

"Piazza di Liberace"

1441 North Kaweah Road
Palm Springs, CA 92262

**Nomination Application
for City of Palm Springs
Class 1 Historic Site**



Prepared by
Steven Keylon
for the
Palm Springs Preservation Foundation
June 4, 2019



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Front cover: Piazza di Liberace.

“Piazza di Liberace”

CLASS 1 HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) is a non-profit organization whose mission is “to educate and promote public awareness of the importance of preserving the historical resources and architecture of the city of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley area.”

In March of 2018, the PSPF board of directors, in consultation with the owners of Piazza di Liberace, assigned the task of writing the residence’s Class 1 Historic Site nomination to board member Steven Keylon.

The Owner’s Letter of Support is at Appendix I.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SIGNIFICANCE: “Piazza di Liberace,” at 1441 North Kaweah Road, was the home of entertainer Liberace from 1966-74. When it was built in 1951, the address was 320 Camino Norte. Building permit #4898 of April 11, 1951, describes the work as a 7-Room Frame and Stucco Dwelling with Tropicool Roof (white gravel) and a 2 car garage. This simple, contemporary home was bought by Liberace in 1966. Liberace remodeled the house extensively and changed the primary façade to face North Kaweah Road—the address was changed to 1441 North Kaweah at that time. Piazza di Liberace is significant as one of several homes Liberace owned in Palm Springs, and stylistically is in harmony with the over-the-top Hollywood Regency style for which he is most well-known. Of the three Palm Springs homes owned and lived in by Liberace, Piazza di Liberace is the only one remaining which closely resembles its appearance at the time he owned it. Piazza di Liberace is an important example of a custom Hollywood Regency structure created for an internationally known entertainer, and it exhibits numerous stylistic features that place it within the historical context of Palm Springs’ modern period. Piazza di Liberace was Liberace’s primary residence in Palm Springs from 1966 until 1974.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA: Piazza di Liberace has not previously been evaluated for Class 1 Historic Site eligibility, but it is included on the draft 2015 Citywide Historic Resources Inventory.

A brief summary of the evaluation contained in this nomination is as follows:

88.05.070 (C,1,a) paragraph 2 - **Significant Persons:** This criterion recognizes properties associated with the lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to the national, state or local history. *As the home of one of the 20th Century’s leading entertainers, owned at a time when he was the highest paid performer in the world, Piazza di Liberace qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criterion 2.*

8.05.070 (C,1,a) paragraphs 3 and 4 - **Design/Construction:** Piazza di Liberace is eligible under the theme of Modern architecture because it possesses numerous distinctive characteristics that make up the Hollywood Regency style. It also represents the period when Hollywood entertainers were buying second homes in the desert resort. *As a custom Hollywood Regency residence designed and owned by Liberace, it has significance for its distinctive characteristics, and qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criteria 3 and 4.*

SUMMARY: *This evaluation finds Piazza di Liberace eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Site under 8.05.070 (C,1,a) paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 of the local ordinance’s seven criteria.*



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

**Department of
Planning Services**
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm
Springs, CA 92262
Telephone: 760-323-8245
Fax: 760-322-8360

HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION

The City of Palm Springs allows for the local designation of historic buildings, sites or districts within the City (Section 8.05.070 (C,1,a) of the Palm Springs Municipal Code.) This application packet is to be completed in order to request a historic designation. For additional information, please contact the Department of Planning Services at 760-323-8245 or planning@palmspringsca.gov.

APPLICATION

The completed application and required materials may be submitted to the Department of Planning Services. The submittal will be given a cursory check and will be accepted for filing only if the basic requirements have been met. A case planner will be assigned to the project and will be responsible for a detailed review of the application and all exhibits to ensure that all required information is adequate and accurate. Incomplete applications due to missing or inadequate information will not be accepted for filing. Applicants may be asked to attend scheduled meetings pertaining to their project. These will include the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) and the City Council.

HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD (HSPB)

Once the application has been determined to be complete, the HSPB will review the application to determine whether the site meets the minimum qualifications for designation pursuant to Chapter 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code. If such determination is made, a public hearing will be scheduled for a future meeting.

A public hearing will be held by the HSPB to receive testimony from all interested persons concerning the Historic Site Designation. The public hearing may be continued from time to time, and upon complete consideration, the HSPB will make a recommendation to the City Council. Notice will be provided as indicated below.

CITY COUNCIL

After receiving the recommendation of the Historic Site Preservation Board, a public hearing will be held by the City Council to receive testimony from all interested persons concerning the requested Historic Site Designation. The public hearing may be continued from time to time, and upon complete consideration, the City Council will then conditionally approve, deny, or approve the application as submitted. The City Council's decision on the application is final.

NOTIFICATION

Prior to consideration of the application by the HSPB and the City Council, a notice of public hearing for an Historic Site Designation request will be mailed to all property owners within 400 feet of the subject property a minimum of ten (10) days prior to the hearing dates.



Office Use Only

Date:
Case No.
HSPB No.
Planner:

**CITY OF PALM SPRINGS
Department of Planning Services**

HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION APPLICATION

TO THE APPLICANT:

Your cooperation in completing this application and supplying the information requested will expedite City review of your application. Application submitted will not be considered until all submittal requirements are met. Staff may require additional information depending upon the specific project. Please submit this completed application and any subsequent material to the Department of Planning Services.

This form is to be used to nominate individual properties for Class 1 or 2 historic designations, or to nominate the formation of historic districts. Applicants are encouraged to review two bulletins from the US Department of Interior for additional information:

- “How to Complete National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” (National Register Bulletin 16A / <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/>); and
- “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” (National Register Bulletin 15; <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>).

Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions in the Bulletins.

1. Property Information

Historic name: Piazza di Liberace

Other names: Not applicable

Address: 1441 North Kaweah Road, Palm Springs, CA 92262 (original address when house was built was 320 Camino Norte)

Assessor Parcel Number: 505181003-3 (Appendix II)

Owner Name: Garth Gilpin and Betsy Smalley

Owner’s Address: 1441 North Kaweah Road, Palm Springs, CA 92262

City: Palm Springs State: CA Zip: 92262

Telephone: 626-824-0304

Fax number: Not applicable

E-mail address: gggilpin@sbcglobal.net

2. Classifications

Ownership of Property. Fill as many boxes as apply.

- Private
- Public - Local
- Public - State
- Public - Federal

Category of Property. Fill only one box.

- Building (Note can include site)
- District
- Site (Exclusive of Structures)
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property. TOTAL must include at least One (1) in Contributing Column.

Contributing	Non-contributing
1	Buildings Sites Structures
3	Objects (statuary, fountain, mailbox)
4	Total

If the building or site is part of a larger group of properties, enter the name of the multiple-property group; otherwise enter "N/A".

N/A.

