

# **CARPORT INTEGRITY POLICY**

## **Arizona State Historic Preservation Office**

**Prepared by**  
**Jason Fox and R. Brooks Jeffery**  
**Preservation Studies**  
**University of Arizona**

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### **Purpose**

In 2004, the staff of the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the members of the Arizona Historic Sites Review Committee (HSRC) reviewed the proposed Winterhaven Historic District (Tucson) National Register nomination in which the discussion of integrity was often focused on how the carport, an integral component of ranch style house type, has been modified over the 50+ years of the subdivision. SHPO staff and the HSRC disagreed with the preparers' evaluation of carport integrity as applied to the proposed Winterhaven Historic District. The preparers were graduate students from a University of Arizona Preservation Studies class under the direction of R. Brooks Jeffery. The preparers took a purist stance that defined criteria for carport integrity as having no modifications to its original form and function. The SHPO staff and the HSRC then recommended that a more thorough study of carports be conducted by the preparers with the purpose of providing a spectrum of options for carport integrity, evaluation criteria, and recommendations to SHPO staff and the HSRC as a policy to guide evaluation of future nominations where the integrity of carports in ranch style house types is at issue.

Jason Fox, one of the graduate students in the Preservation Studies program who worked on the original nomination, and Jeffery then completed a draft Carport Integrity Policy for review by SHPO staff and HSRC. The policy presented three scenarios and recommended the third that stated, "All residences with compatible carport garage conversions and compatible enclosures into habitable space are considered contributors." This policy recommendation was approved for adoption by a unanimous vote by the HSRC in October 2005. All three scenarios are presented below to convey the comprehensive understanding of the alternatives and to provide justification for the policy's final recommendation.

### **Methodology**

This study traces the development of the carport for the purpose of providing a background context for the intentions of the original architects and builders as carports became part of the architectural vocabulary of post-war subdivision development. This study then analyzed all 83 Winterhaven residences with carport modifications (from a total of 268 Winterhaven properties) to derive distinct patterns of modifications and to develop criteria to evaluate their integrity. Finally, this study makes recommendations with specific application to the Winterhaven Historic District nomination that may also have application in other ranch style house type subdivisions as a broader policy.

Information for this study and policy statement was obtained from a variety of sources. To initiate the study, a query was distributed to the Forum (National Trust for Historic Preservation) and Vernacular Architecture Forum listservs to solicit both sources of information on the origins, evolution, and transformation of carports, as well as current policies that assess their integrity as historic resources. This query generated numerous responses from all over the United States, and although no carport integrity policies surfaced as precedence, the scholarly references, provocative discussion, and personal anecdotes provided by these colleagues expedited the preparation of this policy.

## Historical Background of Carports

Throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, the steadily increasing rate of middle-class automobile ownership made the residential accommodation of this new luxury a pressing concern. Due to the expense of the automobile, its storage had to be in a safe and secure location that was off the street. Between 1900 and the 1960s, these criteria demanded new configurations for the single family home to accommodate the car (Buckley, 1991: 124). An initial solution was to adapt the earlier carriage house building type as a detached garage for the automobile (Robinson, 2000: 72). This type of solution was readily accommodated on deep city and streetcar suburb lots that were often accessed by alleys. However, this was practical only for those who could both afford to construct an entirely separate structure and had sufficient room on their property. With the development of post-World War II subdivisions, where lots were broader against the street and narrower in depth (in contrast to their earlier counterparts), also came the expectation of some sort of accommodation for their automobiles (Robinson, 2000: 72). One solution was the integration of the garage into the residence itself, an arrangement that made it the dominant architectural feature in many American suburbs. This was made possible by wider suburban lots that allowed sprawling elevations.

The carport developed as an alternative to the garage for housing the automobile in a residential setting. A predecessor for the carport may have been the older form of the porte cochere, which performed a similar function to the carport by sheltering passengers as they exited carriages or automobiles. Like carports, porte cocheres also functioned as vehicular-based entrances to the home that often supplanted the formal front entry or porch as the primary means of entering the residence (Gebhard, 1991: 108).

