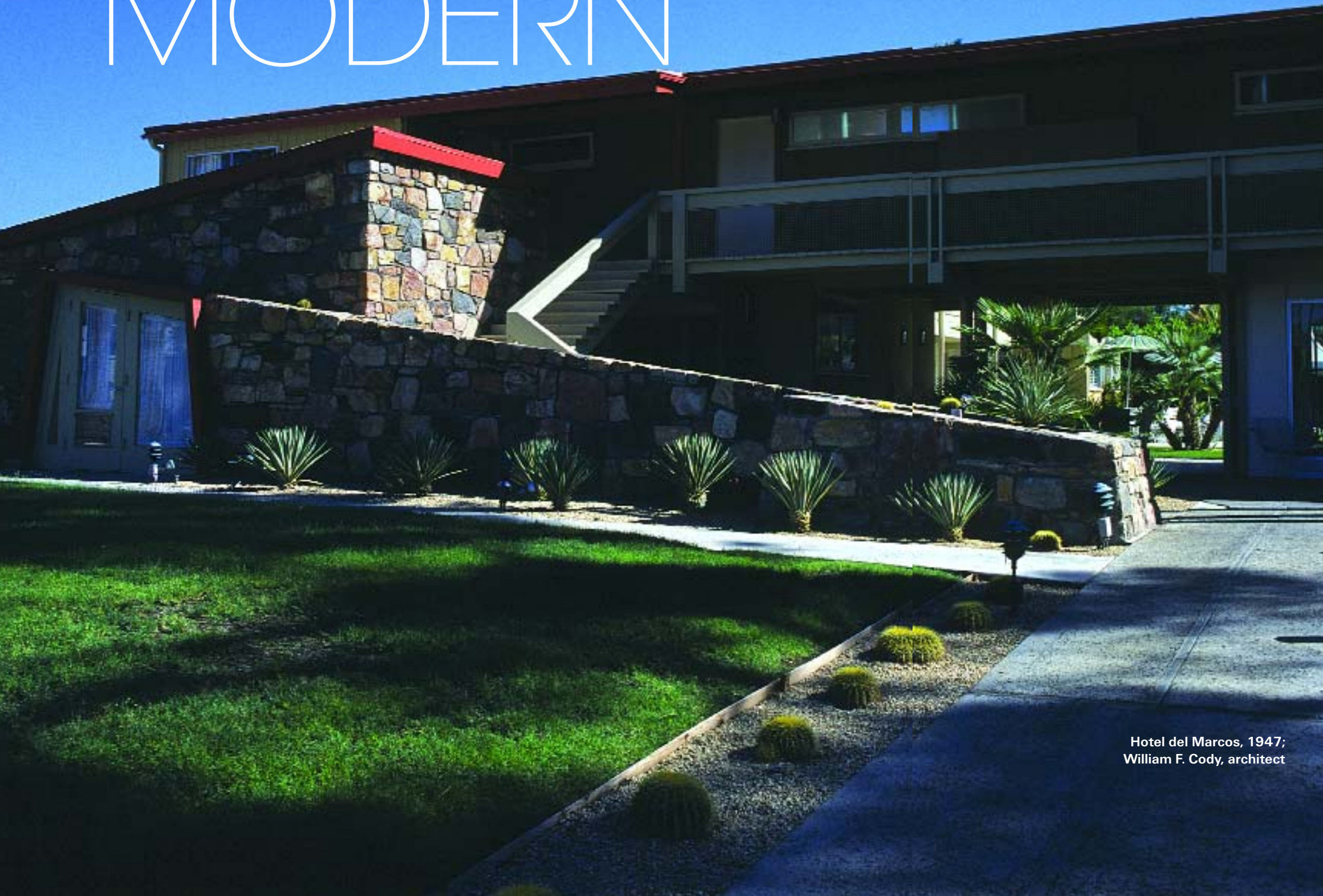


PALM SPRINGS MODERN



Hotel del Marcos, 1947;
William F. Cody, architect

*Oh, give me a home where the millionaires roam,
And the dear little glamour girls play,
Where seldom is heard an intelligent word,
And we round up the dollars all day.*

– Sung by Johnny Boyle
in the lobby of the Palm Springs Desert Inn (1930s)

