions and ages, found in the roof, in skylights, interior and exterior wall panels. The roof/ceiling panel is Gill factory-made 4x8 panels, 2 1/2" thick. There are three types of panels, or "sandwiches." Two are used for opaque roofing: a core of either honeycomb paper or polyurethane foam is sandwiched between 1/4" walnut for the ceiling and a layer of fiberglass on the exterior. The honeycomb paper sandwiches are used for overhangs and the carport because they are cheaper and have less insulating value. The third type of sandwich is used for skylights, which Gill has added throughout the house over time. This is composed of translucent or clear fiberglass and clear fiberglass at the ceiling plane level, giving a soft, glareless light; the grid and geometry of the 4" Masonite divisions add to the Oriental feeling throughout the house. Other materials and chemical composition are deployed depending on load and function, including polyester resins, fiberglass laminates, polyurethane and paper and balsa wood laminates. Special glu-lam beams were built up out of 2x4s at the Gill factory in El Monte under the supervision of architect and client and faced with walnut. All these materials and technologies were produced in Mr. Gill's factory in El Monte (the firm designed a handsome corporate headquarters there in 1973 with trademark glass and interior landscaping). A custom brick, a rich dark red, is used for indoor and outdoor walls in a running brick pattern; the typical exposed wood beams, joists and rafters of wood are seen throughout the house. These are treated with a clay-colored stain to blend in with the earth tones of the house. Other character-defining features found here include horizontal runs of soffit lighting in the kitchen and living room, suspended wood frames with translucent plastic panels, and a built-in sofa in the living room.

Alterations

All of the alterations were done in collaboration with client and architects, including recent changes under Dennis Smith, current principal/president of the firm. No spatial layouts or the existing footprint were altered. The most noticeable changes are the enclosure and renovation of a secondary landscaped area that was part of the original master bath in the mid 1990s and the replacement of the screens on the porch off the dining room with solid glass with no alteration of window openings. Most of the other changes addressed replacing original (and then avant-garde) materials with even more state-of-the-art materials, such as replacing the original translucent panels in the original path to the house with custom blue patterned glass and replacing opaque ceilings with the skylight "sandwich" units to gain more light. The panels in the free-standing screen at the entrance have been replaced with stained art glass designed by Hester Gill, who was also responsible for the landscaping. The kitchen countertop was replaced by petrified wood, and secondary bathrooms were also renovated.

These changes, done in collaboration between architect and client, a practice and way of working which never changed, reflect minor adaptations to new conditions. The most important change was to the master bathroom and the alteration of its relationship to the outdoors. However, none of these changes affect the integrity of the house, including location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling, and association, and the house readily conveys its historical significance.

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*Gill, Merwyn C., House
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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Statement of Significance

The Gill House is one of Buff, Straub and Hensman's masterworks.

This large, well-appointed house is distinctive within the firm's canon for two reasons. First, the unusually intense, productive, and friendly collaboration between architect and client led to the architectural integration of state-of-the-art plastics that the client developed as a result of technologies he invented and/or refined the World War II effort, and the firm's more typical (and far more low-tech) palette of natural materials such as wood, brick and stone.

These state-of-the-art materials were employed not just for both structural and ornamental the structure and during the construction of the house but as part of the on-going maintenance and changes to the house, a sustained half-century-plus collaboration between client and architect. The attitude of the inventor/owner, M.C. Gill,¹ is casual with regard to those post-war plastics in the sense that he was never adverse to changing things as new products devised by his firm became available and were deemed superior or worthy of investigation. This attitude where materials were not deified or considered as too precious to tamper with (a very Modernist approach based on an experimental attitude to materials and methods) coexisted easily with a respect and love for fine natural materials and their inherent worth and beauty. Gill, or "M.C." as he is usually called, loved tinkering on the house, as Buff did as well: in a way, this was a very malleable "machine for living," to paraphrase Le Corbusier. (Though 97 years old, this USC grad '37 still goes to work at his firm, now world renowned for its innovations in plastics used in the aerospace and airline industries.)

Finally, the house also demonstrates the attention to integrating the building and the experience of architecture into the site so characteristic of the work of Buff, Straub, & Hensman. Conrad Buff's insistence on this commanding but very private 1.4 acre site, which contains its own prospect as well as a small ravine (rather than other nearby, larger sites), illustrate the architect's perennial concern for the "genius loci" of a specific setting for a specific client.

The Gill House exemplifies a seamless integration between the woodsy, easy, disarmingly apparent informality of the Buff, Straub, & Hensman tradition and the application of precise, state-of-the-art materials that today might be termed "technology transfer." The house demonstrates an exceptionally quality of design, is the work of a master architect, retains its integrity, and conveys its historical significance.