As early as 1909, carports were used by the Prairie School architect Walter Burley Griffin in his design for the Sloan House in Elmhurst, Illinois (Gebhard, 1991: 110). By 1913, carports were also being employed by other Prairie School architects such as the Minneapolis firm of Purcell, Feick & Elmslie in their design for a residence at Lockwood Lake, Wisconsin. In this instance, the carport was termed an “Auto Space” (Gebhard, 1991: 110). The late architectural historian David Gebhard suggested that the term “carport” originated from the feature’s use in 1930s Streamline Moderne residences (Gebhard, 1991: 107). This term, which entered popular jargon in 1939, stemmed from the visual connection between these streamlined residences and nautical imagery.

In the 1930s through the 1950s, carports were also being used by Frank Lloyd Wright in his Usonian Houses; an idea that he probably got from Griffin, a former associate. Wright recognized two distinct advantages to a carport over a garage. First, its form recognized that the automobile was a status symbol, a family’s most prized possession. Second, the cost of an open carport was low compared to a closed garage (Robinson, 2000: 72). He argued that the modern automobile was not a horse that had to be stabled in a barn-like structure (a garage). Instead, it would be showcased in a simple structure that, instead of hiding the automobile, framed it. The low cost of a carport compared to a garage fit with Wright’s aim to make the Usonian House a low-cost solution to suburban housing. The carports that Wright designed for his Usonian Houses were an integral part of the main façade, foreshadowing their later arrangement in the modern ranch style home (Hess, 2004: 36). Like Wright, suburbanites later saw the carport as a means to show off their automobile, and this made the family’s choice of an automobile distinguish their home from its virtually identical neighbors (Robinson, 2000: 79).

Despite Wright’s advocacy, it was not until the post-war era that carports were widely embraced. Seen as an inexpensive and flexible alternative to garages, their popularity can be attributed to magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *Sunset* that promoted the carport as an integral part of the modern ranch style house. For instance, an article in the February 1955 edition of *House Beautiful* extolled the virtues of the so-called “Drive-In House,” which featured a carport that acted as the “first reception area” for guests upon their arrival (Gebhard, 1991: 121). Many carports sheltered the home’s main entry in addition to the automobile (such as in Winterhaven’s Transverse Ranch type). The architectural simplicity of carports worked well within the emerging modernist functional aesthetic. *Better Homes and Gardens* commented that “their crisp open structure is the perfect counterpart to today’s house” (Gebhard, 1991: 122). Carports were prominent in the Case Study Houses designed by Craig Ellwood and Pierre Koenig; where their openness complemented the glass walls of the rest of the structure. Although carports were best suited to warmer climates they were a feature of homes throughout the country. Most of these shared the same basic

arrangement, attached to one end of the house, continuing its roofline, and opening directly or perpendicularly onto the street. The end of the carport that was not attached to the house was treated in a number of ways. Materials used in carports varied from modern steel posts to decorative concrete blocks to the same materials as the rest of the house (Robinson, 2000: 73).

In general, the distinction between homes that featured attached garages and those that included carports was that residences originally built with garages were larger and more costly. Carports were common in subdivisions that were built with Federal Housing Administration (FHA) financing, which had a cap on the maximum home cost. Despite this economy, carports were seen as more modern than garages, yet another example of efficient automobile-oriented architecture like the drive-through or strip mall. In addition to their popularity in new construction, carports were also advocated to modernize the fronts of older Victorian or bungalow residences (Robinson, 2000: 73).

Magazines and architectural plans highlighted the flexibility of the carport as an outdoor entertainment area when not occupied by the car. The residences in suburban subdivisions such as Levittown in Long Island were marketed as being designed to be customized. This was particularly emphasized in regard to carports, where plans would be drawn up at the time of original construction for the homeowner to later convert this space into an additional bedroom or other interior space. Books of plans for the construction of modern residences during the 1940s through the 1960s would also include carport designs that were specifically earmarked for later modification. This flexibility greatly appealed to growing families during the post-war baby boom. Families could initially buy a smaller, more affordable home and have the potential to easily expand it as necessary. In practice carport modifications varied greatly in their compatibility with the original architecture of the home. Gebhard noted that after observing a planned late-1940s subdivision in California that the do-it-yourself aesthetics of homeowners' carport enclosures was in stark contrast to the modernist architecture of the original residence (Gebhard, 1991: 123).