I'm feeling pretty Johnny Boyle at the moment. The little ditty he belted out about Palm Springs (above) expresses all the giddy optimism of this day in the life of Pilot Michael. Here it is, ten eventful years since *Flying Adventures* first took flight and I am back where it all began – in the desert oasis that was our pages' debut destination and baby, I'm moved to say, look at us now! Palm Springs and I both have seen a lot of life in the last decade – I jetting hither and thither to find the most fabulous fly-in places and fun for readers, and "America's foremost desert resort," as Palm Springs was dubbed back in 1936, being – still – America's foremost desert resort. This is even before it became the mirage made real of California dreamers, golf resort schemers (today there are more than 100 courses) and the elite of Hollywood's Golden Age. Yes, even before *Palm Springs Life* magazine touted it as "the sandbox of society where sophisticates go Native!"



I have returned to the birthplace of *Flying Adventures* to celebrate its 10th year of success in the bosom, as it were, of the terrific town I so loved once. And how I am loving it again! Coming back has landed me in a fly-in adventure of all time, for Palm Springs is in the midst of a party of its own: it's a wingding, a fling, a wonderful what-have-you with the architectural movement so dear to my aviator's heart: Modernism. Of course, everyone knows flyguys-and-gals have an affinity, typically, with soaring. Well, one look at the up-up-and-away roofline of the Tramway Oasis Gas Station, a hyperbolic paraboloid of steel I-beams and corrugated metal that juts over what used to be gas pumps and, there you go: modernism and me, we're of a mind! Or maybe I mean, style.

Either way, this is the town that has had lots of heydays – like that of the '50s when it was, among other joys, the Rat Pack's good time central (remember Sammy & Sinatra? Cocktails? Lots of cocktails?). Of course, it also has seen its share of shabby times (remember the '80s' Spring Break?). But now...wow. Now Palm Springs is the "it" place again. And it is all because of the architects who quietly were imposing their aes-

thetic on the desert during the era Elvis was honeymooning with Priscilla; it is because of the genius hard at work at the very time the Bossanova was moving everyone to put down their martini and leap into the pool (fully clothed). This was an aesthetic – perfected in the '50s and '60s – that *Look* magazine in 1962 called "The Way Out Way of Life." From the 1940s through the 1960s, these maverick architects – Albert Frey, Richard Neutra, William Cody, John Lautner, to name a few – found Palm Springs the perfect oasis for their theories. The desert's unique beauty and extreme climate – blistering days, cold nights, intense sunlight, and rainfall of only 5.5 inches per year – was a thrill to the skill of these "moderns" to conceive houses, banks, even Palm Springs Airport (a Donald Wexler design) that were "a return to nature by modern means," said Neutra – "dwellings in the desert landscape not rooted, but subtly inserted in (their) surroundings, fundamentally strange to the human race." Dwellings of glass walls, askew angles, butterfly rooflines, and details so sleek and spare as to seem, said critics, industrial.

I love strange. Seems a lot of others love strange, too, like the local preservation societies obsessed with keeping Palm Springs's "nature near" (a Neutra term) structures out of bulldozers' way. And like the retro rangers (like me) riding here just to turn back time and live a little like Lucy and Ricky, circa '60s, in a world of "mod" shag carpet, spare Eames chairs, and a "jet age" Lucite anything.

What will the neighbors think? This is what

Form shall not necessarily follow function: the modernist credo stylishly rendered in the 1935 Movie Colony Hotel by architect Albert Frey (left); Convention is meant to be broken: the sleek chic of the moderns' vision in the retro-modern Ballentines Hotel, 1938