Significance—Conclusion

Criterion C- Eligible

As demonstrated above, the Gill House, a single-family house designed by master architects Buff, Straub and Hensman meets the registration requirements as outlined in the MPS. It has retained to a high degree the respective required aspects of integrity, seen in its retention of character-defining features. It is an excellent example of the firm's body of work, as well as embodying the larger architectural concerns and expressions of Pasadena's "Recent Past" as described in the Context Statement.² It is an outstanding example of the integration of high-tech materials developed as a response to World War II into a palette of materials more characteristic of Arts and Crafts architecture but in an architectural form and expression unique to Mid-Century Modernism as realized in Southern California, Los Angeles, and Pasadena. It is significant as demonstrating innovation in residential Modernism within the MPS period of significance, 1964. Therefore, it is eligible to qualify for listing under Criterion C, Architecture and Design, at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1948 – 1968.

¹ Interview with M.C. Gill, 13 February 2008.

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Criterion Consideration G- Eligible

As demonstrated above, the Gill House is of exceptional importance in the work of Buff, Straub & Hensman for three reasons. It exemplifies an exceptionally high quality of design, distilling their values toward site and setting and philosophy of residential architecture into this residence. The house embodies the unique “can do” post-World War II attitude by both client and architect, the first an industrialist developing state-of-the-art wartime materials for peacetime use, the other, Conrad Buff and his colleagues, war veterans who sought challenges. Finally, in contrast to other versions of Modernism, the house demonstrates the popular appeal of Buff, Straub & Hensman’s architecture to a broad range of Americans.

For these reasons, the residence meets Criterion Consideration G.

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Los Angeles County, California
MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena*

Bibliographic References

Archives, Buff, Straub and Hensman. Office, 1450 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena 91105.

Gill, M.C. Interview. February 13, 2008.

Los Angeles Times Home Magazine. 1969. "A View to Tomorrow." March 23. 35.

Masonry Industry. "A Decorous Addition to Office Building." 1975. December. 10, 11.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

*Gill, Merwyn C., House
Los Angeles County, California*

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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Photographs

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: looking southeast, northwest corner
CA_LosAngelesCounty_512GlenCourt1.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: northwest elevation, view southeast.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive2.tiff



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Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail, Looking East along South elevation
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive3.tiff



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Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail, Looking Southeast, Northwest corner
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive4.tiff



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Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail, Looking Southeast, Northwest corner
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive5.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: northeast elevation, view southwest.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive6.tiff



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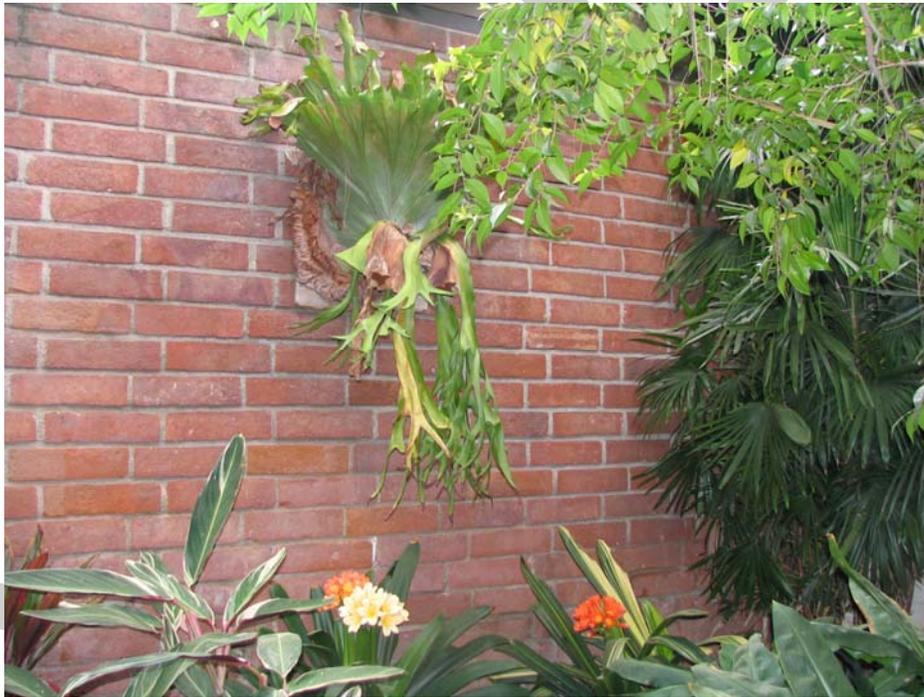
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*Gill, Merwyn C., House
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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail of brickwork and plants.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive7.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail, interior light fixture.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive8.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Interior detail
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive9.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail, light fixture.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive10.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: detail of exterior elements, view northwest.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive11.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: Detail of exterior elements.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive12.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena
Los Angeles County, California
Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes
March 24, 2008
Negative: Jones & Stokes
View: detail of garden surrounded by water and patio.
CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive13.tiff



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MPS: Cultural Resources of the Recent Past—City of Pasadena

Gill House – Pasadena

Los Angeles County, California

Barbara Lamprecht, Jones & Stokes

March 24, 2008

Negative: Jones & Stokes

View: interior detail of living space in relation to exterior patio and surroundings.

CA_LosAngelesCounty_1385ElMiradorDrive14.tiff