3. Use or Function

Historic Use or Function: Private residence

Current Use or Function: Private residence

4. Description

Architect: Unknown

Construction Date and Source: 1951 (permit history)

Architectural Classification: Hollywood Regency

Construction Materials:

Foundation:	Concrete slab on grade	Roof:	Composition
Walls:	Frame wood construction covered with stucco		N/A
		Other:	

Building Description: *Attach a description of the Building/Site/District, including all character-defining features, on one or more additional sheets. A thumb drive, containing detailed photographic information about Piazza di Liberace's exterior, etc., is provided with this nomination.*

5. Criteria (Fill all boxes that apply for the criteria qualifying the property for listing.)

Events

(1) Fill this box if the property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

Persons

(2) Fill this box if the property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

Architecture

(3) Fill this box if the property reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, State or local history, or

(4) Fill this box if the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or

(5) Fill this box if the property represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or

(6) Fill this box if the property represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

Archeology

(7) Fill this box if the property has yielded or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Other Criteria Considerations (Check all the boxes that apply.)

- the property is owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- the property has been removed from its original location
- the property is a birthplace
- the property is a grave or cemetery
- the property is a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- the property is commemorative
- the property is less than 50 years of age or has achieved significance within the past 50 years

6. Statement of Significance

Summary

Piazza di Liberace, located at 1441 North Kaweah Road, was constructed on Lot 8, Block N, of Las Palmas Estates, in 1951 (see the grant deed in Appendix III).

Chain of Title

Primary sources show the chain of ownership for Lot 8, Block N, of Las Palmas Estates (which started as 320 Camino Norte, but changed to 1441 North Kaweah Road) as follows:

- March 9, 1953. John H. Slaten and Hilda Slaten, husband and wife, to Wendell Martin, an unmarried man.
- July 24, 1964. Wendell P. Martin, an unmarried man, to John W. Mellor and Virginia Mellor, husband and wife as tenants in common.
- May 23, 1966. John W. Mellor and Virginia Mellor, husband and wife, to Liberace, a single man.
- October 9, 1974. Liberace, a single man, to Kenneth L. Rizzotto and Janie Rizzotto, husband and wife as community property.
- May 12, 1977. Kenneth L. Rizzotto and Janie Rizzotto, husband and wife as community property, to Steven H. Gerber, an unmarried man, and Patricia A. Priest, an unmarried woman, as tenants in common.
- March 3, 1978. Steven H. Gerber, an unmarried man, and Patricia A. Priest, an unmarried woman, as tenants in common, to Parlina, Incorporated, a Panama Corporation.
- April 9, 1981. Parlina Incorporated, a Panama Corporation, to Stanley H. Green and Karen L. Green, husband and wife as joint tenants as to an undivided 1/2 interest and Tadabumi Takasu, an unmarried man as to an undivided 1/2 interest as tenants in common.
- September 22, 1981. Karen L. Green and Stanley H. Green, husband and wife as joint tenants, to Stanley H. Green and Karen L. Green, husband and wife, as community property and an undivided one-half interest to Tadabumi Taksasu and Masako Kobori, as tenants in common.
- February 9, 1987. Bank of America National Trust and Savings Association, a National Banking Association, to Garo Kevorkian and Kathy Kevorkian, husband and wife as joint tenants.
- June 8, 1995. American Savings Bank, F.A., dba American Savings Bank, to Charles G. Westlund, Jr., an unmarried man.
- February 27, 1996. Charles G. Westlund, Jr., a single man, to King of Hearts, Inc.
- July 17, 1996. King of Hearts, Inc., to Charles G. Westlund, Jr., an unmarried man.
- October 29, 1996. Charles G. Westlund, Jr., to Laura Mae Bollema, a widow.
- August 13, 1997. Laura Mae Bollema, a widow, to Laura Mae Bollema, Trustee of the Laura Mae Bollema Living Trust, Dated September 7, 1993.

- April 16, 2010. Laura Mae Bollema, Trustee of the Laura Mae Bollema Living Trust, Dated September 7, 1993, to Garth G. Gilpin and Elizabeth Anne Smalley trustees of the Garth G. Gilpin and Elizabeth Anne Smalley Trust dated October 13, 1992. (Current Owners)



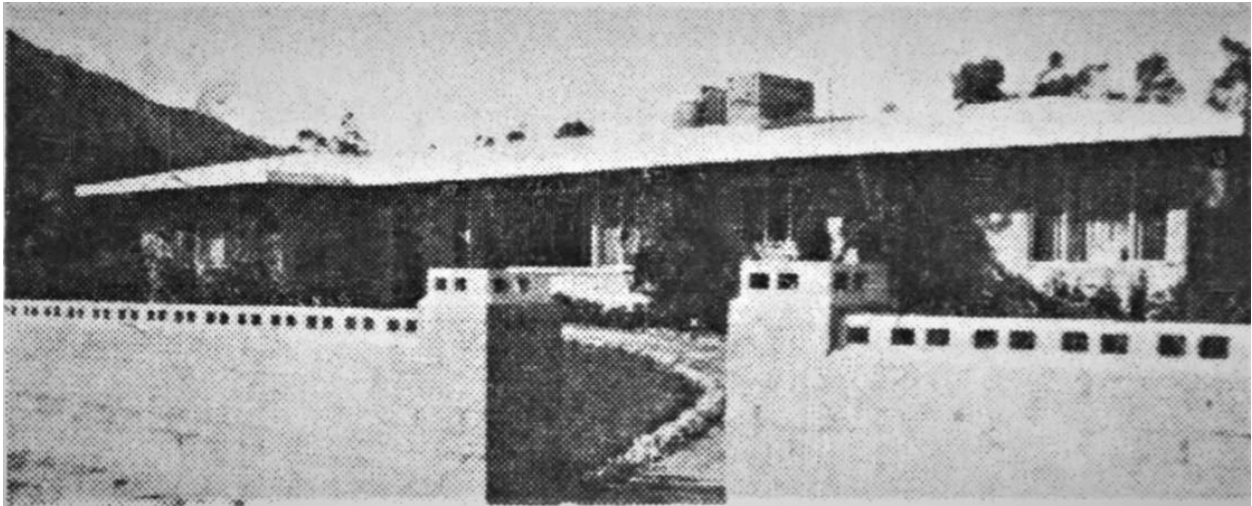
**“Piazza di Liberace”
1441 North Kaweah Road, Palm Springs (1966-1974)**

In 1966, Liberace bought a simple, contemporary home at 320 Camino Norte in the Old Las Palmas neighborhood, and developed plans to significantly remodel the home, and use it as his primary residence in Palm Springs. The four bedroom, four bathroom home was roughly 2,100 square feet and sat on a 14,374 square foot corner lot.

The home had originally been built by contractor John H. (“Jack”) Slaten (1909-1984) and his wife Hilda (1913-1985). On April 11, 1951, Slaten pulled a permit to build a “7 room dwelling” at 320 Camino Norte. The four bedroom, three bath house was built of frame and stucco with steel casement windows and a hipped Tropicool roof (white gravel) and had a 2 car garage.¹ The work was valued at \$21,000. The Slatens pulled a permit to add a bathroom in July 1952.

