

**PRIMARY RECORD**

Primary #  
HRI #  
Trinomial  
NRHP Status Code 3CS

Other Listings  
Review Code

Reviewer

Date

Page 1 of 29      Resource name(s) or number (assigned by recorder): Ruth Nelson Taylor House

**P1. Other Identifier:** 1345 La Mirada Street

**\*P2. Location:** Unrestricted

**DRAFT**

**\*a. County** Orange

**\*b. USGS 7.5' Quad** Laguna Beach **Date** 2015

**\*c. Address** 1345 La Mirada Street      **City** Laguna Beach      **Zip** 92651

**\*d. Latitude/Longitude Coordinates:** Latitude: 33.533758, Longitude: -117.761196

**\*e. Other Locational Data:** Orange County Tax Assessor's Property Number 644-39-115

**\*P3a. Description:**

The Ruth Nelson Taylor House is a two-story, Mid-Century Modern style, Expressionist/Organic subtype residence configured in a rectangular plan. Its Mid-Century and Expressionist/Organic features include the two-story height, horizontal massing, simple geometric forms, expressed post-and-beam construction, the irregularly shaped, steeply angled roof with overhanging eaves and decorative, cantilevered canopy. Character-defining features also include the unadorned wall surfaces, natural wood and plaster used as exterior finishes and accent materials, flush-mounted, metal frame windows and doors, clerestory windows, angled deck and restrained exterior decorative detailing. The Expressionist subtype is expressed in its sculptural form, limited front and side fenestration, and deeply recessed entry. Organic features are its simplicity; the use of few materials (natural wood, plaster, and roof); the bold, slanted shape; and its sense of privacy—a closed appearance to the street contrasted with open orientation to expansive views and its close relationship to the hillside site. [continued on page 3]

**\*P3b. Resource Attributes:** (list attributes and codes)      HP2. Single family property; HP38. Women's property

**\*P4. Resources Present:**  Building Structure     Object     Site     District     Element of District     Other

**P5a. Photo or Drawing** (Photo required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



**\*P5b. Photo:** (view and date)

View northwest, October 2022. Note story poles and exposed canopy attachments.

**\*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Sources:**  
historic; 1962, Building Permit

**\*P7. Owner and Address:**

Gregory Jones  
1345 La Mirada Street  
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

**\*P8. Recorded by:**

C. Jurca and F. Smith  
31423 Coast Highway, No. 28  
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

**\*P9. Date Recorded:** October 10, 2022; revised August 15, 2023

**\*P10. Survey Type:** Intensive

**\*P11. Report Citation:** California Register of Historical Resources Nomination

**\*Attachments:**  None     Location Map     Sketch Map     Continuation Sheet     Building, Structure, and Object Record  
 Archaeological Record     District Record     Linear Feature Record     Milling Station Record     Rock Art Record  
 Artifact Record     Photograph Record     Other (list)

## BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Page 2 of 29

\*NRHP Status Code 3CS

\*Resource Name or # Ruth Nelson Taylor House

B1. Historic name: Ruth Nelson Taylor House

B2. Common name: Skyhill House (on plaque at entrance)

B3. Original Use: single-family residence B4. Present use: same

\*B5. **Architectural Style:** Mid-Century Modern, Expressionist/Organic subtypes

\*B6. **Construction History:** Completed in 1962 (Building Permit). Subdivision of lot completed in 1961.

\*B7. **Moved?** No  Yes  Unknown **Date:** **Original Location:**

\*B8. **Related Features:**

B9a. Architect: Donald E. Evenson (designer)

b. Builder: unknown

\*B10. **Significance: Theme:** Design

**Area:** Laguna Beach

**Period of Significance:** 1962 **Property Type:** single-family residence **Applicable Criteria:** 3

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity)

The residence was completed in 1962 for Ruth Elizabeth Nelson Taylor. Mrs. Taylor was born in 1913 on a farm in Utah. At the age of 21, she married Linniel Edwin “Buck” Taylor (1911-1977) in Los Angeles. The Taylors lived in Montebello and later settled in Whittier with their four children (Census 1940). Mrs. Taylor was an independent woman and wide-ranging artist, as described in her death notice:

Beginning in high school... Ruth had a ballet and tap school, where she designed costumes and sets. She graduated from Chou[i]nard Art [Institute] and designed clothing in Los Angeles. After marriage and children, she formed a children's clothing business.... As an artist, she painted water color [sic] landscapes and still life and was a professional photographer in her later years. Her art work [sic] was displayed at various exhibits from Cambria to Southern California (*Whittier Daily News* 2002).

According to Mrs. Taylor’s youngest child, Bill, she relocated to Laguna Beach after separating from her husband (Taylor 2022). She worked variously as a dance teacher and as a real estate agent with Owners Realty (*Laguna Beach Directory* 1963 and classified ads, *Laguna Beach News Post* various dates). After the second World War, increasing numbers of women in the United States became real estate agents (Hornstein 2002).

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: None

(List attributes and codes)

\*B12. **References:** See page 11.