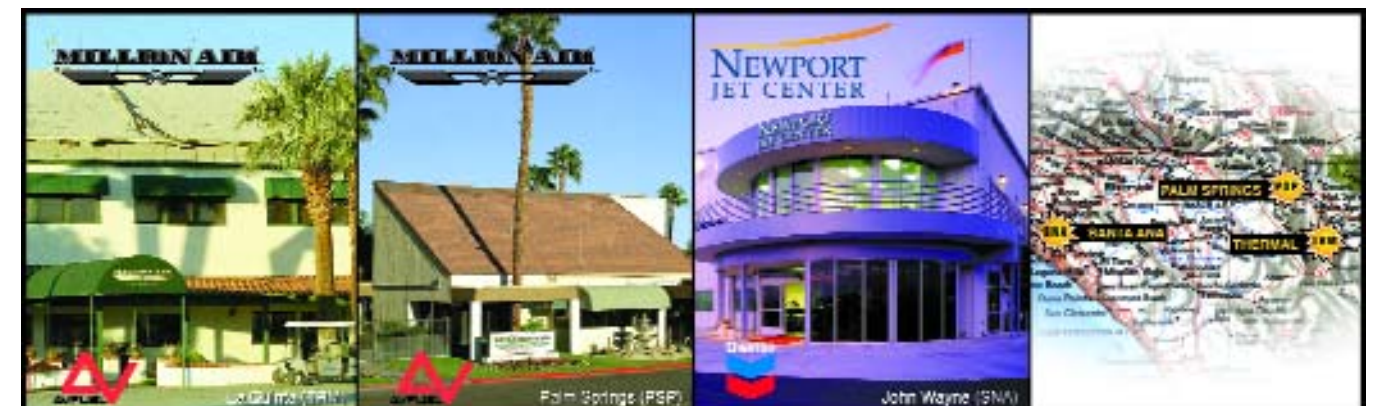
Time magazine said under its "man of the year" cover photo of Neutra when he first appeared on the scene. If they are anything like me they will think there can be no cooler cool than a tour of "Palm Springs Modern," the term given to those city sights making up what here is the most important concentration of modernist architecture *in the world*. The architectural legacy left by then-eccentrics like Robert Alexander is said to be unsurpassed in originality and international influence. It was in Alexander's infamous Elvis Honeymoon House that the King, wielding a pistol, shot out a TV while relaxing on a 64-foot curving sofa; the livingroom furniture, evocative of a Saturn rocket, looked on. Classically modern, and it's here. I have got to see it.

I have got to see the famed 1946 Edgar Kaufmann House, a "way out" splendor in glass, rock and corrugated metal. And Bob Hope's home by John Lautner, the landmark dazzler that overlooks the spectacular

A desert dwelling subtly inserted into its surroundings, in its day "fundamentally strange to the human race" (right); the beauty of nature-near design in a classic mid-'50s Swiss Miss chalet by father-and-son architects George and Robert Alexander; the chair at left is Eames (below)

Coachella Valley. The valley station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, done by Frey and partners John Porter Clark and Robson Chambers, is another must-see. Though the tram itself speeds 8,516 feet to the top of commanding Mt. San Jacinto, it is appreciating the modernist base station (all askew angles beautifully executed) that will be the joyride for me.

There is City Hall, the old Cactus Springs Hotel (now the Hope Springs), and the 1955 Firestation #1; there is Robinson's Department Store. Indeed, in the enclave of



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Palm Springs Visitor Center

Tramway Oasis Gas Station (1965). Pick-up *A Brief History & Architectural Guide* of 38 sites, including 18 Albert Frey masterpieces. 2901 N. Canyon Dr. (800) 347-7746

Palm Spring Modern Tours

Architecture aficionado and passionate Palm Springs Modern scholar Robert Imber narrates a lively, two-hour drive-by of important modernist structures. Imber's absorbing tour ventures into exclusive neighborhoods to reveal many architecturally compelling buildings and houses, including those of Old Hollywood stars who contracted with leading modernist architects to build homes to this day considered unique and groundbreaking. Imber's inside line on the personal stories behind the architecture lend to the tour a special fascination. (760) 318-6118

The Architecture of William Cody

Nov. 6

A discussion presented by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. www.pspf.net

Houses, Houses & More

A comprehensive list of quintessential Palm Springs Modern buildings – plus their addresses – designed by Cody, Lautner, Neutra, Wexler, Williams (1950s), Williams, Williams & Williams (1930s-40s) and others. www.csupomona.edu/~blemerton

Great Alexander Weekend Home Tour

Nov. 2-4

Tour of classic modernist homes, plus lectures, book signings, architectural photography and parties. www.alexanderhome.com

Palm Springs Desert Museum

Nov. 30

An architectural symposium titled, *Midcentury Hotels* explores the Palm Springs Modern aesthetic. 101 Museum Dr. (760) 325-0189 www.psmuseum.org

