

Palm Springs

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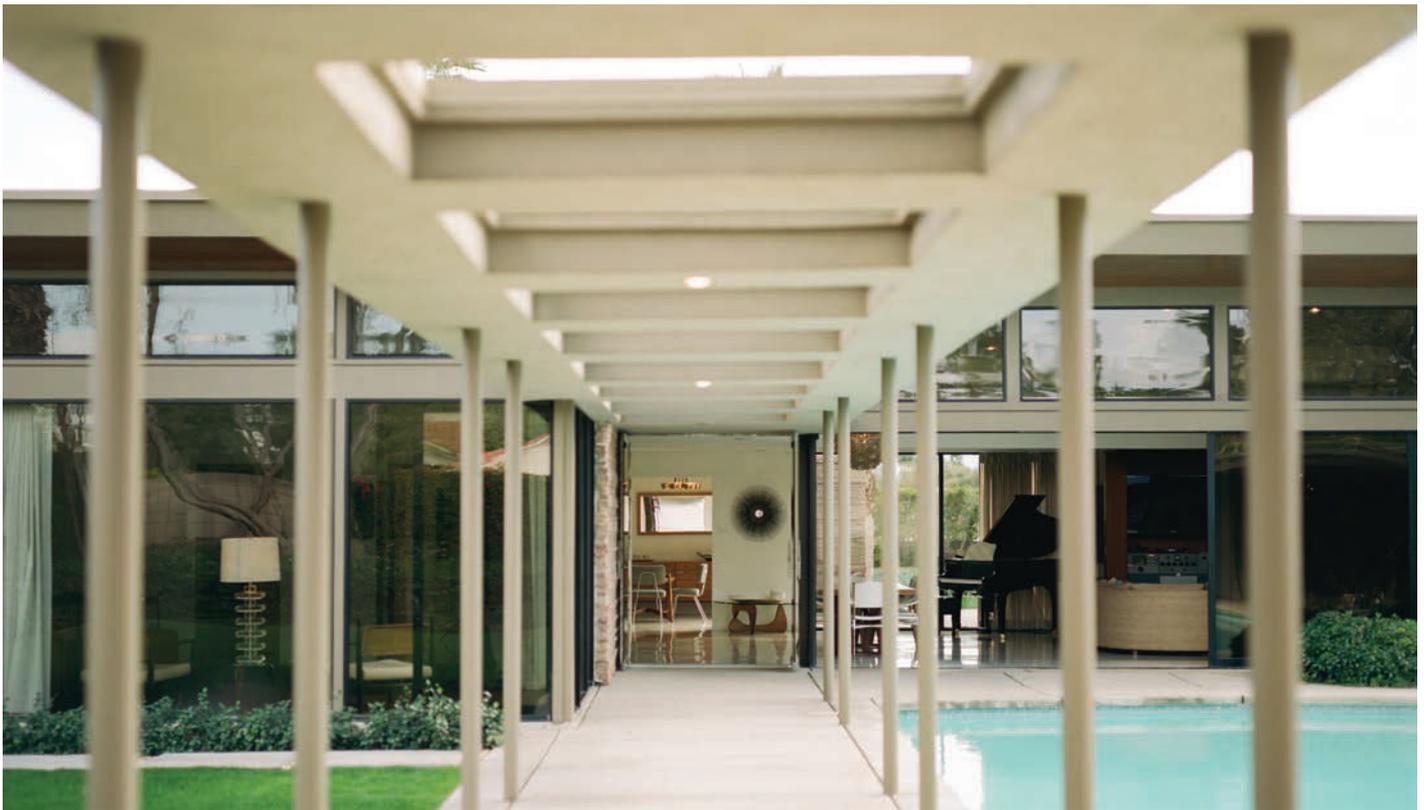
Warm Winters and Hot Design

Palm Springs is officially hip once more, as a new troupe of design enthusiasts rediscover its mid-century architecture. Zoey Goto headed over to California's desert outpost for the Modernism Week Preview, to soak up its sunshine and vintage-vibes.

There are few cities on earth that tantalize the eye quite like Palm Springs. Cruising into this quirky city, via the bone-dry desert, it soon becomes clear that Palm Springs simply refuses to do bad buildings; whether it's the high-impact housing of the rich and famous, or the mundane everyday buildings of finger-lickin' drive-thrus, gas stations, banks or sci-fi-tastic convenience stores, everywhere the eye lands offers up a design masterclass.