B13. Remarks: none

\*B14. **Evaluator:** C. Jurca and F. Smith

\***Date of Evaluation:** October 2022; revised August 2023

### Abbreviated Sketch Map

Property outlined in red, no scale ↑ N

See Continuation Sheet page 19 for context



## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 3 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

ContinuationUpdate

\*P3a. Description: Continued from page 1

The very distinctive design is characterized by a deeply angled, exterior side wall with a single, main sloped roof plane and the other demising walls all built plumb and vertical. At the main (southwest) corner, the recessed entrance was originally punctuated by a distinctive, two-sided, canted canopy that wrapped around the south and east walls (**Figure 1**). The canopy was removed sometime after 2018 (**Photo 1**). The main façade finish punctuates the established, angular geometry and is beveled, natural wood, thick clapboard siding, which adroitly wraps around the finished sides, imparting both depth and texture (**Photo 2**). Exterior walls are finished in a variety of materials, including the composition shingled roof that wraps around the south (left) side in two separate planes in the same angle, one full height, the other stepped out and terminating just over the inset entrance. An at-grade covered parking stall is tucked just behind and beneath the angled front façade and shares the low space with the main entrance and a utility closet (**Photo 3**). The street-facing façade follows the angled slope of the roof, with an angled ribbon of continuous clearstory windows set high on the wall on a deep, exaggerated thin sill supported on angled, triangular supports with a belt of vertically set louvered windows below following the established angle.

The recessed entrance is typical of the Expressionist style. The low-ceilinged area contains a slab door with obscure glass in the flanking sidelights. Beyond the entrance, triangular walls neatly conceal two louvered doors in a utility area. The otherwise dimly lit carport area has a band of continuous windows set into the end-wall where the floating (north) wall terminates (**Photo 3**).

The overall effect of a person passing from the carport and perpendicular entrance to the interior of the house would be “embrace” or “compress and release” as described and practiced by Frank Lloyd Wright and others. Low-ceilinged, constricted spaces lead to the naturally illuminated, spacious area of the residence as expressed in this instance.

The canted, south exterior wall is much higher on the south (left) side than the north (right), which in part establishes the façade’s precise geometry (**Figure 1**). The south wall is two units, the stepped out front plane (above, center of image), with an inset roof plane that spans nearly the full building height. The composition roof is unequal sides in length. It has overhanging eaves finished in painted tongue-and-groove wood. The roof has square, simple rain gutters and downspouts on the north side. The fenestration is limited at the front and side elevations as described. The rear of the residence is nearly entirely open, with full-height windows and sliding doors facing down the downhill side providing broad views of the city, shoreline, and ocean. An engaged, right-angle triangular deck continues the overall thesis of interplay of irregular shapes at the rear elevation. That deck has a canted railing, with sets of three uprights supporting double handrails. The painted wood railing’s uprights visually pierce the plane of the deck (**Photos 5, 6**). A first floor featuring sliding glass doors is inset in the hillside (**Photo 6**).

The resulting, very controlled design is a delicate balance of angled tension, with skillfully controlled solids and voids placed organically in a steep natural hillside. The property is graded into the hillside and has a small, irregularly shaped front yard with two angled, paved parking spaces. A paved driveway leads to the carport from a main driveway that serves two other lots on the west side. A shared three-property wood mailbox is located on the south side (**Photo 7**). Limited exterior alterations are: replacement of wood shingle with composition roof, removal of a geometric feature at the north elevation and removal of south-

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 4 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

facing concrete retaining wall (dates unknown, ESA Memorandum 2023). The southwest corner entrance canopy was removed sometime after 2018. The building appears to be in good condition.

There is a “floating” end-wall on the north side, which was a somewhat familiar feature of high style Mid-Century design (**Photo 8**). At the (northeast) corner, it steps beyond the façade, forming a right-angle, clipped triangle form. It is stepped out from the main volume by an inset, continuous, amber-colored, ice patterned glass, in vogue at the time, that allowed natural light with privacy. That exterior end-wall has a large, fixed, window at the rear of the building, toward the downslope ocean and hillside view. The roof above is supported on shaped triangular rafters with narrow bands of vertical louvered windows spanning the small spaces between them. The north end-wall is primly clad in smooth plaster and extends beyond the main front and rear walls.

On the south side, the roof ridge of the entrance roof-wall is higher than the inset plane. The resulting interstitial space between those planes has louvered windows and a partial screen (**Photo 9**).

The property is located in a neighborhood of hillside single-family homes, most of which are set primarily in narrow, deep lots, some flat and graded, others are steeply sloped (**Sketch Map**). The surrounding residences are a variety of unrelated styles and are generally two stories in height. Located on the west side of La Mirada, the property is differentiated from neighbors in the degree to which its design addresses the street, which faces away from the ocean views.

\***B10. Significance:** Continued from page 2

Mrs. Taylor purchased the property in 1961 in the Arch Beach Heights neighborhood of Laguna Beach, a steeply sloped hillside composed of unusually narrow, 25 feet wide lots. She owned six lots in total and subdivided the difficult-to-build hillside properties into four larger lots (Orange County 1961). Between 1961 and 1965, with her mother, Mertie Nelson Withers, they transferred ownership of the properties between themselves five times, for reasons unknown. Part of the reason that is important is because in 1961, a woman could not apply for a credit card in her own name, which means that developing ocean view property must have required exceptional effort. It was not until 1974 when the Equal Credit Opportunity Act passed that discrimination on the basis of gender was prohibited.