Elvis Honeymoon House

See the modernist masterpiece where the King and Priscilla retreated after Sinatra's Learjet whisked them back from Las Vegas. 1350 Ladera Circle (760) 322-1192

Palm Springs from its Tennis Club district to the Old Movie Colony, there are lots of awesome examples of the architectural movement where nature, plants, view, light and air are glorified. These, said Neutra, are all the elements so necessary to the modernist vision; in a word, he said, this was a "new approach to biologically correct modes of living." This was a vision expressed as well in the 2,500-odd copycat houses built by the Alexander Company in the '60s, tract houses of the design formula, set down in a linear line: first comes the carport, next a breezeway, then an all-window wall, and, finally, a wall without windows at all. What's more, Palm Springs's then-radical houses were an utter thrill, still are, to their owners – no matter what the neighbors think. So it's certain: I am in for one amazing and inspirational tour. As Mrs. Grace Miller, an early Neutra client, wrote to him of her home: "One of the most fantastic surprises... is how the house lends itself to any kind of life, i.e., close, private life, or the gay social life, whether there is one or

more to dinner, one or two or a crowd for tea or cocktails, or a bunch of young things for dancing, careless with their cigarette butts. The house is always a success!"

I love a success. It was the moderns' mantra in their designs so destined for hipdom that form no longer slavishly follow function, that conventions are meant to be broken, that the future should be embraced with all the excitement Palm Springs – the remarkable resort that inspired them – ever promises. Flush as I am with the success of *Flying Adventures*, with its future as limitless as the dazzling desert views Neutra and friends were committed to providing their clients from every room, this is all I know: I am going to pop over to the Orbit-in, the low-slung hotel where the '50s never went out of style. I am going to book a room with Sputnik looking décor, channel Sinatra with a celebratory cocktail at the Boomerang Bar, and begin my kinda now, kinda wow fling with Palm Springs Modern...now. The town and I both? We've got a great thing going. ✕

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Runways: 13L/31R 4,952' 13R/31L 10,000'
Approaches: VOR or GPS-B
ATIS / ASOS: 760.327.2770

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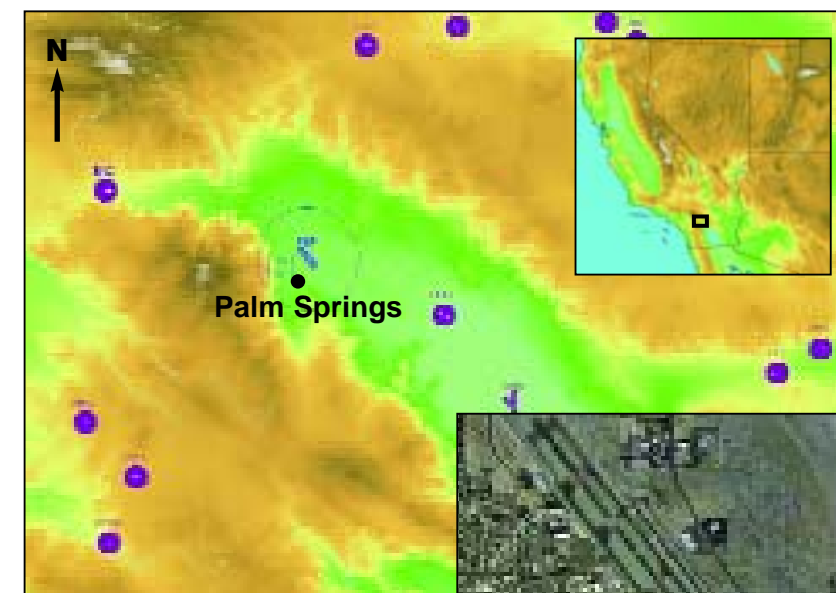
Avis 760.778.6300
Budget 760.778.1960
Enterprise 760.320.0079

AIRPORT RESTAURANTS

Cactus Jacks Café 760.323.2210

AIRPORT LODGING

Movie Colony Hotel (2 mi.) 760.320.6340



Profile map viewed from Palm Springs looking west.

Maps provided by Voyager Flight Planning Software