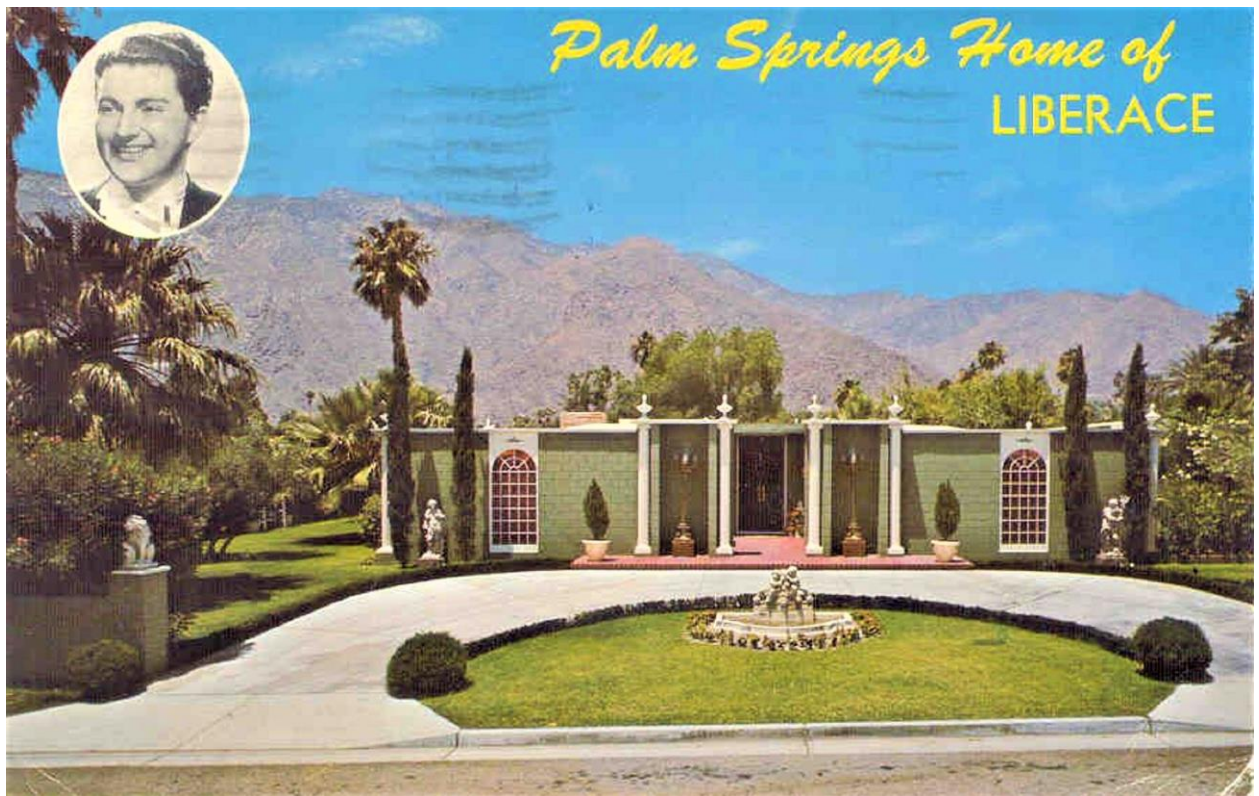
In March 1953, an auction notice was printed in the *Los Angeles Times*, announcing the auction of three homes to be held March 8—all three of the homes had been built by Slaten. One of these was 320 Camino Norte, described as a “corner 4 bedrooms, 4 bath” with “wall-to-wall carpets & drapes” and a heated and “circulating” Paddock Pool.²

The house was bought by Wendell P. Martin (1896-1995), of Beverly Hills and Palm Springs.³ Martin, who lived at 1353 South Calle Rolph in Sunview Estates, leased the house to Mr. Ray Day of Detroit in late 1953 through May of 1954. Martin moved into the house after that, living there for several years, occasionally renting it out—in 1964 he rented it to bandleader Paul Whiteman, who was appearing with his band at Romanoff’s on the Rocks.⁴



The first iteration of the house at 320 Camino Norte, in 1951

Martin sold the house to the John and Virginia Mellor in 1964, who in turn sold it to Liberace in May of 1966. Liberace planned to renovate the house, changing its conservative contemporary design to a high style interpretation of the Hollywood Regency. The most dramatic modification was to change the primary façade from Camino Norte to Kaweah—the address changed to reflect this, to 1441 North Kaweah Road.



Piazza di Liberace and The Hollywood Regency Style

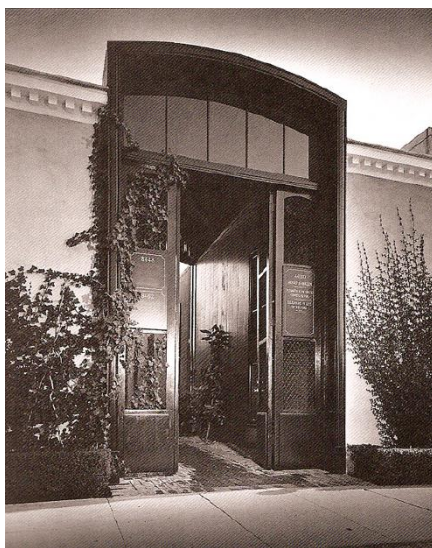
The modern house as redesigned by Liberace would feature many distinctive characteristics which place it in the Hollywood Regency style. A permit dated June 30, 1966, describes a “remodel” and the addition of one 1,000 square foot room. This addition was presumably related to the new primary façade facing Kaweah, which had a symmetrical arrangement of Neoclassical features in an otherwise blank wall, opaque to the street. From historic photographs, the primary façade was painted a deep olive green, and appears to have a pattern of faux blocks. At its center, a monumental new entry was created—open to the sky and paved with brick, an indented bay led to double-height, double-doors painted black with impressive brass hardware. On either side of this entry stood two pair of tall, Corinthian columns, each one topped by a statuary urn. These columns framed a pair of tall niches which held 8-foot tall gold candelabrum—a Liberace signature. Adding to the symmetrical arrangement, a pair of tall arched panels, simulating windows, featured a white-painted pattern which suggested multi-light fenestration. These faux windows were flanked by concrete Neoclassical figural statues, bookended with two more matching Corinthian columns and urns (there are a total of six columns on the primary facade). Framing the statues were two pair of tall, cylindrical Italian cypress trees, further emphasizing the formal French feeling. As was typical of other Hollywood Regency remodels, a tall parapet, or false wall, was constructed to hide the gabled roofline of the existing house and to give the new design a monumentality and formality fitting to a Hollywood Regency-style residence.

A new circular driveway was created, accessed from Kaweah, which enclosed a small panel of lawn, bordered by boxwood topiary and a low boxwood hedge, and featuring a small pool with a fountain adorned with cherubs. The perimeter of the property was walled, and on either side of the new driveway tall brick standards were topped by a

statuary lion. The gardens surrounding the residence featured expansive panels of turf, dotted with mature palms and specimen olive trees. In characteristic Liberace fashion, a whimsical custom mailbox was created in the form of a piano, complete with tiny bench.

HOLLYWOOD REGENCY STYLE

The Hollywood Regency style had become very popular in West Hollywood in the 1950s and 1960s, where scores of small Spanish-Colonial bungalows were being transformed into mini-mansions by “interior decorators and decorator wannabes.” Liberace would have been familiar with the leading practitioner of the Hollywood Regency style, architect John Elgin Woolf, who had a Hollywood Regency office at Melrose Place in West Hollywood; Liberace also had a business on Melrose Place, an antiques store. According to author John Chase, “the blanked-out exteriors of these miniature mansions became inside-out interiors: urns and finials were placed on rooftops like bibelots on a fireplace mantel; windows and panels of trellis were arranged as though they were pictures hung on the wall,”⁵ which sums up Liberace’s changes to the façade of his new home.