The Arch Beach Heights tract was subdivided and recorded in 1911. The steep and narrow hillside lots were largely notional, however, as streets had been platted without regard for the steep topography and lots were often inaccessible (Laguna Beach Landscape and Scenic Highways Element 1995; Laguna Beach, Open Space and Conservation Element 1984).<sup>1</sup> Development potential in Arch Beach Heights began in earnest in 1948, when Bruce Countryman acquired 829 lots and built eleven houses by 1949 (ESA Memorandum 2023). He successfully petitioned the Laguna Beach County Water District to annex the property, and he extended Summit Drive to the top of the hill where it connected with La Mirada, making lots more accessible (Landscape and Scenic Highways Element 1995). Numerous residences were completed or under construction in the neighborhood by 1963, including homes designed by Evenson at

<sup>1</sup> Confusingly, the Arch Beach Heights “Addition,” which is southeast and non-contiguous with the Arch Beach Heights area under discussion, was also subdivided in 1911. The Addition was not as steep and thus developed earlier, with informal beach cottages, in the 1920s and especially the 1930s, after an official road was constructed in 1933.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 5 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

931 Summit (1961) and 1105 Summit (1963, **Figures 2 and 3**). Arch Beach Heights became part of Laguna Beach in 1965 (*Laguna Beach and the Greenbelt* 2017).

Mrs. Taylor retained lot 25 for her own residence, and the house was completed in 1962 (Orange County Records 6047/418 1962). She later established an easement for a driveway to the hillside lots behind her property. Two lots were developed with single-family houses in 1968; the third remained a vacant lot until the 2000s.

Ruth Nelson Taylor’s development activities were not limited to Laguna Beach. While still a resident, she acquired forty acres of property in San Simeon, just north of Ragged Point, after visiting her son in boot camp at Fort Ord. In 1964, she applied to rezone the agricultural property to allow construction of a “resort-type motel, restaurant, art gallery, cabins, trailer camp and 41-lot subdivision” (“Planners Tour Resort Site” 1964). Given that her proposal came just two years after finalization of the Big Sur Coast Master Plan, which had been a “victory for conservationists” that codified a limited growth policy, promoted protection of viewsheds, and established “protection of the natural landscape... as the guiding principle of development a full decade before similar standards would be applied statewide in the Coastal Initiative,” her resort proposal, perhaps unsurprisingly, failed (Walton 2007).

She returned the following year with a slightly amended proposal, to which conservationists such as the Sierra Club as well as less disinterested parties like the Hearst Corporation objected (“Lines Drawn” 1965). This too did not pass (“Board to Guard Highway Beauty” 1965). In 1972 she built a residence on that property. In 1975, she lost another project decision, to subdivide a 15-acre parcel into three 5-acre parcels, which she appealed, unsuccessfully, to the Coastal Commission (“San Simeon Subdivision Hearing Set” 1975 and “Supervisors May Oppose” 1980).<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Taylor seems to have constantly been participating in activities that were at the time considered out of the ordinary. By 1970, she applied for a patent for a unique “Light Fixture With Changing Light Emission” design with Davis W. Pennington, for Kinetic Lighting (United States Patent Office 1972). The rotating fixture emitted illumination through small pinholes toward elongated prisms.<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Taylor’s arts education at Chouinard, the region’s leading art school before it became CalArts, and practice in a wide variety of arts—from dance to set and costume design, painting, and photography—evidence a well-trained, creative

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Taylor also played a prominent leadership role in opposing then-Senator Alan Cranston’s proposal to create the first national scenic area along the Big Sur coast and appropriate \$100 million for land acquisition. Later, Leon Panetta amended the proposal to create a conservation alliance headed by the Secretary of Agriculture, working with local officials and residents. Photographer Ansel Adams was the most noteworthy proponent of these proposals. Mrs. Taylor served as president of one local activist group called Committee Opposing Arrogant State Tyranny (COAST), which comprised fifteen property owners with about 1,000 acres along Highway 1. She traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1980 to speak against Panetta’s bill in committee. The “amateur lobbyist” expressed the opposition of residents who did not want the area to become a National Park, fearing that there would be state-taking of land and, ironically, given her unsuccessful efforts locally and at the state level, the curtailment of development rights (“Bittersweet Week for Activist Taylor” 1980). Both Cranston’s and Panetta’s bills to protect the Big Sur area ultimately failed.

<sup>3</sup> From what can be gleaned reviewing the drawing, that light would create an almost mystical pattern of evolving, changing colors in tiny beams. The distinctive, “mood lighting” fixture concept was entirely in keeping with the Expressionist architecture movement. Pennington was eventually granted patents for other inventions. No other records were found connecting Mrs. Taylor with Mr. Pennington.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 6 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

woman who was capable of embracing the innovative design program of the La Mirada Street property and Mrs. Taylor’s later house north of San Simeon. That residence is not visible from the street. A photograph from her son of the property under construction with satellite images reveals an innovative design based on two octagons with a rectangular, hyphen connector. Like the La Mirada Street property, it occupies a steeply sloped hillside lot (in this case perched dramatically over a cliff) with panoramic views of the ocean. She lived there from 1972 until shortly before her death in 2002. The architect is unknown, and the property was subsequently combined with the property next door at 19691 Cabrillo Highway.

According to her son, who lived at the La Mirada Street property off and on until 1966, when his mother sold it and moved into a rental, the credited designer of the residence was Donald E. (Bud) Evenson, which Mr. Evenson confirmed in an interview. Evenson was born in 1936 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where his father was a draftsman. He graduated from the University of Illinois School of Architecture in 1961 and moved to California in 1959 where he completed his last few units. Three year later, the *South Coast News* announced that Mr. Evenson received a \$3,000 Francis J. Plym Traveling Fellowship in Architecture from his alma mater. The article described his intention to study “past and present architecture in Japan and other oriental countries in relation to use of wood for structural purposes, and in visiting offices of prominent Asiatic and European architects” (*South Coast News* 1962).

