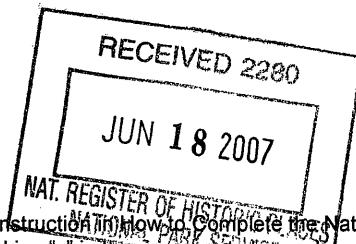


771

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 on 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 classifications, 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 John Yeon Speculative House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number 3922 N. Lombard Street  not for publication

city or town Portland  vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97217

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide X locally.

  
Signature of certifying official/Title - Deputy SHPO

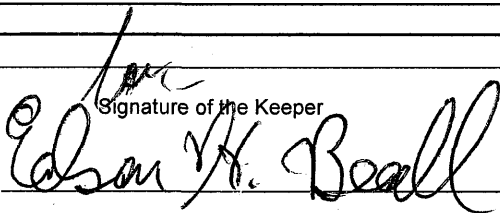
6.14.07  
Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
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):

  
Signature of the Keeper Edson H. Beall Date of 8.1.07

John Yeon Speculative House  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR  
County and State

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property  
(check as many as apply)

- private
- public - local
- public - state
- public - Federal

Category of Property  
(check only one box)

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

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

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

0

**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:  
Northwest Regional  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: CONCRETE  
walls: WOOD: plywood  
roof: ASPHALT (shingle)  
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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

See continuation sheets.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

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### SUMMARY:

The John Yeon Speculative House, designed by master architect and conservationist John Yeon, was built in 1939. Located at 3922 N. Lombard Street, the building is one of the earliest examples of the Northwest Regional style and features the "outside inside" architectural concept. It is one of nine speculative houses Yeon designed in concert with builder Burt Smith in the late 1930s. Yeon introduced many pioneering innovations in the series, including the use of plywood as an exterior building material, the incorporation of continuous bands of windows to open the interior to the outside viewing area and allow for abundant natural light, the installation of ventilation louvers set below the glass on each window, and the introduction of modular building. Because of his pioneering choice of exterior cladding and structural design, the series of buildings are sometimes referred to as "the plywood houses" or "modular houses" by academics and historians. Always mindful of the environment where he placed his designs, Yeon constructed the building's hip roof with two-by-six inch tongue-in-groove planks to act as an "armor" to withstand falling trees and branches during wind storms.

The house is located on the corner of N. Lombard Street and N. Chautauqua Boulevard in the Mock's Crest neighborhood of Portland, Oregon. It is a balloon-frame, single-story, detached, single-family residential building with three bedrooms, a single bathroom, kitchen, utility room, large single-car garage, and a great room that includes the living and dining areas and a fireplace. The irregularly-fenestrated rectangular building is clad in plywood, and the hip roof is currently covered with asphalt shingles. The previous owners replaced the original plywood garage door with a modern aluminum door to facilitate an automatic garage-door opener. The house is built on a honeycombed-style concrete slab. The design allows the intake for the furnace to pull air through the foundation to help heat the floor and protect the water pipes from freezing during winter. The walls and ceilings are painted plaster. The interior floor is original hardwood parquet, like the floor Yeon used for his Asian Gallery at the Portland Art Museum. The structure and floor plan of the building remain intact.

### SETTING:

The Speculative House is located in the Mocks Crest neighborhood of North Portland. Mock's Crest is situated on the bluff overlooking the Willamette River, downtown Portland, and Forest Park. Developed between 1928 and 1939 by the John B. Yeon Company, Mocks Crest is an upper-middle class neighborhood with a variety of architectural styles and mature landscaping. Much of the original landscaping by John Yeon still exists on the subject property. The mature Japanese maples, sword ferns, large rhododendrons, andromeda, magnolias, and an English Laurel garden wall found on the property are all part of Yeon's original design.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

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### EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The main entrance and garage door are located on the north side of the building. The front entry is situated in a garden courtyard planted with the original landscaping designed by John Yeon. The courtyard is enclosed by a six-foot high fence of exterior plywood panels made to match the siding of the house. The building's largest bank of windows consists of eight panes, measures sixteen feet in length, and is located in the living room facing out into the courtyard. Two bathroom windows and two bedroom windows are also located on this side of the house.

The west side facade features two banks of windows: one of four panes and one of two panes. This facade is the exterior wall for two of the building's bedrooms. There are no entrances on this side.

The east side of the building primarily serves as the wall of the garage area, which features a bank of three glass panes. Set back behind the attached garage is the east wall of the kitchen area. A single pane of glass is set above the kitchen sink. No entrances are located on this facade.

The south side of the building faces the back yard. The most eastern portion of the south facade is set back to form a "utility area," and represents the south wall of the garage. This facade has one door and no windows. The remainder of the south wall encloses the living space. The kitchen area has four panes of glass, followed by a dining area with four panes of glass and a door leading to the back patio. Another bedroom is located behind the middle of the building's south wall and contains glass panel windows. The west-most side of the south facade forms a wall to another bedroom and features three additional panes of glass.

### INTERIOR DESCRIPTION:

The living room of the house measures twenty-five-by-thirteen feet. As with the rest of the building, the ceiling height is eight-and-a-half feet, thus creating a sense of spaciousness within the building. The floor is parquet hardwood. A bank of eight continuous windows on the north side of the room creates a sixteen-foot long wall that looks out on the front courtyard. The main entrance is located perpendicular to the front wall and opens into an inset patio area in the courtyard, thus contributing to the clean appearance of the main facade. The living room also features a coat closet and a central fireplace on the east wall. The fireplace retains its original decorative mantle, which is constructed of custom "roman"-style bricks that are an inch-and-a-half high and eight-inches long.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

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The dining room of the building measures ten-by-eleven feet. The dining room area is open to the living room, thus creating a "great room" effect. The parquet floors found in the living room also extend to the dining room area. The dining room has a bank of four continuous window panes on the south wall that look out upon an eleven-by-eight foot rear patio. A door opening to the rear patio is located on the same wall, and is partially sheltered by the roof eaves. The dining room contains an opening in the east wall that leads to the kitchen area.

The kitchen is quite small for a house of this age and size, representing an emphasis on efficiency. The kitchen measures twelve-by-eight feet. The cabinetry in the room is all original and extends from the floor to the ceiling in order to maximize storage space. The original floor and counter-top surfaces were replaced at an unknown time in the past. The current homeowner has since covered the floor with high quality vinyl and installed granite tile countertops and custom cabinet hardware. The range in the room is not original, but is estimated to be an early 1960s Norge range. A single glass pane is located behind the kitchen sink and looks east into the rear "utility area" of the house. A bank of four continuous glass panes is located on the south wall and creates a viewing area into the back yard. A door in the north wall of the kitchen leads to the utility room.

The utility room separates the living areas of the house from the garage and the entry to the attic space. The utility room incorporates cabinets that extend to the ceiling to maximize storage space. The floor itself is concrete with no covering. The original oil furnace housing is located in this room, though the various components of the furnace itself including the burner, blower, etc., have been replaced over time. The utility room is plumbed for laundry facilities. A door in the south wall leads to the rear "utility area" of the house, which is a small courtyard where the electric meter, telecommunications box, heating oil, and other services enter the house. A door in the north wall opens to a stairwell area that leads to a small attic storage space above the garage. This area also contains the hot water heater. The small attic area provides access to a crawl space through which the area above the interior ceilings can be accessed.