Architect John Elgin Woolf's office on Melrose Place in West Hollywood.

As noted below in the Historic Resources Group Palm Springs City Survey, several of the character-defining features of the Hollywood Regency style were highlighted at Piazza di Liberace: the symmetrical façade; blank walls; vertically exaggerated entry doors; eccentrically detailed Neoclassical detailing; and exaggerated applied ornament:

REGENCY REVIVAL: *The Regency Revival style, also known as **Hollywood Regency**, is seen almost exclusively in the design of single-family and multi-family residential architecture from about the mid-1930s until about 1970; most examples in Palm Springs date to the 1960s. The style references in part the architecture and design that developed in Britain in the early 19th century. Like the original Regency style, Regency Revival includes elements of Neoclassical and French Empire design; however, its*

attenuated classical ornament and simple surfaces reflect the influence of the Modern Movement. The style first appeared in the United States in the mid-1930s as a stripped-down version of Neoclassicism that exhibited both the influence of Streamline Moderne and the simplified yet exaggerated qualities of Hollywood film sets. Its early development was interrupted by World War II and the resulting halt of private construction. It resumed after the war with the work of architects such as John Elgin Woolf, whose designs emphasized symmetry, privacy, exaggerated entrances, and prominent mansard roofs. Post-World War II Regency Revival buildings are characterized by theatrical arched entrances with an exaggerated vertical emphasis, usually positioned in projecting pavilions with high, steep roofs; symmetrical, largely blank primary façades; and eccentrically detailed, unconventionally proportioned Classical columns and ornamentation juxtaposed against large expanses of the blank wall. In Palm Springs, Regency Revival design can be found in custom residences, such as that at 2205 Yosemite (c. 1965), as well as in multi-family developments. In some cases, a Regency Revival portico was tacked on to dress up an otherwise standard tract home, as at 2996 Avery Drive in Araby Estates. Designer James McNaughton was a local practitioner of the style.

Character-defining features include:

- *Symmetrical façade*
- *Tall, steeply pitched mansard, hipped or gable roofs, especially over the entrance; frequently a flat roof over the remainder*
- *Blank wall surfaces veneered in smooth plaster; some examples may have a brick veneer or wood surface*
- *Vertically exaggerated arched entrance doors, sometimes set in projecting pavilions*
- *Tall, narrow windows, often with arched tops*
- *Eccentrically detailed and unconventionally proportioned Neo-Classical features including double height porticoes, thin columns, pediments, fluted pilasters, niches, and balconettes with iron railings*
- *Exaggerated applied ornament, such as large lanterns or sconces*



Genuinely close to his work, Liberace has never tried to hide his residence like some stars. Instead, he's had his mail box quizzily decorated with his signature and special piano trademark.



Left: Liberace's distinctive mailbox at his Sherman Oaks house.

Right: The piano-shaped mailbox from Piazza di Liberace.



From Palm Springs Life, May 1968. Liberace playing the piano in the Piazza di Liberace living room.

Once the exterior architecture of the home was complete, Liberace got to work on the interior design, with the *Desert Sun* reporting that Liberace had completely redecorated the home in the “piano-style décor for which he is world famous.”⁶ By this time, Liberace had opened an antique store on Melrose Place in West Hollywood, and at Piazza di Liberace he furnished the house in a unique mix of European antiques.⁷ “Mr. Liberace’s Beverly Hills [sic] Studio, under his supervision, did the complete décor which includes French, Italian and German antiques collected from all over the world.” Through the tall double doors, a foyer led to a sunken living room, entirely paved with bricks which were painted vivid chartreuse. The focal point of the large room was an enormous bar. “His home appears contemporary on the exterior but is internally fashioned after the style of a French country house, with brick floors, period antiques and much art nouveau, for which Lee has a particular penchant and which he personally selects. He has a keen interest in making antiques perform functionally as well as in a decorative manner. He calls them ‘antiques with a future,’ and a fine example is the glistening, king-size bread rack, the kind used long ago in European bakery shops, placed in one corner of the living room as an integral part of the bar. The rack holds various and sundry bric-a-brac and colorful arrangements of artificial grapes, whose vines “climb” the lattice-patterned wallpaper which forms an outdoor atmosphere in that area of the room.”⁸

“In a small but elegant sitting room adjacent to the living room, French Provincial cabinets form a façade that hides the television set, a jukebox for 45s and the stereo equipment for music that is piped throughout the house. Functional antiques appear again in red-velvet-covered chests in which Lee keeps treasured silverware, and these chests serve also as seats. A truly beautiful chandelier is the focal point of attention and hangs above a round, glass-top table with gilded, clawfoot base of antique wood. Lee created the table from two separate pieces that he felt would find rapport; he was right. Red velvet divan and chairs contrast strikingly with the plush, white carpeting in the room. Red is one of Lee’s favorite colors and appears throughout the desert house. In his Los Angeles home, a ‘Marie Antoinette Room’ is done completely in solid red.”⁹

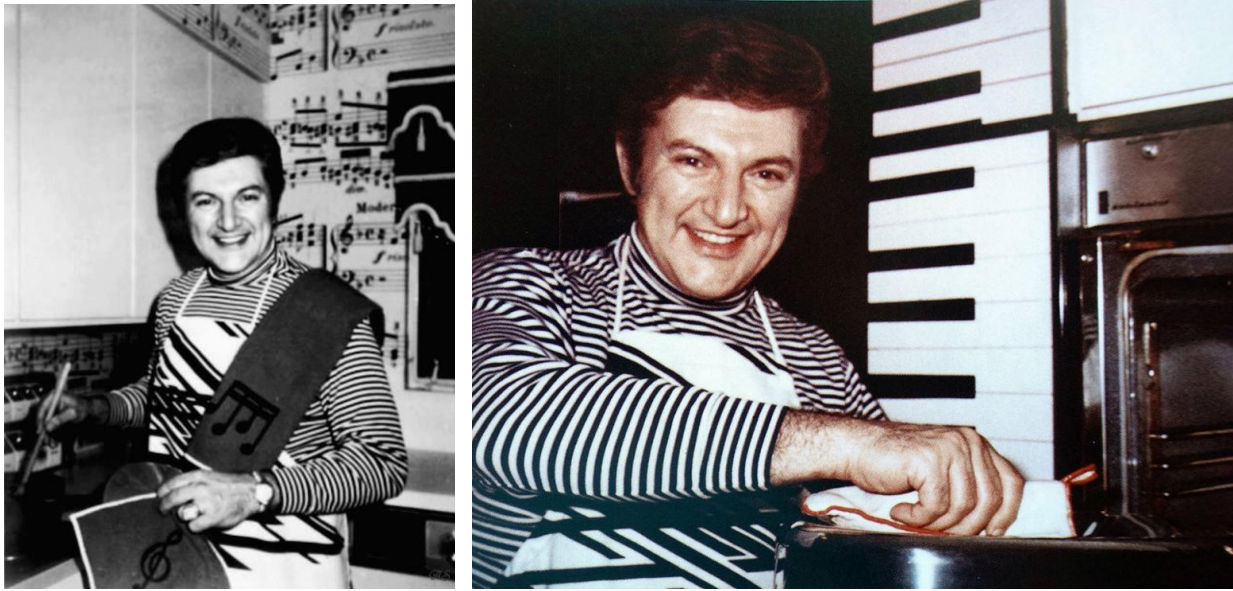


Relaxing on piano-contoured bed, Liberace takes care of fan mail.