Evenson obtained his architecture license in 1967, before which he served as a designer in Laguna Beach when he wasn’t on fellowship (Evenson 2022). Evenson is credited with designing sixteen homes in Orange County between 1961 and 1965, thirteen in Laguna Beach (ESA Memorandum 2023).<sup>4</sup> In addition to the Taylor House, other Evenson-designed single-family residences identified through newspaper records, building permits, and real estate listings include 981 Summit Drive (1961) and 732 Gainsborough Drive (1962, substantially altered) in Laguna Beach, 4022 Calle Lisa (1963) in San Clemente, and 4 Castanada Place (1966) in Monterey. A grainy photo in the *Laguna Beach Post* revealed a remarkable Monarch Bay residence that Evenson designed at 32702 Queen Catherine Court, in what is now Dana Point. which the paper celebrated as “Balanced Power Home... distinguished by the use of four hyperbolic paraboloids in the roof construction” (*Laguna Beach Post*, June 20, 1963). The no longer extant house was also covered in the *Los Angeles Times* (June 9, 1963).

Bud Evenson also designed his own Laguna Beach home in 1961. It was on a small parcel he received as payment for building designs. The diminutive but dramatic residence at 21302 Capistrano Avenue occupied the flat portion of a steep hillside lot and featured three walls of glass and a roof that was parts glass and plastic (Evenson 2022). It has since been demolished. Another Evenson-designed Laguna Beach residence at 1105 Summit Dr. (1963) has been significantly altered (ESA Memorandum 2023).

It appears that Evenson designed “additional houses on the east side of La Mirada,” at an unknown date and location (ESA Memorandum 2023). Neither permit and planning records nor visual inspection yield evidence of any extant buildings that would be recognizable as the work of Evenson.

<sup>4</sup> The ESA Memorandum includes the residence at Queen Catherine Court in Monarch Bay as a Laguna Beach property. It was built in a portion of unincorporated Orange County that later became Dana Point.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Page 7 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

Mr. Evenson left Laguna Beach in 1965. Returning from his fellowship travels, he found little work there and placed ads in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Well-known Laguna designer resuming practice after European architectural fellowship” and *San Francisco Examiner*, “Architectural designer... Europe Fellowship ’63, five years own office in L.A., desires creative position.” Each of the aforementioned designs used a remarkable amount of experimentation in forms and shapes, executed in natural wood and included bold boundary-testing. Considering the fact that Mr. Evenson was responsible for those executed designs so early in his career, those buildings represent a fearless and significant collection of work at the time for a confident young designer who was barely 30 years old by 1966.

He moved to Monterey and worked with a local planning firm, Hall & Goodhue. He continued to practice architecture with that firm (“Foil for a Flat Lot,” location unidentified, for the owner of an advertising firm in San Francisco) and designed a project in Napa that, if built, would have brought the first large modern hotel and conference center to the area (“New Resort Complex,” “Napa Valley Hilton” 1975). He was involved in a number of large-scale projects in California including Chamsil Tennis Club (Monterey), Village Green Condominiums (Carmel Valley Village), and Harris Court Business Park (Monterey) (ESA Memorandum 2023). In 1975 he contributed to a book on *Apartments, Townhomes & Condominiums* edited by a staff member at *Architectural Record*. He also turned his formidable talents to planning, which was a focus of his new employer. They prepared general and specific plans for Sonoma, Napa, Monterey, and the Big Sur Coast (“Prolific Peninsula Planner” 2011).

Mr. Evenson is retired (Evenson 2022). His executed, independent single-family residential design work between 1961 and 1966, before he became a licensed architect, represents a discrete period of audacious experimentation—bold shapes and distinctive volumes, clad in simple materials, on challenging hillside lots (some with ocean views), expressed a dynamism not found in his later career. The resulting homes are remarkable. Daring shapes are expressed in materials sensitive to their natural contexts, which make these designs unexpectedly fit into their settings. A tangible record of his early career is clearly expressed in this property’s daring design and remaining projects from that period. Because his practice changed direction from design and construction to planning and large-scale projects, this single-family design work should be considered Evenson’s primary period of importance. His purposeful creativity is clearly expressed in Evenson’s remaining, known, unaltered work between 1961 and 1966.

While Bud Evenson’s name is little known, he is, and was recognized as, an extremely talented architect, whose known residential hillside work exemplifies the dramatic possibilities of Mid-Century Modern architecture in coastal locations. The main design presentation of the Taylor House is Mid-Century Modern although it exhibits other strong influences. Mid-Century Modern is the broad term used for various types of post-war Contemporary architectural styles and industrial design. Its more academic subtype and precursor, International Style architecture, was characterized by the use of bold, geometric forms, simple wall surfaces, large expanses of glass, the integration of indoor spaces with the out of doors and minimal applied exterior or interior ornamentation. The style is equated with post-and-beam construction, clear expressions of structures and simple materials, large expanses of glass and open plans each of which is clearly presented in the Taylor House design.

The design indicates obvious characteristics of the rare Expressionist style as well. Expressionist architecture developed in Europe in the early twentieth century with related visual and performing arts

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 8 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

movements. Mrs. Taylor's demonstrated interest in the unconventional design type is entirely plausible considering her design, dance, and art background. The style was embodied in the use of novel materials, used in innovative ways frequently expressed in unusual massing, clearly demonstrated in this house. The individualist style often employed the distortion of common forms, with the concept that architecture could be an extension of art and the representation of "an inner experience" (*History of Art and Architecture* 2021). Like other examples of the style, the Ruth Nelson Taylor House design hints toward a sort of intangible spirituality.