The garage measures twenty-five-by-fifteen feet and is large enough to accommodate one automobile. The dimensions clearly reflect the size of automobiles at the time of construction, but the space still allows sufficient room for modern vehicles. A large original built-in cabinet is included in the southeast corner. An old wooden workbench with drawers is found in the garage area, but it is probably not original. The original plywood garage door had been replaced at some time in the house's history with a modern aluminum door and a remote-controlled garage door opening device; however, the structure and scale of the garage itself remains intact. The garage door opens to N. Lombard Street to the north. The east wall contains a bank of three windows beyond which there is a paved walkway that leads from the front of the house to the backyard and the "utility area." The garage windows do not include louvers below the glass.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4

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A nine foot hallway leads from the west side of the living room to the bedroom and bathroom areas of the building. The hallway does not share any outside wall space and, therefore, does not have any windows. There are two doors on the south side of the hall that lead to two bedrooms. There are two doors in the north side of the hall that lead to a bedroom and bath room respectively. The hallway measures three-by-eight-and-a-half feet and retains the eight-and-a-half foot ceiling height. Three closets are located in the hallway, each using the entire floor-to-ceiling height to maximize storage. The original parquet floor found in the living room continues through the hallway.

The bathroom is located on the north side of the house and has two glass panes with two ventilation louvers on the north wall. The windows look to the fenced courtyard area in front of the house, which allows for privacy. The bathroom measures ten-by-six feet with an eight-and-a-half foot ceiling. Along the east wall of the room is the original cast-iron bath tub and shower combination, as well as the toilet. The west wall contains the sink and vanity. Other than the tub, none of the fixtures in the bathroom are original. Prior to the current owner, the room had been remodeled with low-quality materials and fixtures. In 2003 a marble tile floor and new fixtures were installed. The original bathtub was retained.

The bedroom in the northwest corner of the house measures ten-by-fourteen feet. The west wall features a bank of four glass panes that wrap uninterrupted into a bank of two additional glass panes on the north wall, thus creating a corner viewing area that looks out upon mostly original landscaping and N. Chautauqua Boulevard. The south wall features the entry door, while the rest of the wall is comprised of built-in floor-to-ceiling closet space. The flooring is the original parquet hardwood; however, it had been covered with carpet by a previous owner and minor moisture damage occurred. The floor is currently covered with a floating Pergo laminate to protect the original hardwood until a future date when complete restoration can be done.

The bedroom in the southwest corner of the house measures ten-by-fourteen feet. The north wall is a reflection of the entry door and comprehensive wall of closet space found in the northwest bedroom. The south wall features a bank of three glass panes and looks out upon the back yard. The west wall features a bank of two glass panes that looks out across N. Chautauqua Boulevard. The original parquet floor remains intact; however, it was covered with carpet by a previous owner. Removal of the carpet and restoration of the original floor beneath is pending.

The bedroom that is located central to the south wall of the house is entered through a door on its north wall. The room measures ten-by-fourteen feet. The entire west wall of the room features built in closet space of the same design found in the other bedrooms. The south wall features a

John Yeon Speculative House  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR  
County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

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

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number   7   Page   5  

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panel of five panes of glass that overlook the back yard and patio area. The original parquet floor remains intact; however, it was covered with carpet by a previous owner. Removal of the carpet and restoration of the original floor underneath is pending.

John Yeon Speculative House  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR  
County and State

**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).

Areas of Significance  
(Enter categories from instructions)

- 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.
- C 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.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1939  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1939  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

Property is:

Significant Person  
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B removed from its original location
- C a birthplace or 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

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Yeon, John (architect)  
Smith, Burt (builder)

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

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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

- Previous documentation on file (NPS):
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36CFR67) 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 Portland Planning Department

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

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### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Completed in 1939, John Yeon's Speculative House at Mocks Crest is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C as the work of a master architect. The Speculative House is one of nine speculative houses designed by Yeon for builder Burt Smith in the late 1930s. These small, balloon-frame houses were among the very first in the country to use plywood as an exterior building material. Plywood was used for interior applications prior to 1939, but new glues used in the manufacturing process, developed in the late 1930s, enabled plywood to be used as a waterproof exterior material. Another significant element of the speculative houses was Yeon's innovative ventilation system that used separate screened ventilation louvers below fixed panes of glass to provide airflow – an innovation which Yeon himself pioneered. Furthermore, John Yeon's Speculative House is significant because it represents one of the country's earliest examples of modular housing design, and is the prototype for larger scale adaptations in Yeon's later work like the Visitors' Information Center (1948) at McCall Waterfront Park in downtown Portland. Yeon's early success on the Aubrey Watzek House led to a series of commissions for inexpensive, modular, plywood houses, which were all built by Smith throughout the 1938 and 1939. The small homes in the series were the only houses Yeon built for sale on the open market. Of these houses, the John Yeon Speculative House on Lombard Street retains the most integrity, as confirmed by biographer Richard Brown. Brown established the trust for the University of Oregon's Yeon Center for Architectural Studies.<sup>1</sup>

Yeon's entry into the general housing market followed his highly acclaimed architectural debut with the Aubrey Watzek House (1937, National Register listed 1974), which was featured at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1938. Yeon was approached by renowned builder Burt Smith with the idea of crystallizing his modernist ideals in a series of houses for sale on the open real estate market. Whereas the Watzek House was specifically commissioned, the speculative house series allowed Yeon to have complete artistic freedom. The subject Speculative House was built in a new housing development in the Mock's Crest neighborhood in North Portland. The land was owned and subdivided under his father's John B. Yeon Company, with the east side of N. Chautauqua Boulevard being used as a "street of dreams" style exposition for builders at that time. It was here that Yeon built two speculative houses simultaneously, side-by-side, which introduced his innovative, modular designs that incorporated a series of glass panels and exterior plywood sheets in a uniform, "Japanese screen" style facade.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with John Yeon conducted by Marian Kolisch at the artist's home in Portland, Oregon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983, Smithsonian Institute Archives of American Art <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/yeon83.htm>>; *Progressive Architecture, Homes* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corp., 1947), 124; Personal friend and biographer of John Yeon Richard Brown, interview by author (14 February 2007).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

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Though it was the Watzek House that propelled Yeon to national recognition as an architect, it was his speculative houses that introduced the fundamental design elements that would characterize much of Yeon's work as a master architect. He is frequently cited as one of the founders of the Northwest Regional Style of architecture and its characteristic elements of Asian design, which were hinted at in the Watzek House, but were given full effect in the speculative house series.

John Yeon is often cited as Oregon's most influential *native* architect. As the son of a successful timber baron and Portland real estate developer, Yeon was exposed to the wood products industry and architectural concerns at an early age. His father, John B. Yeon, set a strong example for civic involvement and charitable work on behalf of the common wealth. John B. Yeon's work in building the Columbia River Highway and other projects exposed his son to the rugged beauty of the Pacific Northwest. The young Yeon, like his father, would lament the environmental devastation caused by logging and development without regard to man's impact on nature. Therefore, Yeon's experience of having been born and raised in Oregon gave him a unique perspective on architecture that would distinguish his contribution to developing what became the Northwest Regional vernacular.