“Unquestionably, the world would be a brighter place if each of us would light just one little candle. In which case, Liberace must be called a one-man light of the world! It all started with just one little candelabrum, which he placed on his concert piano, as mood material during a stage performance. The audience loved it, and overnight it became the Liberace trademark. Two eight-foot-tall candelabra frame the front entrance to Lee’s Palm Springs home, and there are 150 of varying sizes inside the house, which is a small house when compared to his mansion in Los Angeles. Another Liberace trademark is, of course, the piano. He wears piano-emblazoned jewelry; his bed is piano-shaped, complete with a keyboard at one end of the headboard, and the same shape prevails in the contour of the bar at the far end of the living room.”¹⁰

“Liberace, one of the busiest people in show business—he averages 35 weeks on tour every year—loves Palm Springs and comes here to relax. Servants are left behind in the townhouse; Lee does his own cooking for the few friends he entertains during desert stays. In the kitchen, a wallpaper of musical scores is a fine foil for a second antique bread shelf and a black refrigerator accented with a white keyboard. Ten sophisticated sets of dishes are contained in homey-looking cupboards. Another functional antique is an ancient iron heater which has been carefully lined to serve as an ice bucket.”¹¹



Liberace's piano-themed kitchen at Piazza di Liberace.

The house was finished in December 1967, just in time to have a huge Christmas party for his staff. "The Liberace home, although mammoth, wasn't large enough to hold all the celebrants, so the famed pianist reserved 12 villas at the Myron Wintons' La Siesta Villas to take care of the overflow."¹²

"Those of my friends who have been to all my homes feel most comfortable at the house in Palm Springs. In the Hollywood house, some of them tell me, they experience a certain coldness; they are often afraid to sit down for fear of damaging anything! But here, in Palm Springs, because of my dogs and everything, visitors feel more relaxed."¹³

Though he purchased The Cloisters in 1967, he continued to live at Piazza di Liberace, using The Cloisters as a guest house. "Let me tell you about my place in Palm Springs," Liberace wrote in 1973. "Well, really there are two places. One of them is the house I live in. The other is "The Cloisters" that houses most of my most precious things as well as my guests when they come to visit me in the desert."¹⁴ He would use Piazza di Liberace as his primary residence until he sold the house in late 1974.¹⁵

Extant Character-Defining Features That Should Be Retained

The following is a list of existing character-defining features on the exterior of Piazza di Liberace that should be preserved going forward:

- Piano-shaped mailbox
- Pair of concrete lion sculptures on pilasters framing the circular driveway
- Concrete circular driveway and associated half-circle panel of grass
- Brick paving at entry and going from driveway to rear garden.
- Concrete fountain with cherubs
- Eight Corinthian columns — six on Kaweah façade, two on Camino Norte (it is recommended that the concrete urn finials that once topped these columns be recreated)

- Pair of double-height entry doors and their associated hardware
- Concrete Neoclassical figural sculptures flanking entry (these are now in the pair of niches flanking entry. It is recommended 8-foot tall gold candelabrum be restored, and these statues moved back to ends of Kaweah facade.)
- Mature topiary olive trees
- Symmetrical windowless façade facing Kaweah

Non Character-Defining Features: Changes and Additions to Piazza di Liberace

After Liberace sold Piazza di Liberace in 1974, it changed hands several times, and building permits don't reveal what changes may have taken place. In 2010, the house was bought by Garth Gilpin and Betsy Smalley, who hired designer Christopher Kennedy to oversee renovations of the home. The exterior changes made since Liberace's ownership are listed here, and are considered non-character-defining features:

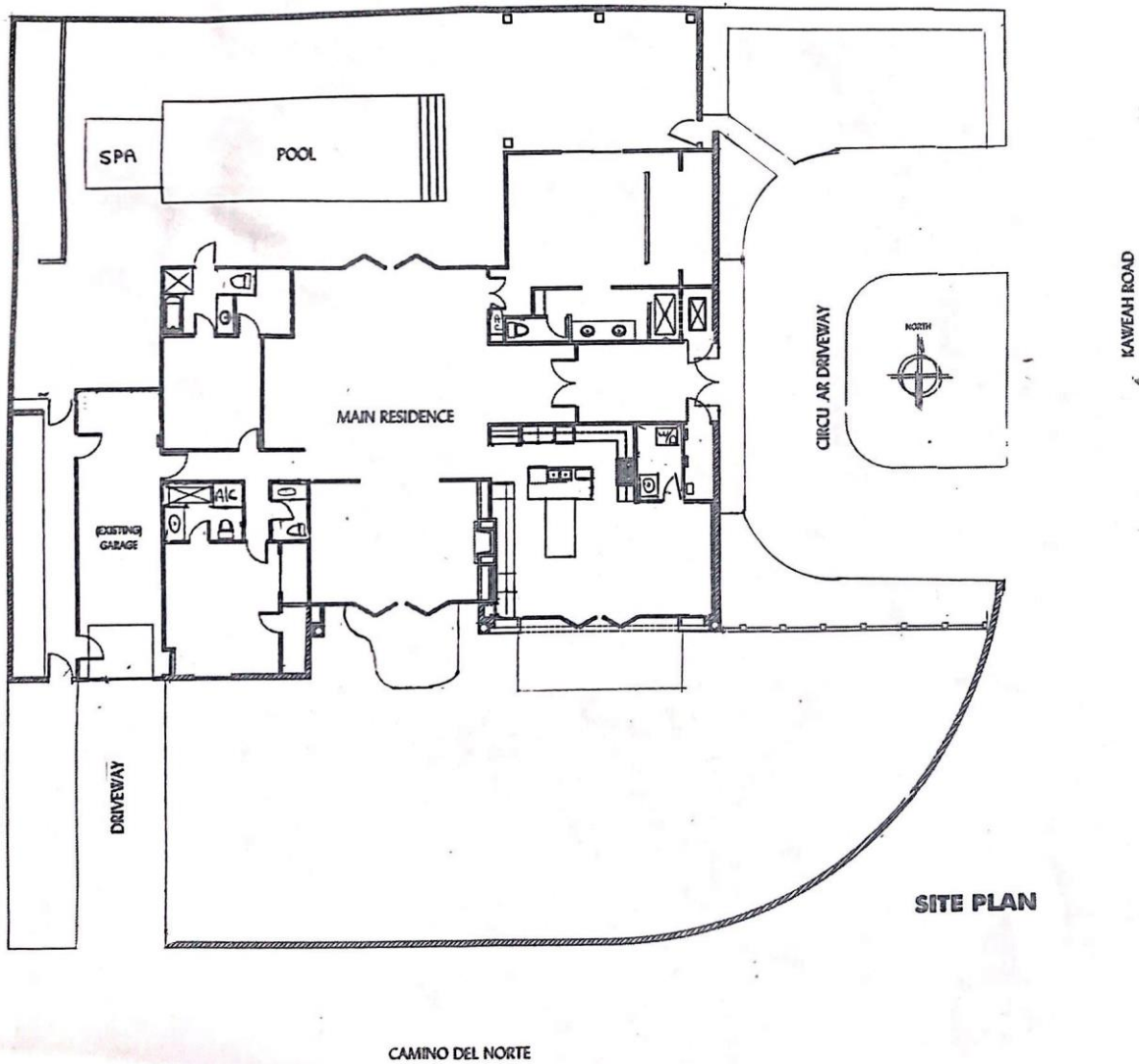
- Removal of decorative Hollywood Regency detail on primary Kaweah facade, including concrete urn finials atop the Corinthian columns; pair of faux arched window openings; pair of 8-foot tall gold candelabrum in niches; pairs of Italian cypress trees. It is recommended that these important elements be restored to the important primary façade.
- Sliding glass doors were replaced with large aluminum and glass accordion folding doors.
- Retractable canvas awnings
- New concrete surrounding the swimming pool at the rear of the house, and new landscaping, while retaining Liberace's mature trees. Spa added to existing pool.
- A roof cover was added to the original open entryway leading to the double height front doors.
- Exterior light fixtures
- There are now a pair of iron gates at the entry adorned with a motif of musical notes. While it would appear to be an element from Liberace's ownership, this could not be positively confirmed.
- Only two historic photographs of the exterior could be found taken during Liberace's ownership. The one color photograph, a vintage postcard, shows the house painted a medium sage/olive green color, with off-white trim. The house is today painted a warm white. The applicant should consider returning the paint palette to its historic paint colors when the house is next repainted.