In addition to Expressionism, the other subtype clearly expressed is Organic architecture. It was described in the book, *In the Cause of Architecture: Essays by Frank Lloyd Wright for Architectural Record, 1908-1952*:

Frank Lloyd Wright first used the term 'organic architecture' in ...*Architectural Record* in August 1914. He wrote that "the ideal of an organic architecture... is a sentient, rational building that would owe its 'style' to the integrity with which it was individually fashioned to serve its particular purpose—a 'thinking' as well as 'feeling' process (Wright and Guthheim 1975)... The concept of an organic style meant different things to different architects and manifested itself in a variety of ways....

[Buildings and sites] have a very special relationship in organic architecture. The site should be enhanced by the building, and the building derives its form partially from the nature of the site. [As evidenced in the subject property] Sometimes this is done by similarity (Prairie House and prairie landscape), sometimes by contrast (Fallingwater and a forest glen). In natural settings, the buildings may open out (Usonian houses), and in urban settings, turn inward (...Larkin and Johnson Wax Buildings). The building grows out of the landscape as naturally as any plant; its relationship to the site is so unique that it would be out of place elsewhere.

[Materials] are used simply in a way that enhances their innate character and optimizes their individual color, texture, and strength. One material is not disguised as another. The way a building comes together, how one material joins another; the very form of the building should be an expression of the nature of the materials used. In organic architecture, only a few materials are used, both inside and outside.

A building should convey a sense of shelter, refuge, or protection against the elements. Its inhabitants should never lack privacy or feel exposed and unprotected.

[Space] "The reality of the building does not consist of the roof and the walls but the space within to be lived in," said Wright. The interior space determines exterior form... Interior space is not packed in boxes called rooms; rather, space should flow freely from interior area to interior area. Rooms are never simple rectangles but are broken up vertically and horizontally (alcoves, L-shapes, lowered ceilings, and decks) to give the eye and mind something delightful and sometimes something mysterious to enjoy... One space can introduce another, heightening the effect, or function as part of a series...

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 9 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

Nature is an architect's school. The creative possibilities of form, color, pattern, texture, proportion, rhythm, and growth are all demonstrated in nature. Organic architecture does not imitate nature but is concerned with natural materials, the site, and the people who will occupy the buildings.

Not all organic architecture has ornament, but when used, it is developed as an integral part of the material, not applied...

Organic architecture is simple because its scheme and design are clear. "The highest form of simplicity is not simple in the sense that the infant intelligence is simple—nor, for that matter, the side of a barn. Simplicity in art is a synthetic positive quality in which we may see evidence of mind, breadth of scheme, wealth of detail and withal a sense of completeness found in a tree or flower."

As Wright... wrote, "The complete goal of the ideal of organic architecture is never reached. Nor need be. What worthwhile ideal is ever reached?"

The Ruth Nelson Taylor House expresses each of the described defining concepts of the Organic style. The form of the building is a clear expression of nature executed in a palette of limited, natural-appearing finish materials. The design conveys a clear sense of protection of and privacy to its users, opening toward an expansive view. Interior volumes unmistakably shape the unusual exterior plan and structure. The resulting atypical form, earth tone colors, natural patterns and materials with seemingly organic textures, and controlled proportions and rhythm make the house appear almost to have evolved from the hillside, although it was clearly man-made. The design has controlled, limited ornamentation. What seems simple at a glance is far more sensitively and sympathetically designed to fit into its environs than most buildings. Finally, the bold design of the residence conjures feelings from even the casual observer, which is part of its nearly unattainable purpose.

The design is a rare and singular expression of the Mid-Century Modern style with unmistakable Expressionist and Organic subtype characteristics. Its massing, simple geometric form, post-and-beam construction, irregularly shaped, angled roof with overhanging eaves and decorative, cantilevered canopy are each Mid-Century Modern. Expressionist concepts are embodied in the bold sculptural form, radical angled geometrical orientation and controlled volumes, and shrouded entrance with clear privacy concept. Some of the Organic features coincide with those of other identified styles, including its bold design intent, use of natural materials, and lack of applied ornamentation. Despite the careful design, its natural siting makes the house appear as though it spontaneously emerged from the hillside rather than being built on a schedule by tradesmen. In one small residential building, these interrelated design styles overlap and merge.

Residents of Laguna Beach, which has origins as an artist colony at the turn of the last century, were open to experimental and eclectic architecture styles (*Laguna Beach and the Greenbelt* 2017). Local master architects such as Fred Briggs and Chris Abel designed commercial, institutional, and residential buildings in various styles that included the Expressionist/Organic subtype of Mid-Century Modern. J. Lamont Langworthy designed some thirty houses in Laguna Beach during a residency of more than twenty-five years. Five years' Evenson's senior, Langworthy arrived in Laguna Beach at roughly the same time in 1961-62, a licensed architect who had interned for Paolo Soleri in Scottsdale. Langworthy's Laguna Beach

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 10 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

firm at one point employed fourteen people; he frequently collaborated with master builder Tom Lyster, most notably in a company that designed prefabricated houses starting in the late 1960s, of which three were built in Laguna Beach and eventually more than one hundred elsewhere in California (“Mad Man” 2021; Langworthy 1982). Langworthy’s work contributed to the Expressionist/Organic and Mid-Century Modern subtype in Laguna Beach. The angular, street-facing carports of two of his most notable projects (Garrison/Bridge House, with Lyster, 1964 and Hano House, 1967) evoke Evenson’s other, relatively unaltered residence in Laguna Beach (**Figures 2, 8, and 9**). The presence of Langworthy’s work reinforces the community’s and Evenson’s modernist design direction. It does not diminish the design significance of the Ruth Nelson Taylor House in the otherwise artistic beach town.