Yeon's achievements in architecture and conservation survived his death in 1994 at the age of eighty-three. A substantial gift of properties was arranged by Yeon beneficiary and long time friend, Richard Louis Brown to the University of Oregon's School of Architecture and Allied Arts. These properties include Yeon's landscape architecture preserve in the Columbia Gorge called "The Shire," and his famed Watzek House. The University of Oregon used the endowment from the Yeon estate to establish the John Yeon Center for Architectural Studies, its John Yeon Lecture Series featuring prominent guest architects, and the John Yeon Graduate Research Fellowship.<sup>2</sup>

### EARLY INFLUENCES AND FAMILY HISTORY

John Yeon's influences as an architect began at a very early age. His father, John B. Yeon, immigrated from Canada to the Oregon Coast where he worked in a lumber mill. By saving his money the elder Yeon was able to start his own logging company and went on to become quite successful. By the time the young John Yeon was born his father had relocated inland to Portland where he invested in real estate and development. As a result, Yeon grew up exposed

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<sup>2</sup> University of Oregon School of Architecture and Allied Arts, John Yeon Center for Architectural Studies, "John Yeon Center for Architectural Studies" 2007 < website (<http://aaa.uoregon.edu/index.cfm?mode=pdx&page=yeon>) > (2007).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 3

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to the wood products and real estate development industries. These influences would prove valuable in the innovative products and designs that Yeon would incorporate into his architecture later in life. Furthermore, his father exhibited a passion for the environment, architecture, and public service himself. These were all qualities that would help to establish John Yeon's reputation, not just as an architect, but also as a conservationist.

In the Columbia Gorge, one of Oregon's most famous landmarks, the Vista House at Crown Point State Park was constructed under the direction of John B. Yeon. His son, John Yeon, would later recall that the famous Vista House was not easy to obtain funding for because politicians deemed such a building to have "no purpose," though it was conceived to be both a scenic viewpoint and essentially Oregon's first roadside rest area. John B. Yeon served as Multnomah County's first Roadmaster and was responsible for building the Columbia River Highway, which he agreed to do for a personal profit of only \$1 per year.<sup>3</sup> Yeon was determined to ensure that the path of the highway blended into the natural environment of the ancient glacier valley. Such was Yeon's respect for the environment of the Columbia Gorge project that he hired a tree surgeon to protect trees that were damaged by dynamite blasts used in building the road. This passion for the Columbia Gorge would later be seen in the younger John Yeon's leading effort to create the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area in the early 1980s. The Vista House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. John B. Yeon is also commemorated by a State Park in his name, located off the Columbia River Historic Highway near Multnomah Falls.

The Yeon Building is located at 522 SW Fifth Avenue in downtown Portland and is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building was constructed to be the headquarters of the John B. Yeon Company and capitalize on the demand for downtown office space in the growing city. Again the influence of Yeon's father is apparent. Rather than use a local architect, John B. Yeon sought out the services of renowned San Francisco firm Reid and Reid, best known for its work on the Hotel del Coronado in San Diego. Completed in 1911, the Yeon Building was fifteen stories tall, and was the tallest building in the state. The Yeon Building was considered by many at the time to be Oregon's first "sky scraper" and a triumph in architectural design for the city of Portland.<sup>4</sup>

Yeon's mother, Elizabeth Mock, was the daughter of David Mock who received a pioneer land grant for approximately one mile of land along the bluff in north Portland that overlooks the Willamette River, Swan Island, and the present day Port of Portland. The neighborhood of older,

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<sup>3</sup> Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Gideon Bosker, and Lena Lencek, *Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture* (Portland, OR.: Oregon Historical Society, 1985).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

stately homes where the subject Speculative House is located is now referred to as "Mock's Crest." Likewise, the land at the base of the bluff is called "Mock's Bottom." By the time of John Yeon's birth, his father had purchased the land from his grandparents and would later develop the area known as the Mock's Crest neighborhood. A portion of the land was donated by the Yeon family to the college that has since become the University of Portland. Following the deaths of John and Elizabeth Yeon, the young John Yeon and his surviving siblings donated a parcel of land in Mock's Crest to the City of Portland to create the Columbia Park Annex.<sup>5</sup>

As a child John Yeon traveled with his father on business, such as trips up the Columbia Gorge during the building of the Columbia River Highway or to the Oregon Coast. These forays into the Oregon wilderness gave Yeon an intimate appreciation for the natural beauty of the ecology and natural landscape Pacific Northwest. The Northwest Regional Style, of which he is widely cited as an originator, is most characterized by its relationship to the natural environment of the Pacific Northwest. Though historically, regionalism in architecture was primarily a result of the predominant building materials of a particular region, wood in the case of the Pacific Northwest, in the imaginations and ambitions of Yeon, and contemporaries like Pietro Belluschi, regionalism was also the reflection of the natural environment in design. Thus an appreciation for Yeon's childhood is essential to understanding just how profound his impact on the Northwest Regional Style truly was. As the son of a timber baron and real estate developer, John Yeon developed a knowledge of indigenous building materials and their applications within the rugged Pacific Northwest that was truly unique.

### THE NORTHWEST REGIONAL STYLE

The Northwest Regional Style began to be recognized in the late 1930s as the architectural establishment of America's East Coast began to take notice of a small but impressive number of uniquely modern houses making headlines from Oregon and Washington. Like all regional movements, one of the defining characteristics of the Northwest Regional Style was the use of the area's abundant timber as a building material. Here modernism began to depart from the early-modern examples from Europe, known in America as the International Style, by using large timber beams for structural support instead of concrete and steel. Like the International Style, this freed the walls of buildings from their traditional structural constraints, and allowed for the use of large panes of glass.<sup>6</sup> In deference to the majestic scenery of the Pacific Northwest, the designs of the buildings themselves were shaped by opportunities to bring the "outside inside" with large glass windows and walls oriented toward views of mountains, forests, rivers, valleys, etc. In this way, the modernism inherent in the Northwest Regional Style was a departure from

<sup>5</sup> Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

<sup>6</sup> Understanding Modern, 2001.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

the early American modern architects like Frank Lloyd Wright. Thus the Northwest Regional Style became a manifestation of not only regionally prevalent materials, but the beauty of the regional environment as well. The minimalist and rationalist concepts of the International Style, made famous by the likes of Walter Gropius and Mies van de Rohe, were well suited for the Northwest Regional Style, which emphasized design around the natural environment.

Yeon is frequently cited along with Italian-born architect Pietro Belluschi as one of the primary inventors of the Northwest Regional Style. Belluschi was a formally educated engineer who immigrated to Portland and began to establish himself as an architect through projects like the Portland Art Museum (1932), though his early work more closely resembled that of American modern architects like Frank Lloyd Wright. Though Yeon was not a formal employee of A.E. Doyle & Associates, he was acquainted with Belluschi through a mutual friend and older Portland architect, Harry Wentz. When Portland businessman Aubrey Watzek inquired about commissioning a house, Yeon originally recommended Belluschi, but ended up submitting a competing design for the proposed house, that was accepted by Watzek.<sup>7</sup> A competitive relationship developed between Belluschi and Yeon that resulted in initial controversy over the credit for the Watzek House (1937), which Belluschi cited as an A.E. Doyle & Associates project without naming Yeon as its independent designer. Eventually, credit for the Watzek House was awarded to John Yeon and the house was presented at an architectural photo exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1938. The attention paid to the exciting design would propel Yeon and the new Northwest Regional Style to national acclaim.

