

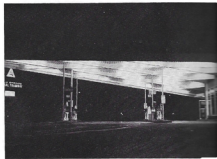
GARISH GAS STATIONS? NOT IN PALM SPRINGS

PALM SPRINGS this year showed itself a forerunner in a trend which other communities are expected to follow — the idea of making service stations decorative as well as functional.

Motorists looking for the emblem and colors of their preferred service are somewhat startled to find that in Palm Springs the colors are gentler and the signs lower. Realty and operations men from the Los Angeles metropolitan area at first were considerably startled to find their regular installation plans subjected to acute analysis by the Palm Springs Planning Commission and definite limitations by city ordinance. By law, Palm Springs does not permit blinking signs, neon signs, static or revolving, or any freestanding sign, higher than 20 feet—and only one of those to a station.

No service station may be established within the city limits until detailed plans—including signs, lighting, elevations, landscaping and the proposed colors and materials to be used—are reviewed and approved by the planning commission and its architectural advisory committee, on which local architects, designers, landscape planners and other specialists sit with commission members. Approval rarely is voted the first time around.

In addition to the specific requirements set out in the city's zoning ordinance, the planning commission has successfully built up a series of conditions which involve the size and location of signs, walls, storage areas, entrances, exits and even the intensity of lighting permitted. (Facetious attendants at the all-night Shell station in the 900 block of



North Palm Canyon jokingly allege they take out flashlights to service cars after dark. At the Tramway station further north, the attendants claim they have to wipe every windshield twice, because the wind blows water from the decorative fountain over the windshields.)

The city's director of building and planning, 31-year-old Richard J. Smith, is a patient but persistent advocate of high standards in all developments. He sums up Palm Springs' position by saying, "The planning commission requires that service stations be unique and attractively designed—and not be of the typical oil-company design."

Smith directed national attention to this concept in a report he wrote during the past year for the monthly *Western City Magazine*, the official publication of mu-



municipal groups in all eleven western states. He drew regional attention in two feature speeches invited this spring by the Southern California Planning Congress and the American Institute of Planners meeting in Los Angeles. Smith's report, publicized in advance, drew a record-high attendance of 225 mayors, councilmen, planning commissioners and city planners from all over Southern California's 13 counties.

In both his magazine feature and his organization speeches, Smith used a 1966 incident to illustrate what he firmly believes is the value to a community of an "accepted" determination to establish and maintain high standards in service stations as well as in all other types of commercial structures. He puts it this way:

"Within the past two years, six attractive service stations have been constructed

in Palm Springs, five of which were designed by architects and one by a well-known building designer. Of these six stations, only two were approved by first submission of plans . . .

"At one of the meetings, an oil company representative presented a plan of their standard design with a few modifications . . . (but) during the presentation the advisory committee stated that the proposed plans were not acceptable. The company representative immediately went to his car and brought in a complete new set of plans, prepared by a local architect . . ."

Obviously, plans specially drawn by a local architect in each community add more to the station's pay-off point than the one-plan, mass-produced, metal-box "typical oil-company design." Just as ob-

viously, this approach helps add something to Palm Springs which Palm Springs believes pleases people from outside strongly enough to bring them back.

So, as the French parliamentarian said during that historic debate between the sexes, "Viva la difference."

That the city itself is willing to conform to its own high standards, even at possible cost, was proved by the planning commission's denial of a 30-foot free-standing flagpole for the Standard service station built on airport land under a lease expected to bring the city some \$400,000 over a 20-year period. Faced with the commission's firm negative, Standard replaced the flagpole with a decorative desert rock formation, only 10 feet high, on which to display its familiar red, white and blue insignia. □