Following Ruth Nelson Taylor’s ownership, two subsequent families have owned the property. Crawford and Julia Anderson purchased it from Mrs. Taylor in 1966. They sold it to Gordon B. Jones (b. 1935) in 1971. Mr. Jones was a structural engineer who joined the Irvine Company in 1965, and eventually became Director of Engineering Planning. He lived in the house for almost fifty years, until his death in 2019 (*Orange County Register* 2019). The present owner is Gregory Jones.

In 2017, the City of Laguna Beach and its greenbelt were recognized by the National Park Service as a Historic American Landscape. In 1980-81, the City of Laguna Beach prepared a citywide Inventory of historic properties, which it adopted by Resolution as “the best representative examples of historically significant architecture” within the city (Resolution 1982). By design the Inventory did not capture properties built after 1939; nor did it include areas of the city whose primary development took place after this period. The City of Laguna Beach has neither prepared nor adopted additional historic context statements or city- or neighborhood-wide architectural surveys since the Inventory over forty years ago.

In 2022, the City of Laguna Beach amended its Municipal Code and Local Coastal Program to make owner consent a criterion for a property to qualify as a locally significant historic resource. Previously, the City would review projects involving demolition of and substantial alterations to properties over 45 years old for historic resource impacts. While those amendments are currently in litigation for violations of the California Environmental Quality Act and the California Coastal Act, the City has proceeded with its new policies.

A local Design Review Board Staff Report for the nominated property, in its response to an item entitled “Historic Preservation,” stated:

N/A. The subject property was built in 1961 and is not listed in the City’s Historic Register. Historic preservation consideration may be given due to the age of the structure. The exterior of the residence has remained largely unchanged since date of construction and the existing residence appears to be a strong representative of mid-century modern architecture; *however, according to the applicant, the residence has not been consistently maintained in good repair, and the maintenance necessary to renovate the residence may detract from any historic value.* This is also evidenced by the lack of building permit records on file. Staff recommends that the Board evaluate the project to ensure historic preservation is achieved (emphasis added, Laguna Beach 2022).

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 11 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

The property retains sufficient integrity to be considered a historic resource. Maintenance of a building or property does not affect its “historic value” or its integrity. The hundreds of thousands of buildings, structures, and objects built long before 1962 that retain integrity and are designated National Historic Landmarks, listed on or determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, other state registrations, or listed as local historic resources attest to the fatal flaw in the argument that maintenance “may detract from historic value.” Owner consent has nothing do with whether or not a property is historically significant, only whether it is listed either locally on the Laguna Beach Historic Register or on the California Register.

The property retains sufficient integrity of its original distinctive Mid-Century Modern, Expressionist/Organic design. Its location has not changed. The immediate setting is as it was designed, although more single-family homes have been built in its surrounding setting since the early 1960s. The distinctive exterior wood, glass, roofing, and plaster materials each remain intact. The original workmanship in and of those materials remains tangible and evident. The recently removed entrance canopy could be either re-affixed or reconstructed depending on its condition and existence. Interior alterations are not relevant to integrity considerations for purposes of its California Register eligibility for design (ESA Memorandum 2023). The aesthetic or historic sense of the early 1960s remains clear in the distinctive building design. The presence of those original physical features, including its bold shape, canted walls, and materials, when taken together, clearly convey the property's historic character or feeling. Likewise, in the visible design, the property retains its direct link between Mrs. Taylor and the property. It retains association because the building and setting are sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to observers. Like feeling, its association requires the presence of the physical features that convey the property's historic character.

The property’s boundaries are those historically associated with Orange County Tax Assessor’s Property Number 644-39-115 since 1962. Although the lot was established in 1961, the building was not completed until the following year.

Because there is no adopted local historic context statement regarding women in Laguna Beach, basic registration requirements borrowed from other communities were applied to this property. The property was directly associated with the productive life of Ruth Nelson Taylor, a woman who played a small role in developing properties in California. Comparison of Ms. Taylor’s achievements with those of her peers presents a predictable challenge, as there were few known woman developers in mid- to late twentieth century California.

An earlier example was Grace Yager Perego Harney. She was born Helen Grace Beals in Kansas in 1885 (Wikitree 2022). After divorcing her first husband (*Chronicle* 1913), Mrs. Yager, who had assisted in his construction business, began to build small residential projects in Santa Rosa. By the 1920s, she had constructed numerous duplexes and multi-family buildings in San Francisco. According to *Building Age & National Builder*, she built the five-story La Grace Apartments in 1925. The following year *Building & Engineering News* described more apartment units she owned under construction. Two years later, the remarried Ms. Perego was the keynote speaker at the National Association of Real Estate Boards in Seattle (*New York Times* 1927). In *Women of the West*, she was possibly self-described as “First Woman Builder of California” (Binheim and Elvin 1928). During the Depression, she wrote a textbook on real estate. By

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 12 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

1952, she completed the Graystone and Crown Terrace complexes. Crown Terrace used part of a public street and became the subject of a bitter dispute between her and the city and celebrated newspaper writer, Herb Caen (*Examiner* 1952). She was part of the team responsible for building Gavello Glen (1956), a modernist single-family tract in Sunnyvale, and in 1959, built her last multi-family units, Perego Heights (Weinstein, n.d.). She died in 1973. The primary differences between Parego and Taylor were their eras, and the locations, sizes, and success of their projects.