While Yeon lived a fairly reclusive lifestyle and would only see about fifteen of his building designs to completion, Belluschi pursued an illustrious career with high-profile commercial projects like Portland's Equitable Building (1948) and US Bancorp Tower (1983). He was also the Dean of Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1951-1965.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Belluschi is more frequently cited in reference to the Northwest Regional Style, though it was not until after the success of Yeon's Watzek House that his work began to exhibit more of the Northwest Regional characteristics. Some of Belluschi's most famous residential buildings, like the Sutor House (1938) and Platt House (1941), share similarities to the Watzek House and Speculative Houses. Indeed, John Yeon himself believed that Belluschi borrowed more influence from him than the other way around.<sup>9</sup> Other more established Portland architects, like Herman Brookman and Van Evera Bailey, who would also contribute to the Northwest Regional movement, showed the influence of Yeon's early work.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

<sup>8</sup> "Pietro Belluschi," Great Buildings.Com, 2007 <[http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Pietro\\_Belluschi.html](http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Pietro_Belluschi.html)> (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Brown, 14 February 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Bosker and Lencek, 1985.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

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Though Yeon was occasionally dismissed by critics for his lack of formal credentials in architecture, it was arguably that freedom from existing paradigms that allowed his imagination to manifest itself in exiting new designs like the Watzek House and Speculative House series that would do much to define the Northwest Regional Style.

### THE DEVELOPING ARCHITECT

John Yeon's earliest practices in the field of design were at the private Moran School in Washington State during his last year of grammar school. There his interest in theater combined with his artistic skills and he began building model stage sets for plays. Later Yeon would attend Culver Military Academy in Indiana, which presented him with his first opportunity to travel to Europe at the age of seventeen. Yeon toured England, Germany, and France, but was most impressed by the architecture he found in Scandinavia.

Upon returning to Oregon, Yeon took a keen interest in the design and construction of houses in his father's real estate development projects. He carefully watched the houses being built in the Mock's Crest development. Yeon would later recall that he stopped going to the beach in the summer to work as an office boy at the architectural firm of A.E. Doyle and Associates and began to make drawings and models of houses.<sup>11</sup> During his time at A.E. Doyle, Yeon befriended Henry Wentz, who was an architect of the firm and head of the Portland Art School where Yeon took classes.

John Yeon attended Stanford University in 1927, though his studies were cut short when his father died during his freshman year. Rather than return to Stanford, Yeon opted to move to New York and accept an entry-level position at the architectural firm of Young, Moskowitz, and Rosenbloom. In the evening he took classes in architecture at Columbia University. In the years immediately following the death of his father, Yeon also traveled to Europe. He attended the 1930 Exposition in Stockholm where the International Style of architecture was becoming more prevalent. A couple years later, Yeon returned to Oregon when a friend of his father's, Julius Meier, was elected governor. Yeon's connection to his father's work as Roadmaster would lead to him being appointed to Oregon's first State Parks Commission in 1932.

Another member of the State Parks Commission was Aubrey Watzek, who was in the process of soliciting proposals to build his new house. Yeon referred Watzek to the firm of A.E. Doyle and Associates, where he knew Pietro Belluschi. Yeon then took the initiative to design and model a house for consideration without being asked. He had already proposed the location of the

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<sup>11</sup> Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

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house to Watzek, who purchased the land in Portland's West Hills. After rejecting other designs, including one by Belluschi, Watzek eventually selected Yeon's proposal. John Yeon moved into the offices of A.E. Doyle and Associates on January 1, 1937, and completed the Watzek house that year.<sup>12</sup> Photographs of the Watzek House began to circulate within the architecture profession and caught the attention of John McAndrew, the head of the Architecture Department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The Watzek House appeared next to Frank Lloyd Wright's "Falling Waters" in the "Art In Our Time" exhibit at the museum in 1938, and became one of the first houses connected to what was being called the Northwest Region Style. At the age of only twenty-eight, John Yeon was now an established architect earning national acclaim.

### A PASSION FOR NATURE

The role of the State Parks Commission was to advocate for the establishment of state parks. Inspired by the great parkways he had seen in New York City and intent on protecting the aesthetic qualities of Oregon's natural assets, Yeon became a vigorous champion of environmental preservation. Later, as President Roosevelt's various public works projects evolved and a Northwest regional planning effort began, John Yeon became Chairman of the Recreation Committee responsible for identifying sites for state parks. Under the National Regional Planning Commission a subcommittee was formed called the Columbia Gorge Commission, which Yeon chaired. As the Bonneville Dam project moved forward, Yeon fought against the Portland Chamber of Commerce which sought to create "a second Pittsburgh in the Columbia Gorge."<sup>13</sup> Yeon also used his political clout in Oregon to advocate on behalf of establishing the Olympic National Park in Washington State. Through his various political offices Yeon exercised one of the primary philosophies behind Northwest Regional architecture: preference to nature.

Yeon did not hesitate to invest his own finances for the cause of natural preservation. During his time with the State Parks Commission the land for Ecola State Park near Cannon Beach was variously donated or bought out by the state to establish the park. When Chapman Point, located just off Ecola Point, was slated for development in 1927, Yeon stepped in and purchased the land, thus saving the famous view of Haystack Rock.<sup>14</sup> Yeon continued buying land along the adjacent strip of the beach well into the post WWII years to preserve the area from development.

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<sup>12</sup> Yeon describes in detail this unusual working situation, and his relationship with Pietro Belluschi, in his oral interview with Kolisch for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Randy Gregg, "Architect & Preservationist John Yeon, Creating a Lasting Impression," 2007 (Portland, Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission <<http://www.ochcom.org/yeon>> 2000).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8

Perhaps Yeon's greatest legacy outside of residential architecture was his effort, both public and private, to establish the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area in late 1970s and early 1980s. At one point, Yeon purchased approximately one mile of property along the Columbia River, opposite Multnomah Falls, to prevent the land from being developed for industrial purposes. This land eventually became Yeon's personal landscape architecture project, called "The Shire," which was also left in trust to the University of Oregon School of Architecture.

In Yeon's many accomplishments as a conservationist, he repeatedly demonstrated his foresight in public planning and knack for tapping into the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest. Some of Oregon and Washington's most treasured parks and scenery exist today thanks to the efforts of John Yeon. Indeed, his passion and appreciation for nature continues to be reflected in the Northwest Regional vernacular he helped to create.