This wealth of monumental design is now celebrated twice a year, at the

11-day Modernism Week Festival (February 11-21) and its condensed 4-day preview in October (modernismweek.com). In normal times, the main event attracts over 150,000 sun-seeking design enthusiasts, with a jam-packed schedule of talks, parties, vintage sales, film screenings and open-house tours, where you can peek inside perfectly preserved mid-century homes. The overall tone is fun and accessible, aiming to appeal to anyone with an interest in vintage culture, rather than just catering for architecture aficionados. This February Modernism Week has moved the festival online, giving



Sinatra House

audiences a flavor of the festival without having to leave the comfort of their homes, with the postponed in-person event planned for April.

Palm Springs' revival must warm the heart of its 47,000 residents. The city initially had its heyday during the Golden Era of Hollywood, when it became a playground for movie stars, after the studios decided they wanted their artists within a two-hour radius of the set at all times. 100 miles to the east of LA and deep in the heart of the desert, Palm Springs offered A-listers the perfect retreat for privacy and relaxation. Elvis honeymooned here in the radical 'House of Tomorrow', JFK fell for Marilyn in this palm tree lined paradise, and The Rat Pack crooned and clinked martinis in the historic Racquet Club district. When Palm Springs' star faded in the 80s and 90s "you couldn't give

these homes away" laughs Marty Danielson, a 78 year old resident who has opened up his stunning mid-century home for visitors as part of the Modernism Week Preview. "There were streets of modernist homes boarded up. It was like a ghost town," he recalls, as a steady stream of curious visitors amble through his perfectly preserved 1959 abode, past the original Eames chairs and stainless steel chandeliers.

Like many of the Palm Springs homes, Marty's is in the Desert Modernism style. This branch of mid-century architecture was influenced by the German Bauhaus but adapted to the sunny climes of California, with clean simple lines, flat roofs, living spaces that seamlessly merge indoor and outdoor, and an attempt to reflect the dramatic mountains surrounding



Wexler Steel House

Palm Springs. Architects such as Albert Frey, William F. Cody and Donald Wexler, along with the Alexander Construction Company who built vast estates of modernist houses between 1955 and 1965, attempted to create something far more ambitious than just housing; instead offering the dawn of a new American lifestyle, with an emphasis on leisure time and cocktail hour out by the pool.

As luck would have it, when the city fell out of fashion it became its saving grace, as vast tracts of modernist homes were saved from demolition – not because they were particularly valued at the time, but because they were rarely thought about second homes. Palm Springs managed to preserve the highest concentration of mid-century homes in the world, and residents such as Marty, a former lecturer at Parsons

School of Design in New York, have migrated to the city bringing a renewed energy and appreciation for the mid-century way of life. “I wake up every morning and think I’m so glad I live here, with all of this beautiful design and weather” he smiles, gesturing out towards the succulent-lined back yard, with its turquoise pool and private views of the San Jacinto Mountains.

Along with the manicured hand of gentrification, the make up of the city has also shifted in recent years. Modern day Palm Springs now boasts a thriving LGBTQ+ community, with an estimated 55% of its residents identifying as non-hetero, and hosts year-round events such as the hedonistic White Party weekend, plus the world’s largest lesbian festival, The Dinah.

In the winter months, with temperatures still hovering in the early-twenties, Palm Springs attracts snowbird retirees migrating from the northern states to bask in the 350 days of glorious sunshine. There's also been a recent influx of millennials, who have discovered the city via the nearby Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, and from overnighters at hipster hotels such as The Ace or the Jonathan Adler designed Parker Palm Springs, with its insta-worthy lobby filled with pop art. A love of good design, good weather and good times permeates the city.

On the final day of my visit I take a walking tour, organized by the Palm Springs Historical Society. As we gossip with the tour guide Kathy about Zsa Zsa Gábor's extreme frugality and swing by the Rat Pack haunt Melvyn's restaurant, where you can still get Ol' Blue Eyes favorite dish of Steak Diane, I felt as if I'd entered a seductive time warp, a glamorized take on a bygone era. The worries of the outside world just melted away amidst this cheerful, Utopian oasis. For a dose of hazy, gorgeous, technicolor nostalgia, it was utter bliss.





The Best Hotels For Design-Lovers

L'Horizon Resort & Spa

Originally created in 1952 by renowned architect William F. Cody, the hotel is now frequented by the likes of fashion designer Tom Ford and has been voted one of America's top hotels.

lhorizonpalmsprings.com

Ace Hotel & Swim Club

This laid-back resort was originally a mid-century motel and Denny's Diner, and the redesign takes its retro heritage into account.

acehotel.com

Art Hotel

This new kid on the block hotel was created by designer Tracy Turco and offers 8 live/work studios, set around a turquoise pool. Local artists have been drafted in to deck the walls with retro designs, plus each room has its own vintage vinyl record player.

arthotelps.com