Ruth Taylor focused on small projects with unusual designs in small coastal communities between 1960 and the 1970s. Grace Parego was best known for her apartment complexes in San Francisco designed in styles popular at the time. Ms. Parego was a relentless self-promoter who achieved considerable financial success. Taylor focused on one project at a time and was not widely known in the communities where she was active. Her grand vision for the Big Sur development never came to fruition. Evaluation of their legacies reveals such great disparities, that beyond their genders, their achievements are not comparable.

No known woman developers in Laguna can be compared to Ruth Nelson Taylor's success or influence within the same context. The resource is the best known physical representation of Ruth Nelson Taylor's historic contribution to Laguna Beach. As a developer, Mrs. Taylor's financial success and wider reputation came nowhere near Ms. Parego's achievements, therefore this property cannot be considered eligible under Criterion 2. She was not the first, the most successful, or even the most notorious woman real estate developer in California.

An evaluation of the property's historical significance was prepared by ESA in 2023, as a peer review of the since-revised nomination. The evaluation found the subject property to be "potentially eligible" for the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 1 (for its association with the early development of the Arch Beach Heights neighborhood, which may be important to Laguna Beach history and to "the broader history of modernist architecture in California") and Criterion 3 (at the local level of significance as an example of "Organic Expressionism" and as an example of Evenson's design work in Laguna Beach—while also finding that Evenson does not qualify as a Master Architect in the city, region, or state).

Arch Beach Heights was one of several hillside neighborhoods in Laguna Beach that developed in the postwar period with modern architectural styles; adjacent Diamond/Crestview likewise was subdivided (in 1925) without regard for steep hillside topography (Laguna Beach, Open Space and Conservation Element 1984). Other residences on La Mirada and elsewhere in Arch Beach Heights predate the property. Postwar development there began more than a decade before completion of the nominated property, in 1948-49, with Countryman's acquisition of lots, successful petition to bring water to his properties, and the construction of eleven houses, some of which are extant. Mid-Century Modern residential architecture is found throughout Laguna Beach. John Lautner's two houses in Laguna Beach, which were included under a National Register Multiple Property Submission of his residential architecture in 2015, are outside Arch Beach Heights. A map of local architect Lamont Langworthy's Mid-Century residences, published as part of the exhibition of his work at the Laguna Art Museum, shows their distribution throughout the city (**Figure 10**). The nominated property is not eligible under Criterion 1.

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 13 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

The property is eligible for listing on the California Register under Criterion 3 based on its design importance, at a local level of significance with a 1962 period of significance. The Ruth Nelson Taylor House “embodies the distinctive characteristics of [the Mid-Century Modern residence] type [with the rare Expressionist/Organic subtypes], [the Cold War] period [and Laguna Beach]” (Criterion 3). The house represents significant and rare Mid-Century architecture styles and subtypes not commonly found elsewhere in Laguna Beach or the region. The period of significance for the property is 1962, the year construction on the house was completed.

Based on these findings, the property is a discretionary historical resource as defined in the California Environmental Quality Act.

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 14 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 15 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 16 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Page 17 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Sketch Map**

Annotated aerial photograph dated 2022, parcel outlined in red; Google Maps 2022



## CONTINUATION SHEET

Page 18 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

### Location Map

Annotated terrain map of Laguna Beach area with property noted; Google Maps 2022

Latitude: 33.533758, Longitude: -117.761196



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 19 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Figure 1** Southeast corner of Taylor House including original corner canopy, 2018; courtesy Google Maps



**Figure 2** House at 981 Summit Drive, Laguna Beach, completed 1961, Bud Evenson, designer; 2022; courtesy Google; note the distinctive, hyperbolic paraboloid carport roof form suspended from canted, paired masts and use of natural, stained wood



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 20 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Figure 3** Altered house at 1105 Summit Drive, Laguna Beach, completed 1963, Bud Evenson, designer, 2023



**Figure 4** Aerial Photograph of Arch Beach Heights, 1963; ESA Memorandum 2023



## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 21 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Figure 5** House at 732 Gainsborough Drive, Laguna Beach, completed 1962, significantly altered; Bud Evenson, original designer; 2018; courtesy Google; note natural, stained wood finish at second floor



**Figure 6** House at 4022 Calle Lisa, San Clemente, completed 1961, Bud Evenson, designer; n.d.; courtesy Redfin at <https://www.redfin.com/CA/San-Clemente/4022-Calle-Lisa-92672/home/3279048>; residence is a boomerang form with full height windows facing the ocean view, note the extensive use of natural, stained wood as exterior wall finish



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Trinomial#

Page 22 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Figure 7** House at 4 Castanada Place, Monterey, completed 1966, Bud Evenson, designer; n.d.; courtesy Redfin at <https://www.redfin.com/CA/Monterey/4-Castanada-Pl-93940/home/14959087>; canted natural wood outrigger forms support the cantilevered full-length porch



**Figure 8** Garrison/Bridge House, completed 1964, Lamont Langworthy architect, Tom Lyster builder, 554 Diamond Street, Laguna Beach, photo by FORT-LA 2021



# CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 23 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

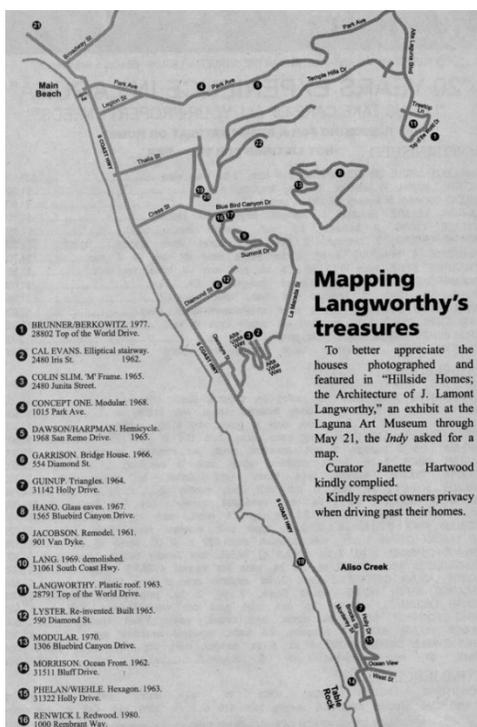
Continuation

Update

**Figure 9** Hano House, completed 1967, Lamont Langworthy architect, 1565 Bluebird Canyon, Laguna Beach, 2021



**Figure 10** Map of houses designed by J. Lamont Langworthy throughout Laguna Beach, *Laguna Beach Independent*, (February 24, 2007)



## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 24 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Ruth Nelson Taylor House  
City or Vicinity: Laguna Beach  
County: Orange County  
State: California  
Photographer: Catherine Jurca  
Date Photographed: September 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 10 Story poles depict proposed additions and alterations, view northwest of south and east (front elevation)
- 2 of 10 Southeast corner detail, wood siding, fixed (top) and louvred (below) clerestory windows, view northwest
- 3 of 10 Carport, entry (left side, foreground) and storage (left side, rear), view north
- 4 of 10 Rear elevation with landscaping, view east
- 5 of 10 South and west (rear) elevations, upper level clerestory windows, sliding door and deck, view northeast
- 6 of 10 Detail west (rear) elevation, lower level, facing north, view northeast
- 7 of 10 Detail of hinged wood mailboxes with wood pulls and wood shake, shed roof, view north
- 8 of 10 North elevation, floating wall, view southwest
- 9 of 10 Roof height difference, detail with operable louvred windows and screen, view northeast
- 10 of 10 From Summit Drive, view southeast

## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 25 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Photo 1** Story poles depict proposed additions and alterations, view northwest of south and east (front elevation)



**Photo 2** Southeast corner detail, wood siding, fixed (top) and louvred (below) clerestory windows, view northwest



## CONTINUATION SHEET

Trinomial#

Page 26 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Photo 3** Carport, entry (left side, foreground) and storage (left side, rear), view north



**Photo 4** Rear elevation with landscaping, view east



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Page 27 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Photo 5** South and west (rear) elevations, upper level clerestory windows, sliding door and deck, view northeast



**Photo 6** Detail west (rear) elevation, lower level, facing north, view northeast



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Page 28 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

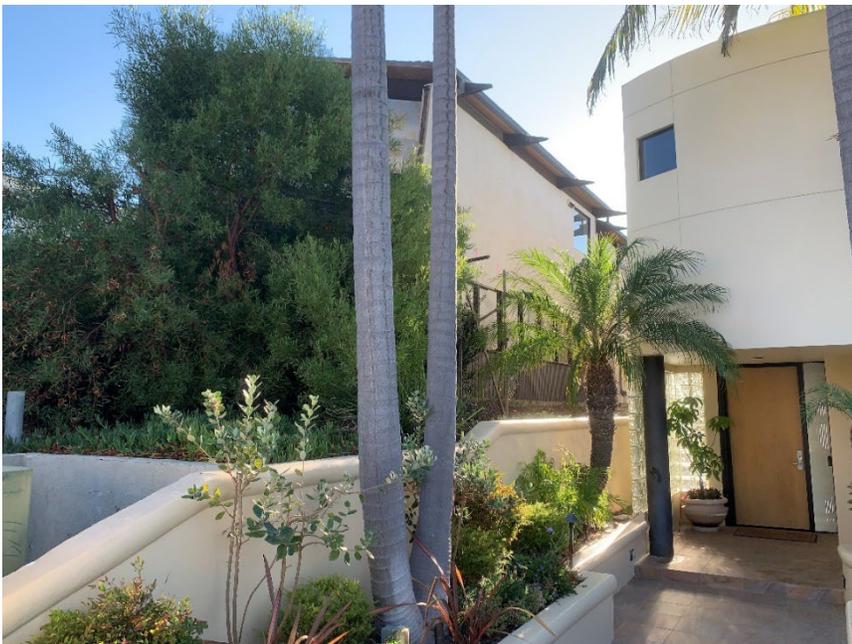
Continuation

Update

**Photo 7** Detail of hinged wood mailboxes with wood pulls and wood shake, shed roof, view north



**Photo 8** North elevation, floating wall, view southwest



**CONTINUATION SHEET**

Page 29 of 29

\*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Ruth Nelson Taylor House

\*Recorded by: C. Jurca, F. Smith

\*Date: October 10, 2022; Revised August 15, 2023

Continuation

Update

**Photo 9** Roof height difference, detail with operable louvred windows and screen, view northeast



**Photo 10** From Summit Drive, view southeast