### THE SPECULATIVE HOUSES, A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS.

Following his success with the Watzek House in 1937, Yeon was approached by the home's builder, Burt Smith, to collaborate on a short series of speculative houses. Smith was the builder on the Watzek House project and his working relationship with Yeon would continue throughout the architect's career. Yeon felt a certain amount of guilt for the cost overruns on the house he built for Aubrey Watzek and was excited to experiment with more economical designs.<sup>15</sup> This project would lead to one of America's first examples of modular home design, predating the famous "Case Study Houses" of Walter Koenig in California by almost two decades. The implications of Yeon's work on his Speculative House series are particularly important in this regard. Like Koenig's later work with steel and aluminum as a building material, Yeon recognized the opportunity provided by new glues used in the manufacture of plywood that allowed the material to be used for external siding. Along with banks of glass panels, the plywood sheets would be set between wooden mullions on two- or four-foot centers. This created an exterior facade that unfolded around the house like the Japanese screen art he so admired. Yeon painted the earliest plywood houses mossy green with burnt orange front doors; later houses were different colors, such as blue, mulberry, and other earthy tones.

The first designs were built for lots owned by Burt Smith in Lake Oswego and Southwest Portland. The location of the lots, surrounded by tall fir trees, led to one of the Speculative House design innovations. The entire hip-style roof was composed of two-by-six tongue-in-groove boards that measured twenty feet in length and stretched from the ridge of the roof down past the exterior walls to create a thin eave line, which was also reminiscent of Japanese

<sup>15</sup> Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

architecture. The effect of the roof design was to, in Yeon's words, "make it an armor plated roof" to protect against falling branches.<sup>16</sup>

Two houses were built as part of the Mock's Crest housing development that his father initiated in 1927, one year before his death. Unlike the Lake Oswego houses these houses were owned by the John B. Yeon Company, and not Burt Smith. Because the John B. Yeon Company owned the land, Yeon was able to redraw the original property lines to expand the lots to meet the needs of his designs for both the buildings and landscaping.<sup>17</sup>

Another of Yeon's important inventions that debuted in the Speculative House series was the separation of the house's ventilation function from the windows.<sup>18</sup> Yeon built screened ventilation louvers below fixed glass panes that could be opened for airflow by pulling open a small door. In so doing, the window glass throughout the house did not need to be framed, hinged, or screened. This innovation contributed greatly to the design's ability to allow for unimpeded viewing area, which was strategically coordinated with the landscaping outside. The result was to create the "outside-inside" effect that is invariably associated with the Northwest Regional Style.

The Speculative House at 3922 N. Lombard is unique in the Speculative House series because here Yeon coordinated a bank of eight panes of glass in the living room area to look out upon a courtyard that is framed by a six-foot wall that matches the plywood panels and the molding on the house itself. Here Yeon incorporates one of the Watzek House's more distinctive design characteristics, the courtyard, and creates a small breezeway similar to those found in Japanese residential design. The house retains its original footprint, and while the original color was painted over several times in its life, the building still has its original floor plan and interior finishes.

A total of nine Speculative Houses were built in the series, including the subject house at 3922 N. Lombard Street and the specially commissioned Jorgenson House, which was built to a much larger scale than the other houses. Of the eight smaller houses that were built, only seven exist today. Three can be found in Lake Oswego, Oregon, in various states of originality due to home additions or other alterations. Two more Speculative Houses can be found in Portland's West Hills area—one showing substantial alterations and the other being in mostly original condition. The other surviving example of the Speculative Houses, located in Portland's Mocks Crest

<sup>16</sup> Yeon, 14 December 1982, 10 January 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Documentation in plat map showing original lot and boundary expansion, Multnomah County Records.

<sup>18</sup> *Space, Style and Structure: Building in Northwest America* 1974; *Progressive Architecture* 1947.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

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neighborhood, has had the garage widened using masonry block to replace one wall, and has a flat-roof living room expansion on the back of the house.

The Speculative House series as a whole offered spacious, aesthetically-pleasing designs to middle-class homebuyers at an affordable price. Each of the houses cost less than \$5,000 to construct, yet featured high-quality building materials and craftsmanship on large lots of greater than 5,000 square feet each.<sup>19</sup> In an April 1939 article, *The Architectural Forum* featured moderately-priced homes from builders across America. The magazine called Yeon's Speculative House, "A deluxe version of the minimum house. The most pleasing characteristic of the exterior is the simple expression of the carefully integrated construction."

The Mock's Crest Speculative House at 3922 N. Lombard is cited by Yeon's long-time friend and biographer, Richard L. Brown, as being in the most original condition of any house in the Speculative House series. Unlike the Lake Oswego houses, it is located on land once owned by Yeon's family and is only a short distance from where John Yeon was born and spent his childhood years. The house is 68 years old as of the date of this nomination and continues to be an outstanding example of the work of one of Oregon's most influential master architects.

### OTHER COMMISSIONS

The Speculative Houses' modular design was expanded in scale for the building of the Jorgensen House in west Portland, completed later in 1939. The Jorgensen House was officially the last of the plywood house series, though many elements of the speculative designs were manifested in later projects like the Cottrell House (1950). The banks of glass panels on fixed mullions became a common element in all of Yeon's later houses like the Vietor House (1941), located in Humboldt County, California. The Van Buren House (1949) alternated a brick exterior with the characteristic plywood and glass panels, as well as the trademark ventilation louvers. The Shaw House (1950) also borrowed the plywood and glass panel facade and incorporated it into a more "post-modern" and "palace-style" design. The Cottrell House (1950) and Swan House (1950) also expanded upon some of the techniques developed in the Speculative House series. John Yeon's only civic building, the Visitors' Information Center (1948), took the modular plywood-house design and stretched it vertically, opting for a flat roof instead of the traditional hip roof.

### PRAISE FOR JOHN YEON'S SPECULATIVE HOUSES

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<sup>19</sup> *The Architectural Forum*, April 1939

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 11

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The following quotes have been excerpted from various period publications that discussed John Yeon's innovative speculative houses:

"Yeon's modular walls have pioneered curtain-wall construction in housebuilding." – *House & Home* (1954)

"The rhythmical module in John Yeon's architecture is not only an esthetic concept having to do with discipline, unity and order. It is also an imminently practical pioneering effort to bring into housebuilding some of the facilities of mass production and prefabrication that everyone has been talking about for more than half a century." – *House and Home* (1954)

"It is one of a series of wood houses designed by Mr. Yeon which inaugurated the now common practice of providing ventilation through louvers below or above simply constructed glass panels." – *Progressive Architecture* (1974)

"[Yeon's architecture is] some of the most carefully studied, most precisely controlled architecture to be found in the United States." – *House and Home* (1954)

"This house is an outstanding example of Yeon's mastery of both intangible space and tangible form." – (journal and date unknown; photocopy from Multnomah County Library archive of Yeon)

"Since Roman times the common window had been used for both light and air, and whether casement, awning, or double hung, an open window always impeded viewing. With Yeon's panel system, "art" fostered a significant technical advance." – *Space, Style and Structure* (1974)

"The resulting structures [the Speculative Houses] built in 1938 and 1939 show Yeon at his most creative, and perhaps for the first time, a systems approach was used in the design of a single family house." – *Space, Style and Structure* (1974)

### CONCLUSION

John Yeon was a master architect and pioneer of the Northwest Regional Style of architecture. Yeon's innovative concepts, designs, and contributions to architecture were even more relevant because of his lack of formal training and certification. Many of Yeon's innovations were the direct manifestation of his unique fortune in life. His grandparents were original settlers in the Portland area. His father was an extraordinary businessman, developer, and conservationist in his own right. Yeon's family wealth and connections provided the opportunity to embellish his artistic curiosity in Europe at the very beginning of the modern movement. Being born and raised in Oregon near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, he had a special appreciation for the

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

## **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number   8   Page   12  

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Pacific Northwest's natural beauty and landscape that possessed every architectural design he ever created. These qualities and his unorthodox career path gave Yeon a unique perspective on architecture that made an indelible impression of the Northwest Regional vernacular that is felt today.