Ultimately the popularity of carport was short-lived; by the early 1960s garages were once more dominant in new construction and by the mid-1970s, carports were completely out of favor. The openness of the carport which had been so hailed during its brief heyday proved to be one of the reasons for its downfall. Carports came to be seen as incredibly demanding on homeowners as they had to be consistently free of clutter and the automobiles within them spotlessly clean (Gebhard, 1991: 123). There was also very limited room for storage and hobbies. What finally cemented the carport's demise was the increase in the number of multi-car households and Americans' ever increasing amount of possessions in need of storage.

## Winterhaven's Carport Modifications

Winterhaven developed as a neighborhood that was notable for its uniform use of carports in all but a handful of residences. Over time, a number of these carports have been modified to adapt to the changing needs of residents. Three types of carport modifications have been identified in Winterhaven: garage conversions, carport enclosures into habitable space, and carport extensions. Several residences exhibit modifications of more than one of these types.

1. **Garage Conversions:** Garage conversions in Winterhaven typically involve the simple enclosure of the existing carport with a standard garage door. Often, the modification is simply the installation of a garage door frame, track, and operable door within the existing carport frame. Other types of carport conversion into garages include those that involved the addition of multiple garage bays to accommodate several cars. This was either done through the partitioning of the existing carport or by the extension of the space beyond the original footprint.



Compatible Garage Conversion with addition of only a garage door and frame (Site 45)



Incompatible Garage Conversion with the addition of a second car bay and incongruous building materials (Site 111)

2. **Carport Enclosures into Habitable Space:** Conversions of this type in Winterhaven involve the complete enclosure of the carport and its use as an interior room. Many of these appear to be conversions to additional bedrooms or dens that are accessed from the interior. Other examples feature an additional door that implies the use of the former carport as a self-contained apartment with its own distinct entrance. The least intrusive of these conversions were done by infilling the carport opening with the same material palette as the rest of the façade and including window openings similar in scale and proportion with others on the street façade. A few carports were enclosed with wood siding or other materials that are incompatible with the rest of the house.



Compatible Carport Enclosure into Habitable Space with openings in scale and proportion, as well as compatible materials consistent with those of the street façade (Site 118)



Incompatible Enclosure into Habitable Space with an additional entry door (Site 115)

3. **Carport Extensions:** Several residences in Winterhaven feature extensions of the original carport outward from the rest of the street façade. This was done to either accommodate additional automobiles or provide covered parking when the original carport has been enclosed. The extensions alter the proportion and scale of the residence’s original design and intrude on the subdivision’s uniform setback, thus compromising the broad, landscaped streetscape as a character defining feature of the neighborhood. Many of Winterhaven’s carport extensions are constructed of wood and less commonly out of brick, but in both cases, the extensions are not always consistent with the material palette of the original house. The flat and pitched roof forms are also inconsistently applied relative to the roof form of the house itself.



Carport Extension with consistent roof form and material palette (Site 184)



Carport Extension with roof form and material palette inconsistent with original house (Site 241)

## Recommendations

There are three possible scenarios for evaluating the carport modifications in Winterhaven. These are listed below in order of number of contributing residences that would be considered non-contributors under each scenario and its justification (i.e., from the least inclusive to the most inclusive scenarios).

**1. All properties with carport modifications of any kind are considered non-contributors.**

Although many ranch style house type subdivisions contain a mix of carports and garages, Winterhaven is unique in the uniform use of carports in all but one residence within the defined period of significance. This purist scenario suggests that any modification to the original open carport would compromise the integrity of the Winterhaven ranch style house type as a character defining feature in the overall historic district and therefore that property would be considered a non-contributor. This scenario would identify 84 Winterhaven properties as non-contributors due to carport integrity.

**2. Only properties with compatible garage conversions are considered contributors.**

The conversion of a carport into a garage is a logical extension of the original function of the space. Often, the modification is simply the installation of a garage door frame, track, and operable door within the existing carport frame, rendering the action reversible. There are some Winterhaven properties for which the installation of the garage door is done in a manner incompatible with the original house, including smaller or larger frame openings, or incompatible materials (see below for criteria definitions for compatibility). In this scenario, all carport enclosures into habitable spaces and non-original carport extensions would be considered non-contributing properties because the function of the space has been altered, and considered a non-reversible action. This scenario would identify 59 Winterhaven properties as non-contributors due to carport integrity.