Other non-character-defining changes on the interior of the house include:

- Combining three existing rooms into one large room. These rooms were the kitchen, maid's room and formal dining room. Walls were removed to create one large space with kitchen and dining area combined.
- Because the home had been added onto over time, floors were at varying levels throughout the house. The 7,000 green-painted bricks that paved the floor of Liberace's living room were removed, and floors throughout the house were brought to one consistent level.

Site Description and Site Plan

Location. Piazza di Liberace is located on a prominent corner lot in the Las Palmas Estates tract. The residence is bounded on the north by a residential parcel, by North Kaweah Road to the east, by Camino del Norte to the south, and by a residential parcel to the west. The topography of the lot is relatively flat. The site includes mature palm trees, olive trees, ficus hedges, etc. A legal description of the property is provided in Appendix III.



Site and floor plans of the existing residence

Permit History

The early building permits cite 320 Camino Norte as the address, but the address was later changed to 1441 North Kaweah Road.

320 Camino Norte

- April 11, 1951 — Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Slaten, owners. Build a 7 room dwelling, frame and stucco, Tropicool roof, 2 car garage. Total value of work \$21,000
- April 23, 1951: J. H. Slaten, owner; PS Pipe and Supply, contractor: 1 bathtub, 1 gas pipe, 3 lavatories, 1 laundry tray, 1 refrigerator, 2 showers, 1 sink, 3 toilets, 1 water heater.
- April 24, 1951: J. Slaten, owner. McLaughlin Electric, contractor: Add temporary service.
- June 8, 1951. Slaten, owner; McLaughlin Electric, contractor: 69 outlets, 17 fixtures, 2 heaters.
- August 1, 1951 — Jack Slaten owner, creation of a swimming pool, 15x30 gunite.
- 8-1-51 — Jack Slaten, owner; Paddock Plumbing: 1 water heater installed, piping.
- 8-1-51 — Electrical, 1 outlet, 1 fixture, 1 electric motor with ½ to 2 h.p.
- Illegible, 1952 — Slaten, owner. Contractor Howard Dean – inspection
- July 13, 1952 — Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Slaten, owners; Contractor J. H. Slaten. Dwelling addition, addition of bathroom; frame and stucco, Tropicool roof.
- August 7, 1952: J Slaten, owner; PS Plumbing, contractor. 1 lavatory, 1 shower, 1 toilet, 1 water heater.
- September 1, 1954 — Wendell Martin, owner; W. A. Foster, contractor: Add frame and stucco bathroom.
- September 1, 1954 — Wendell Martin, owner. Add 2 lavatories, 1 shower, 1 toilet.
- November 8, 1955 — Mr. Martin, owner; Hicks and Allred, contractors. 1 cesspool, 1 sewer pipe
- January 8, 1964 — Add 1 cesspool, 1 sewer pipe. Martin owner
- June 30, 1966 — Remodel and add one room to existing building, 1,000 square feet. Lee Liberace, owner
- July 20, 1966 — Add 15 outlets, 1 meter loop, and 3 220 volt fixtures. Lee Liberace, owner

1441 North Kaweah Road

- January 16, 1974 — Add 6 gas outlets, Barrett Plumbing
- February 5, 1975 — Add one water heater. W. J. Barrett
- November 17, 1975 — Add 6 gas outlets. Barrett Plumbing
- February 25, 1980 — Reroof: clean, patch, flash roof. Hannah Roofing
- February 15, 1985 — connect residence to sewer, Stan Green owner.

BACKGROUND / HISTORIC CONTEXT

The relatively short history of Palm Springs can be organized into three distinct periods that include Prehistory, the Settlement Period, and the Modern Period. It is within the context of the last period, the “Modern Period,” that this building will be evaluated. Additionally, the home qualifies under the theme “The Influence of the Entertainment Industry (1945-1969)” from Historic Resources Group’s Palm Springs City Survey:

Modern Period (1925-1960s): This period can be considered to have begun with the construction of the area’s first “modern” structure, Rudolph Schindler’s Paul and Betty Popenoe Cabin in 1922. With this building, the area’s predominant architectural style, which was based on well-established Mexican and Spanish Colonial motifs, began to change. Incorporation of the town of Palm Springs followed in 1938. During the post-WWII era, Palm Springs’ economy prospered through tourism. Hollywood celebrities discovered the desert oasis and patronized its hotels, inns, nightclubs, and restaurants; celebrity-seeking tourists soon followed, transforming Palm Springs from a sleepy village into an increasingly cosmopolitan environment that saw the construction of schools, hospitals, an airport, and other important public works projects. The commercial core along Palm Canyon Drive (originally Main Street) flourished. In the 1950s the downtown core was expanded by the construction of the cross-axis of Tahquitz-McCallum Way that extended from the center of the original settlement to the airport, spurring new development along the way. Early private residential development also expanded into new sub-divisions composed of midcentury modern second homes in the flatlands surrounding the town’s original core. Palm Springs’ Hollywood associations certainly imparted an air of sophistication to the city. By 1966, the city had built a reputation for cutting edge architecture with architectural practitioners like John Porter Clark, Albert Frey, E. Stewart Williams, William F. Cody, and Donald Wexler.