The extraordinary sacrifices made by Yeon through his public service and conservation efforts meant that physical examples of his portfolio would be relatively few compared to contemporaries like Belluschi. His work was extremely hands-on, he never kept an office, and his staff only briefly peaked at two drafting persons. He also had the benefit of financial independence that allowed him to be very selective of the projects he pursued. For these reasons, Yeon's work remained esoteric outside of academic circles. However, the contributions made by John Yeon to the field of architecture defy the low profile he preferred to keep in his life.

The Speculative House is indeed the work of a master architect and the most pristine example of a series of houses that introduced the economics of modular home design and innovative concepts like separate ventilation louvers. The genius of Yeon's work in the Speculative House series is brilliantly apparent in the Mock's Crest Speculative House at 3922 N. Lombard. For this reason, the house is eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   9   Page   1  

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Bosker, Gideon, and Lena Lencek. *Frozen Music: A History of Portland Architecture*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1985.

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*Buildings and Gardens*. "Space, Style and Structure: Building in Northwest America." 1974.

*House and Home*. "Three Houses in Oregon by Architect John Yeon." 1954.

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*Wooden House*. "American Architecture from WWI to Present." 1977.

#### Internet Resources:

Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission.  
<http://www.ochcom.org/yeon>.

The Oregon History Project.  
[http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/narratives/subtopic.cfm?subtopic\\_ID=501](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/narratives/subtopic.cfm?subtopic_ID=501).

Smithsonian Institute Archives of American Art.  
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/yeon83.htm>.

John Yeon Speculative House  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR  
County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number   9   Page   2  

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University of Oregon John Yeon Center for Architectural Studies.  
[http://hp.uoregon.edu/index.cfm?mode=yeon.](http://hp.uoregon.edu/index.cfm?mode=yeon)

**Other:**

Historic Resource Inventory of the City of Portland, OR.

John Yeon Speculative House  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 10 522899E 5046894N  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

#### 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 Robert Hinds

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date November 2006

street & number 3922 N. Lombard St. telephone (503) 753-3322

city or town Portland state Oregon zip code 97217

### 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

name Robert Hinds

street & number 3922 N. Lombard St. telephone (503) 285-3094

city or town Portland state OR zip code 97217

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.460 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, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

John Yeon Speculative House  
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR  
County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

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### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 29 and the North 10 feet of Lot 28, Block 96, MOCK CREST, in the City of Portland, County of Multnomah and State of Oregon.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary reflects the entirety of the property historically associated with the John Yeon Speculative House.

# PortlandMaps

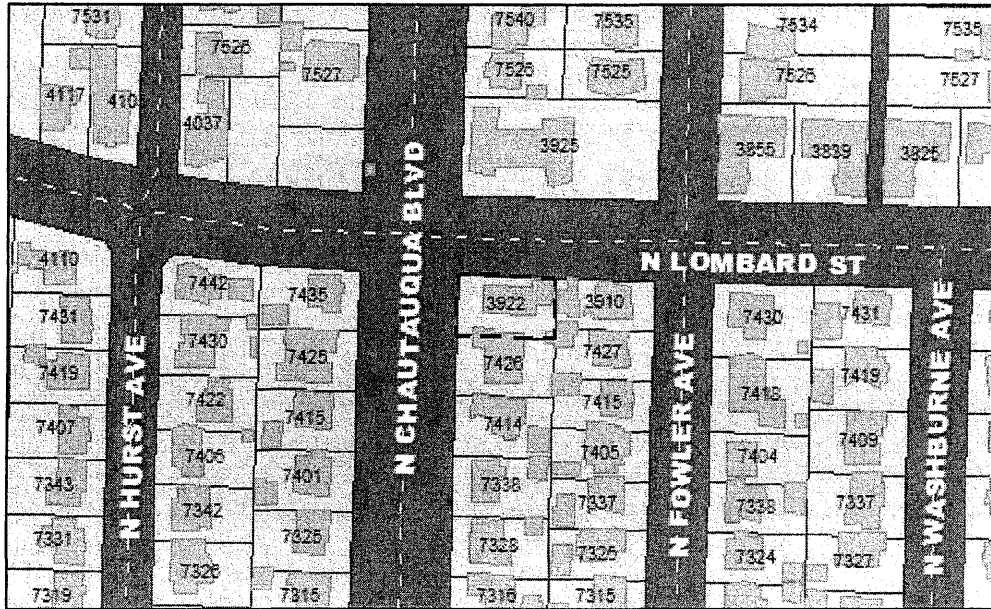
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- ARBOR LODGE -

[Explorer](#) | [Property](#) | **Maps** | [Crime](#) | [Census](#) | [Transportation](#)

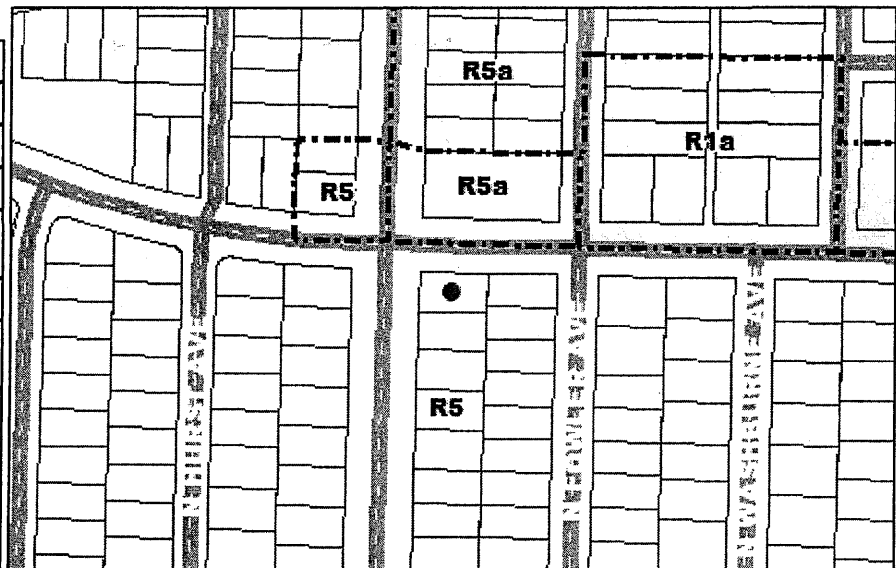
**Summary** | [Elevation](#) | [Garbage](#) | [Hazard](#) | [Natural Resources](#) | [Photo](#) | [Property](#) | [Water](#) | [Sewer](#) | [Tax Map](#) | [UGB](#) | [Watershed](#) | [Zip Code](#) | [Zoning](#)