**3. All residences with compatible carport garage conversions and compatible enclosures into habitable space are considered contributors.**

This is the recommended scenario for the evaluation of Winterhaven's carport as the most liberal interpretation of the intended flexibility in carport modification as outlined in the historic background text above. This allows properties with either compatible garage conversions or compatible carport enclosures to garages to be considered contributors. In this scenario, non-original carport extensions are considered to be non-contributors because the extensions alter the proportion and scale of the residence's original design and intrude on the subdivision's uniform setback thus compromising the broad, landscaped streetscape as a character defining feature of the neighborhood. This scenario would identify 45 Winterhaven properties as non-contributors due to carport integrity.

In addition to the above recommendations, the National Register of Historic Places recognizes seven aspects or qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity. To retain integrity, a property must possess several if not many of these qualities. Priority of one quality over another depends on how significance is defined. These qualities are defined below with their interpretation as applied to Winterhaven carports.

Association/Age: In regard to Winterhaven's carports, association applies to the space's ability to reference its original function as an automobile storage space. Those carports which have been converted to garages best maintain the original function of the space. However, it can also be argued that as the carports in ranch style houses were intended by their designers to be flexible spaces that could later be modified as the owners saw fit, the enclosure of carports into habitable space was in keeping with the intended functional flexibility of the space. Although it is likely that some of the carport modifications were done within the defined period of significance, records that would provide information on post-occupancy property improvements (such as building permits) were not found.

Location: N/A

Setting: Winterhaven's carports were originally approached by gravel or paved driveways from the street. Most of those residences that have modified their carports have retained this feature.

The retention of the driveway is especially important in those residences that have carports enclosed into habitable space, as it provides a clue to the original function of the space. Thus the enclosure of a carport into habitable space combined with the removal of its driveway has the highest level of compromise to the integrity of the property.

Feeling: Defined as the property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time, this quality applies particularly to properties with carport extensions that, due to their size, proportion, and disruption of the neighborhood's uniform street setback, do not retain their integrity.

Design: The design of carport modifications must be compatible with that of the rest of the residence's street façade and should not overwhelm the original design of the residence. Carport enclosures that feature no openings, or those with windows incompatible with others on the residence in terms of type or scale, compromise integrity. The design of carport enclosures to include additional entries (often as a rental unit) is also considered to be inappropriate, because this alters the façade composition and confuses the functional primacy of the front door.

Materials: Winterhaven's residences are characterized by a rather limited use of materials. The most dominant materials are exposed brick, painted brick, mortar-washed brick, and exposed burnt adobe. Wood is used sparingly in the neighborhood in the form of wood siding on gable ends or used as supporting posts located at entry porches and carports. The carports also employ brick or metal supports and some feature low brick side walls. Thus the dominant use of other materials in the modifications of the carport compromises the integrity of the property. Inappropriate materials include the dominant use of wood siding (when there is no other wood on the house) and the use of stucco (which was never a material originally used in Winterhaven).

Workmanship: Even though Winterhaven's ranch style house type promoted standardized house construction, much of Winterhaven's architectural character is derived from the features of workmanship that distinguish one house from another. In the case of carport modifications, when the workmanship of the alterations differs greatly from the original, the integrity of the property has been compromised.

Carport enclosures as habitable space, considered to be new construction within a historic context, must also be evaluated by the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Standard 9, which specifically addresses new additions, provides criteria for evaluating compatibility:

*Exterior alterations or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.*

## **Conclusion**

The carports on many post-World War II ranch style house types were designed as flexible spaces with the intent that homeowners could later enclose them as their family grew or as they simply desired more space. This policy, therefore, recommends that properties with compatible carport garage conversions and compatible enclosures into habitable space be considered contributors to a larger National Register district. Conversely, this policy recommends that properties with non-compatible garage conversions and enclosures, as well as carport extensions be considered as non-contributors to a larger National Register district. This policy also recommends applying the criteria outlined above as a method for evaluating carport integrity in post-World War II ranch style house types.



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