Theme: The Influence of the Entertainment Industry (1945-1969): Palm Springs’ popularity as a favorite destination for the entertainment industry crowd continued after World War II and through the 1960s. A number of celebrities became intimately associated with the town and helped to promote its popularity and growth during this period. Among these the most prominent were Bob Hope, the town’s first honorary mayor, and patron of the annual Bob Hope Golf Classic tournament (now the Humana Challenge) that has donated more than \$50 million for local nonprofits since its inception in 1960; Frank Sinatra, whose “Rat Pack” image personified the city’s post-war swank; and Dinah Shore, patron of the Colgate Dinah Shore Championship (now known as the Kraft Nabisco Championship), the premier women’s golf tournament and one of the Coachella Valley’s biggest annual events

As in the years before the Second World War, a number of celebrities built or purchased seasonal homes in Palm Springs in the post-war decades. While the established centrally located neighborhoods of the Movie Colony and Old Las Palmas remained popular with the entertainment industry, in the late 1950s Vista Las Palmas, a tract of Mid-century Modern houses developed by the Alexander Construction Company immediately west of Old Las Palmas (Las Palmas Estates), began to attract celebrity residents. Other Palm Springs neighborhoods with celebrity residents included Deep Well Ranch Estates, the secluded Mesa neighborhood, Little Tuscany, and Smoke Tree Ranch. Walt Disney

owned two homes at Smoke Tree Ranch (1800 South Sunrise Way), purchasing the first in 1948 and building the second in 1957. The ranch's dining room is named in his honor.

Starting in the early 20th century, Palm Springs was a get-away for members of the entertainment industry; this was a trend that continued after the war. Properties significant under this theme include residential and commercial establishments with specific associations with the entertainment community.

The Influence of the Entertainment Industry (1945-1969): Registration Requirements

To be eligible under this theme, a property must:

- date from the period of significance; and
- represent a known association with an important person or persons in the entertainment industry; for commercial properties, represent a known association with the Hollywood social scene in Palm Springs; a film location must represent an iconic location; and
- display most of the character-defining features of the property type or style; and retain the essential aspects of integrity.

EVALUATION:

Criterion 1: Significant Event. To qualify for listing under this criterion, a property must be associated with one or more events important in the defined historical context. *Criterion 1 recognizes properties associated with events or historical trends, such as the gradual rise of the city's prominence in architectural excellence in midcentury modern architecture that is an important event within this associated context. Piazza di Liberace is not associated any significant single event. The residence does not qualify for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 1.*

Criterion 2: Significant Persons. Criterion 2 recognizes properties associated with the lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to the national, state or local history. Liberace is considered one of the most important entertainers of the 20th Century and became the highest paid entertainer in the world during the time of his ownership of Piazza di Liberace. The residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 2.

ARCHITECTURE (Criteria 3 – 6)

Criterion 3: *(That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history).* Piazza di Liberace, built in 1951 but remodeled by Liberace in 1966, exhibits many stylistic markers which place it directly in the historical context of Palm Springs' Modern Period, and the Hollywood Regency style. The private residence represents a prime example of the significant modernist architecture for which Palm Springs is widely known. It also represents the period when Hollywood entertainers and moguls were buying second homes in the desert resort. As such, the residence may be viewed as an important component of the historical trends that have come to define Palm Springs'

image as a center of important midcentury architecture, i.e., a historic trend that exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history. The residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 3.

Criterion 4: (That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or) Type, Period, and Method of Construction: "Type, period, or method of construction" refers to the way certain properties are related to one another by cultural tradition or function, by dates of construction or style, or by choice or availability of materials and technology. To be eligible under this Criterion, a property must clearly illustrate, through "distinctive characteristics" a pattern of features common to a particular class of resources. "Distinctive characteristics" are the physical features or traits that commonly recur in individual types, periods, or methods of construction. To be eligible, a property must clearly contain enough of those characteristics to be considered a true representative of a particular type, period, or method of construction. Characteristics can be expressed in terms such as form, proportion, structure, plan, style, or materials.

Piazza di Liberace is eligible under the theme of Modern architecture, and the Hollywood Regency style, because it possesses distinctive characteristics that make up the many qualities of the style, such as these from HRG's City Survey:

- Symmetrical façade
- Blank wall surfaces veneered in smooth plaster;
- Vertically exaggerated arched entrance doors, sometimes set in projecting pavilions
- Eccentrically detailed and unconventionally proportioned Neo-Classical features including double height porticoes, thin columns, pediments, fluted pilasters, niches, and balconettes with iron railings
- Exaggerated applied ornament, such as large lanterns or sconces

The residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 4.

Criterion 5: (That (a): represents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or (b): that possesses high artistic value).

5a: Work of a Master: In the case of Piazza di Liberace, while the design is high style Hollywood Regency, it doesn't qualify as the work of a master.

5b: Properties possessing high artistic values: High artistic values may be expressed in many ways, including areas as diverse as community design or planning, engineering, and sculpture. The residence does not qualify for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 5.

Criterion 6: (That represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction). This Criterion was created to address the resources contained within a potential historic district and as such it does not apply to this nomination. Hence, the residence does not qualify under Criterion 6.

ARCHEOLOGY

Criterion 7: (That has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to the national, state or local history or prehistory.) Piazza di Liberace is not likely to yield information important to the national, state or local history or prehistory. Hence, the residence does not qualify under Criterion 7.

7. Integrity Analysis (using U.S. Secretary of Interior Standards)

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. To be listed in the local registry, a property must not only be shown to be significant under the criteria, but it also must have integrity. The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance. Historic properties either retain integrity (that is, convey their significance) or they do not. The definition of integrity includes seven aspects or qualities. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant. The following sections define the seven aspects and explain how they combine to produce integrity.

LOCATION

Location is the place where a historic property was constructed or the place where a historic event occurred. The relationship between the property and its location is often important to understand why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons. Except in rare cases, the relationship between a property and its historic associations is destroyed if the property is moved. ***Piazza di Liberace remains in its original location and therefore qualifies under this aspect.***

DESIGN

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. It results from conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning of a property and applies to activities as diverse as community planning, engineering, architecture, and landscape architecture. Design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, ornamentation, and materials. A property's design reflects historic functions and technologies as well as aesthetics. It includes such considerations as the structural system; massing; arrangement of spaces; pattern of fenestration; textures and colors of surface materials; type, amount, and style of ornamental detailing. ***Piazza di Liberace's essential characteristics of form, plan,***

space, structure, and style have survived largely intact—especially on the most important façade facing North Kaweah Road. Similarly, the structural system; massing; arrangement of spaces; though some important detail had been lost, much of the type, amount, and style of detailing have survived relatively intact.

SETTING

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the *character* of the place in which the property played its historical role. It involves *how*, not just *where*, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space. Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a property was built and the functions it was intended to serve. In addition, the way in which a property is positioned in its environment can reflect the designer's concept of nature and aesthetic preferences. ***The setting of Piazza di Liberace continues to reflect the original design relationship of site and structure.***

MATERIALS

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The choice and combination of materials reveals the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of particular types of materials and technologies. ***A comparatively small amount of Piazza di Liberace's detailing has been lost—the color has changed on the primary façade, the finials atop the columns are no longer extant, and the arched faux windows have been removed. On secondary elevations sliding glass doors have been replaced by folding glass doors. Inside, the kitchen, maid's room and formal dining room have been reconfigured into one large space, and floors have been made one level throughout. However, these changes do not constitute a significant loss of the physical elements that expressed the design during the building's period of significance; the pattern and configuration that today forms the residence and contributing structures survives intact.***

WORKMANSHIP

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. It is the evidence of artisans' labor and skill in constructing or altering a building, structure, object, or site. Workmanship can apply to the property as a whole or to its individual components. It can be expressed in vernacular methods of construction and plain finishes or in highly sophisticated configurations and ornamental detailing. It can be based on common traditions or innovative period techniques. Workmanship is important because it can furnish evidence of the technology of a craft, illustrate the aesthetic principles of a historic or prehistoric period, and reveal individual, local, regional, or national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles. Examples of workmanship in historic buildings include tooling, carving, painting, graining, turning, and joinery. ***The workmanship of Piazza di Liberace is comprised of simple materials like stucco, aluminum and glass, with concrete***

and plaster Neoclassical decorative detailing. The residence continues to express a high degree of contemporary period workmanship.