## Property & Location



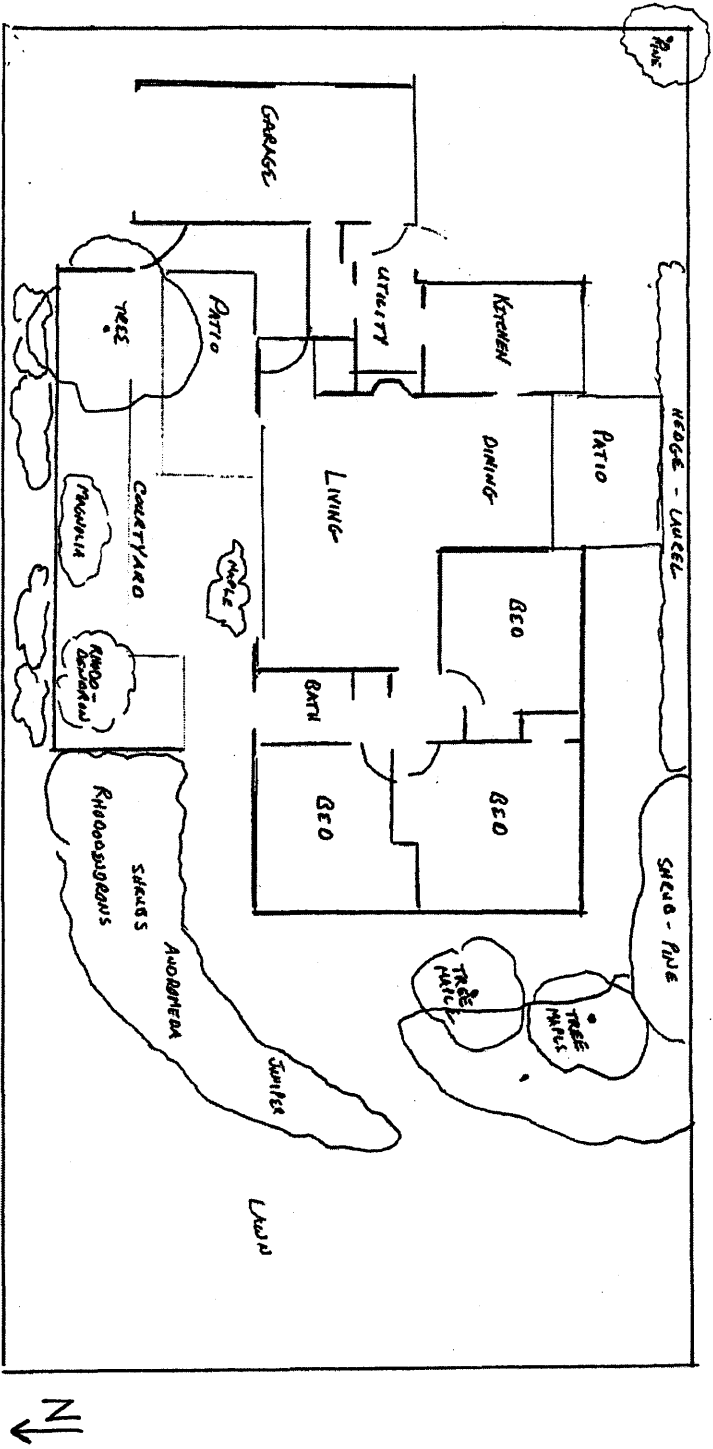
## Zoning

Property	
Zone	R5
Description	Residential 5,000
Overlay	
Comp Plan	R5
Comp Plan Overlay	
Historic District	
Conservation District	
Plan District	
NRMP District	
Urban Renewal District	n/a
Zoning Map	2326





John Yeon Speculative House Landscape and Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior  
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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Photographs Page 1

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John Yeon Speculative House  
Multnomah Co., OR.

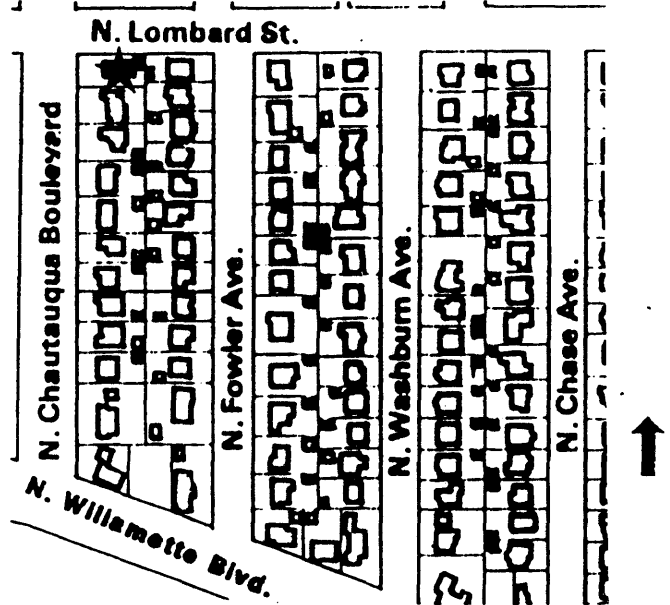
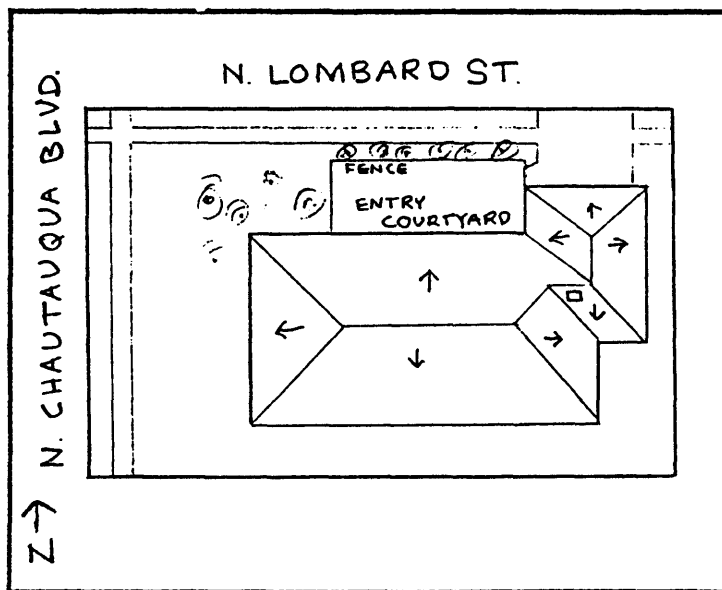
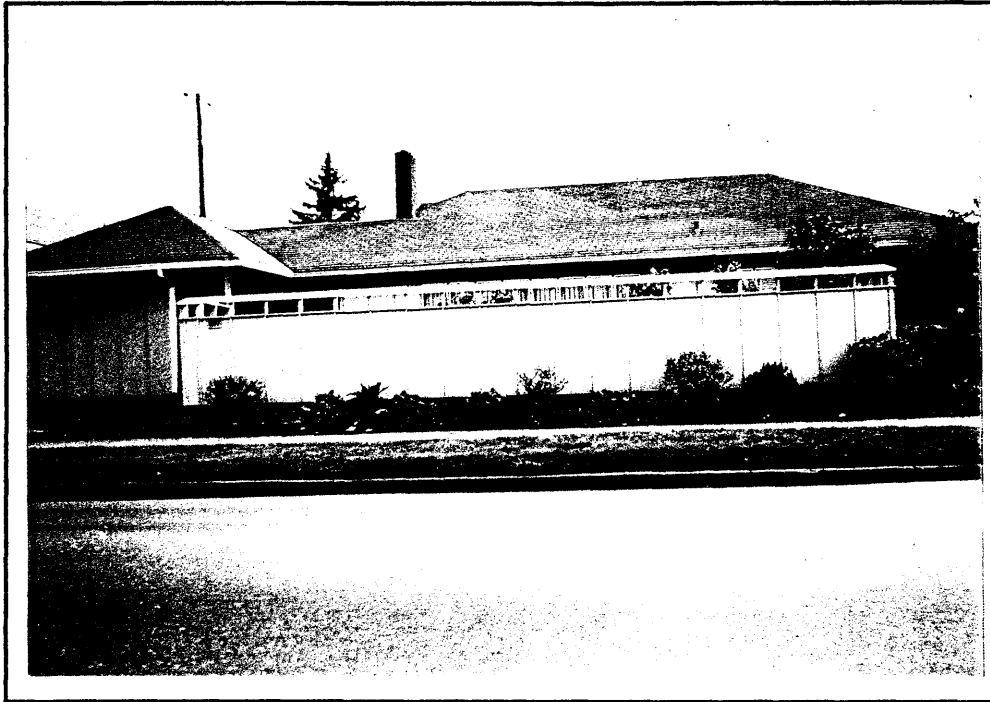
Photos by R. Hinds  
11-27-2006

