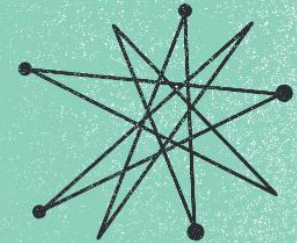


MID-CENTURY MODERN



What happens when you mix vintage style with high-speed WiFi? You get Palm Springs, California, where a growing community of retro influencers is embracing a period aesthetic - wearing hoop skirts, driving old cars, attending sock hops - and broadcasting it all on social media, finds **Zoey Goto**



PHOTOGRAPHS:
WRAY SINCLAIR

★ READJUSTING HER POLYESTER MINIDRESS, ACROSS THE ROOM TO LAY A VINYL



DEVEN GREEN SASHAYS ON THE RECORD PLAYER.

As Elvis crackles to life on the turntable, filling the room with a heartfelt rendition of *Can't Help Falling in Love*, Green eases back into an inflatable bubble chair, surrounded by a riot of handmade crochet blankets and Formica sideboards. Just out of sight, a turquoise swimming pool glistens in the afternoon sun. The clink of martinis being stirred in the kitchen can be heard above the King's earnest crooning. As Green smooths down her Barbarella-style hair, framed by a background of clashing Technicolor wallpaper, it's tantalisingly easy to imagine that we've been transported to an era of *Mad Men* and go-go boots.

The seductive bubble is abruptly burst by the shrill sound of an iPhone ringing and I'm reminded that we're not in a glamorous bygone time, but instead in modern day Palm Springs, California – a city where the past is ever present. "We came to Palm Springs on a lark," Green, a comedian, performer and local Instagram celebrity says, gazing at me above her oversized Jackie O sunglasses. "But we soon found our dream home, so we packed up our LA life and moved here during the pandemic. It was the relaxed vibe that appealed; everyone is permanently on vacation mode."

Today, we're meeting at the Art Hotel, a former motel originally built in 1960. Owned by Green's friend and fellow retro enthusiast Tracy Turco, this eight-room condo was recently restored to its former glory as part of a larger city-wide revival. While Palm Springs has dipped in and out of fashion over the decades, its recent popularity with LA emigrants and other big-city exiles is at least partially down to a new school of influencers who are using social media to bring the vintage lifestyle to a younger audience. "I feel almost like I've become an ambassador for Palm Springs. People discover it online and it sparks curiosity," Green adds.

Sweeps of this desert outpost, situated in the dusty Coachella Valley, were originally built in the

1950s and 1960s, when it became a playground for stars of the silver screen, after the studios decided they wanted their artists within a two-hour radius of the big studio sets at all times. Against a silhouette of the dramatic San Jacinto Mountains, Frank Sinatra and his buddies escaped the glare of the spotlight to croon and cause mischief, while President John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe had an explosive first encounter here that precipitated their alleged romance.

Since these glory days, a heady combination of dazzling Hollywood lore and the highest concentration of Mid-Century homes in the world – designed by architects including Albert Frey, Richard Neutra and Donald Wexler – has continued to attract those who idolise the past.

But the city's new social-media savvy ambassadors are keen to stress that this time around, it's all about championing vintage style, not vintage values. In a city where it's estimated that half the residents identify as LGBTQ+, Green, whose Instagram following swelled to 31k after she appeared as a judge on *RuPaul's Drag Race*, uses her platform "to be an ally and stand with the gay community". Palm Springs is now a hotspot on America's drag circuit, she adds. "It's a light-hearted

place where you'll see the best in drag, because the top performers always swing by here," Green says, reclining beneath a monochrome parasol by the poolside.

Inclusivity is a message that lifestyle blogger Kelly Golightly is also keen to highlight. Beckoning me through the citrus yellow door of her villa, nestled in the undulating foothills of the city, she's quick to point out that "this is a place where everyone is welcome. The entire town is incredibly LGBTQ+ friendly. So much so that when we first moved here in 2010, our neighbours joked, 'Oh oh, the straights are here, there goes the neighbourhood!'" She laughs, leading me past a rainbow of pastel furnishings out to the palm-lined garden, where colourful inflatables bob gently in the pool.

Billing herself as a contemporary Audrey Hepburn, Golightly showcases her home – dubbed Villa Golightly – and her gorgeous, soft-hued lifestyle to her 80k Instagram followers. "I got lucky with the timing as Instagram was just taking off and people loved seeing my throwback world."

Opening page and left: Comedian Deven Green at the Art Hotel. Below: Blogger Kelly Golightly at home in Villa Golightly.





the Ingleside Inn, where the Rat Pack once hung out." The waiters don tuxedos, and the bar staff do a really long pour on the cocktails. "I love that the people here really enjoy dressing up; it's like everyone is in on

the fun and here to have a good time."

Although Palm Springs is clearly still tethered to its 1950s and 1960s heritage, post-pandemic a new wave of curious visitors has subtly started shifting the scene. "There's an influx of younger people, so cool new businesses are cropping up and it's no longer seen as solely a retirement destination," says Golightly. "And while these newcomers are still interested in the vintage lifestyle, it's now more about the 1970s rather than the 1950s, as the era is that bit sexier."

Catering to this new breed of vintage enthusiasts arriving in Palm Springs is designer and entrepreneur Tracy Turco. Since arriving in Palm Springs from New York five years ago, the vintage style icon has

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My Palm Springs content soon went viral. It's really hard to take a bad photo here!" she says, wearing a floor-skimming vintage dress, supersized sunglasses and a wide brimmed hat.

It was nostalgia for a simpler time and a slower pace of life that first drew Golightly to Palm Springs – and it seems like she's found her little old-timey oasis. When she's not creating reels about the recently revamped Colony Palms Hotel – once frequented by a mixture of Tinseltown elite and underworld mobsters – she says she "might stop by

Above: Kelly Golightly at Villa Golightly; Albert Frey's Tramway Gas Station is now the Palm Springs Visitor Information Center



The House of Tomorrow
This futuristic pad found fame when Elvis Presley hip-swivelled over the threshold carrying bride Priscilla for their honeymoon in 1967.



Calliente Tropics Resort
This Polynesian-themed motel was originally built in the 1960s and remains one of the finest examples of the tiki design craze that swept the US post-WWII.



Bank of America building
Widely considered the most beautiful bank in the US, this curvaceous building with a wide overhanging roof is said to resemble a mushroom.



The Trixie Motel
Palm Springs' hottest new opening is the glittering vision of drag artist Trixie Mattel, famed for appearances on *RuPaul's Drag Race*.



Palm Springs City Hall
Designed by Albert Frey – the "father of desert modernism" – this 1952 building has featured in countless films, including *Don't Worry Darling*.

PALM SPRINGS ETERNAL
FIVE ESSENTIAL MID-CENTURY BUILDINGS



From left: Artist, designer and hotelier Tracy Turco and her classic Jaguar at the Modernism Museum; architect E Stewart Williams' Edris House

wholeheartedly embraced the city's nostalgic lifestyle, driving a classic, cherry-red Jaguar car, showcasing an enviable wardrobe of genuine vintage gems and opening a string of retro-themed hotels across the city; every step of her journey is shared with her 11k Instagram followers.

But her greatest impact so far has been the unveiling of the new Modernism Museum, which Turco designed and curated. It's an immersive space that celebrates the glamour of the 1940s through to the boogie down 1970s, housed in a vast 1,115m² space. Inside, a series of interactive time-capsule galleries transport visitors to bygone eras – like a full-scale kitchen that looks like it's plucked from an episode of *Happy Days*, or a funky roller-skating rink complete with a rotating mirror ball.

"It's like scenes from a movie, where you are the star," the designer says, wearing an eye-catching gold lamé jumpsuit and taking a seat on the sunflower and tangerine floral daybed. Turco is

"Nowadays, people want to touch the items and interact, then document it for the socials"



upfront about doing it for the 'gram. "The museum really appeals to the Instagram generation, who share photos, creating a frenzy where everyone wants to visit. I've designed every room with multiple photo opportunities in mind."

Having first visited Palm Springs for the biannual Modernism Week festival – a jam-packed celebration of design in the city, taking place from 16–26 this month – Turco saw a gap in the market for a year-round attraction that was more hands-on. "Nowadays, people don't want to be kept at arm's length in a museum. They want to touch the items and interact, then document it for the socials." It's been this innate understanding of shifting tastes, alongside a willingness to readily embrace an old-meets-new attitude, that's been key to Turco, Green and Golightly's online success.

We pad through cosy shag pile carpeted rooms, past kitschy trinkets reminiscent of grandma's house, and step out onto the street at the front of the museum to bask in the glorious Palm Springs sunshine. Turco bids me farewell, waving before turning away to check updates on her phone – and it feels strangely satisfying that in this pocket of Californian desert, new technology is helping to preserve the old ways.

✕ Fly to Las Vegas