Negative retained by photographer  
3922 N. Lombard  
Portland, OR 97217

Photos labeled with acid-free photographic pen

- 1) North side of house featuring courtyard and front entry, looking SE.
- 2) North side of house with garage (far left) and outer courtyard wall, looking SW.
- 3) North side of house, view from Lombard Street, looking S.
- 4) West side of house, view from Chautauqua Boulevard, looking NE.
- 5) South side of house, view from back yard, looking NW.
- 6) Interior view of ventilation louver, open below fixed pane of glass in NW bedroom.
- 7) Interior view of "great room," looking out to the N courtyard.
- 8) Interior view of kitchen with original built-in cabinets, looking E.
- 9) Interior view of master bedroom, looking SW.

Albina Community Historic Resources Inventory



ADDRESS: 3922 N. Lombard St.

4-534-03922

**3922 N. Lombard Street**

Mock's Crest, Block 96, North 10' of Lot 28, Lot 29

Present owner as of 1993: Francis Sotito

**Neighborhood Association:** Arbor Lodge

**Tax Assessor #:** R-57520-1740

**Quarter Section Map #:** 2326

**Zoning Designation:** R5

**Date Built:** 1939

**Original Owner:** John B. Yeon Company

**Other Owners:** Marie Haskell

**Architectural Plans By:** John Yeon

**Builder:** Bert Smith

**Original Function:** Residence

**Present Function:** Residence

**Style/Typology:** Northwest Regional Style

**Theme:** Architecture

**Chronological Period:** The Motor Age 1914-1940

**Resource Type:** Building

**Plan Type/Shape:** Rectangular

**Foundation Material:** Concrete

**Frame:** Wood

**Roof:** Hip; Composition Shingle

**Primary Window Type:** Battens & mullions on 2-foot centers, ventilation louvers below fixed glass

**Number of Stories:** 1

**Basement:** No

**Exterior Surface Materials:** Modular plywood panels

**Decorative Features:** Modular plywood fence creates entrance courtyard.

**Condition:** Good

**Noteworthy Landscape Features:** Original professional landscaping.

**Setting:** Facing Lombard St, garage entrance to the east, modular plywood fence creates entrance courtyard.

**Alteration Data:**

Garage widened. *NO*

**Statement of Significance:** Like the adjacent house, also by Yeon, this house displays an innovative use of materials. The exterior of the house is finished in plywood panels using a two-foot module. Although plywood was not a new material, new glues made it available for exterior use.

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Vaughan, Thomas and Ferriday, Virginia Guest, editors, SPACE, STYLE AND STRUCTURE:

BUILDING IN NORTHWEST AMERICA (Portland, 1974).

**Negative:** 582-18A

**Total Score:** 21

Architecture: 14      History: 0      Integrity: 6      Environment: 1      Ensemble: 0



John Yeen Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon

1.



John Yeon Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon

2.



John Yeou Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon  
3.



John Yeon Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon  
4.



John Yeon Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon

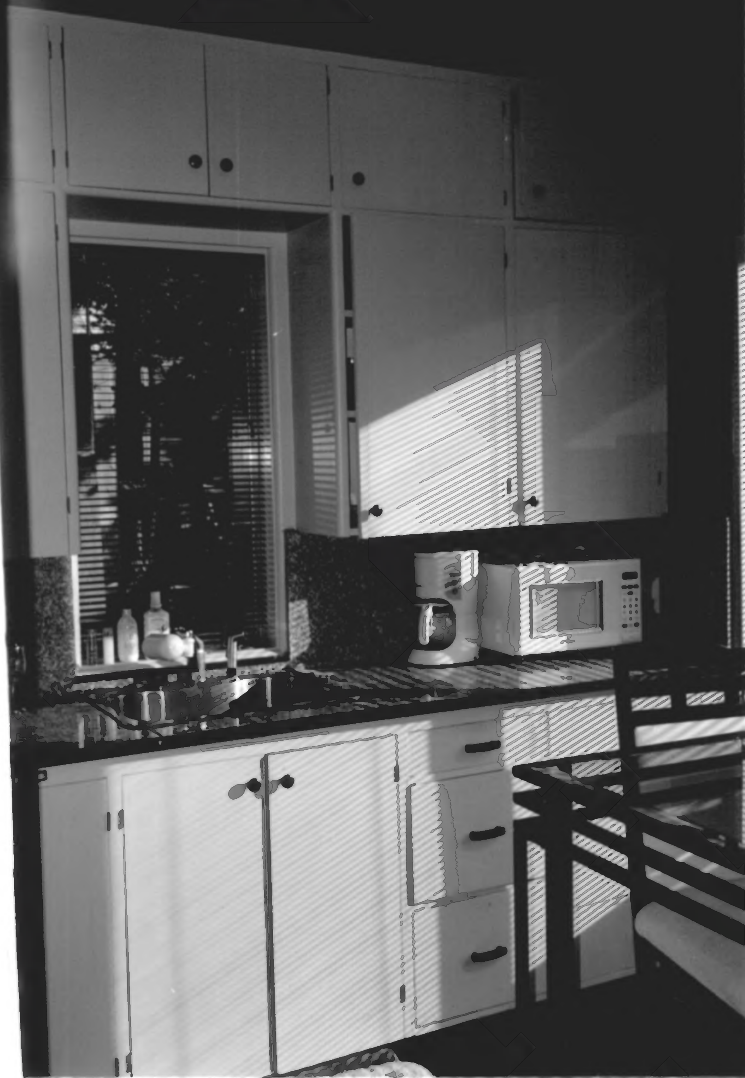
5.



John U. Speculative House  
Multnomah C. Oregon  
6.



John Yeon Speculative House  
Maltross Co. Oregon  
7.



John Yoon Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon  
8.



John Yeon Speculative House  
Multnomah Co. Oregon  
9.