FEELING

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character. For example, a rural historic district retaining original design, materials, workmanship, and setting will relate the feeling of agricultural life in the 19th century. ***Piazza di Liberace is sited on a prominent lot which takes advantage of panoramic mountain views to the southwest. Accordingly, the residence and contributing structures retain their original integrity of feeling.***

ASSOCIATION

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it *is* the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character. For example, a Revolutionary War battlefield whose natural and man-made elements have remained intact since the 18th century will retain its quality of association with the battle. Because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register. ***Piazza di Liberace is an important example of a custom-designed modernist private residence in Palm Springs, which was owned by one of the world's most well-known entertainers. Accordingly, it continues its association with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the community.***

INTEGRITY SUMMARY: This integrity analysis confirms that the building and site of Piazza di Liberace still possess all seven aspects of integrity. ***Aside from some modifications to exterior elevations, loss of Regency detail, and the combining of three small rooms into one larger room, the original footprint of Piazza di Liberace remains comparatively intact. In summary, the residence still possesses a sufficient degree of integrity sufficient to qualify for designation as a Class 1 Historic Site.***

Other Sources Consulted

City of Palm Springs (Planning and Building Departments)

Palm Springs Historical Society

Riverside County Assessor's Office

9. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Approximately .35 acres (or 15,264 sq. ft.)

Property Boundary Description: See Appendix II

10. Prepared By

Name/title: Steven Keylon

Organization: Submitted on behalf of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

Street address: 1775 East Palm Canyon Drive, Suite 110-195

City: Palm Springs State: CA Zip: 92264

Telephone: (760) 837-7117

e-mail address: info@pspreservationfoundation.org

11. Required Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed application form. **Do not mount any exhibits on a board.**

1. **Attachment Sheets.** Include all supplemental information based on application form above).
2. **Maps:** For Historic Districts, include a sketch map identifying the proposed district's boundaries.
3. **Photographs:** Eight (8) sets of color photographs showing each elevation of the property and its surroundings.
4. **Non-owner's Notarized Signature:** If the applicant is not the owner, a notarized affidavit shall be provided (see following page).
5. **Site Plan:** One 1/8" to 1/4" scale drawing of the site, and eight reduction copies (8 ½ x 11 inches). The site plan shall show all of the following: Property boundaries, north arrow and scale, all existing buildings, structures, mechanical equipment, landscape materials, fences, walls, sidewalks, driveways, parking areas showing location of parking spaces, and signs. **Indicate the square footage and use of each building and the date(s) of construction.**

6. **Public Hearing Labels:** Three (3) sets of typed self-adhesive labels of all property owners, lessees, and sub-lessees of record. **The labels shall include the Assessor's parcel number, owner's name and mailing address of each property with 400 feet from the exterior limits of the subject property.** Additionally, all Assessor Parcel Maps clearly indicating the 400-foot radius and a certified letter from a title company licensed to conduct business in Riverside County, California shall be submitted.

Note: If any property on this list is owned by the United States Government in trust for the Agua Caliente Indian Tribe or individual allottee, copies of notices with postage paid envelopes will be submitted to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to notify the individual Indian land owners of the public hearings.

Appendix I: Owner's Letter of Support

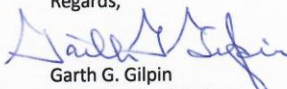
February 5, 2019

City of Palm Springs
Historic Site Preservation Board
3200 Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, Ca. 92262

Dear Board:

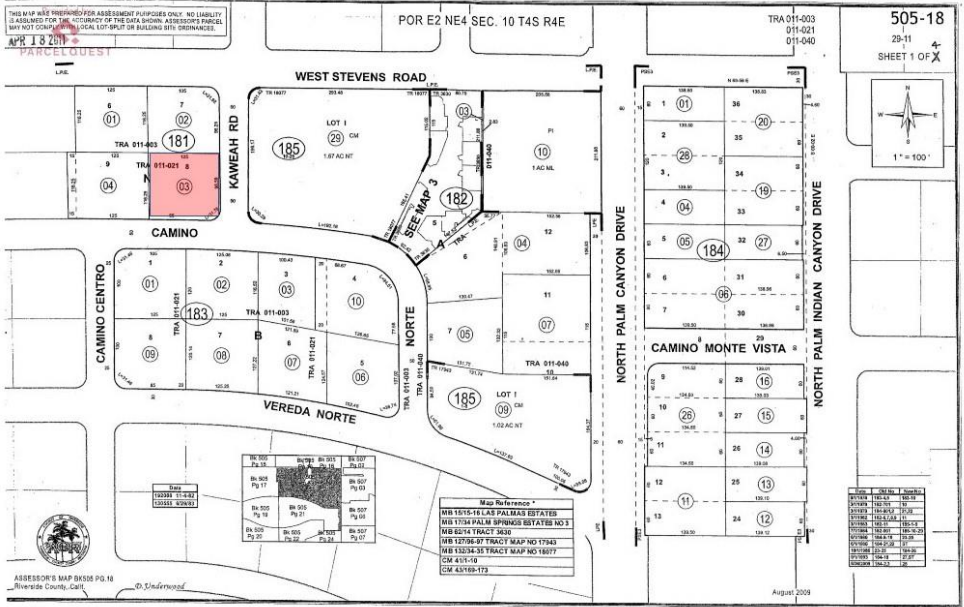
We would like our residence at 1441 N. Kaweah Road to be considered for a Class 1 Historic Site Designation. The home was owned by famed Palm Springs resident Liberace from 1968 to 1974 and its front appearance closely resembles the way it was configured by him at that time. The tour busses love it as it is one of the few homes in old Las Palmas that can never be blocked by hedges. The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is eager to assist us in this application and Mr. Steven Keylon the Vice President will prepare the paper work. Your consideration in this application is highly appreciated.

Regards,


Garth G. Gilpin
gggilpin@sbcglobal.net
626-824-0304


Elizabeth Smalley M.D.

Appendix II: Assessor's Map



Appendix III: Grant Deed (which includes Legal Description)

By this instrument dated March 9, 1953, for a valuable consideration Affix
IRS
20, 50

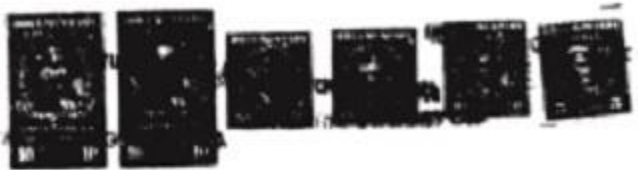
John H. Staten and Hilda Staten, husband and wife

hereby GRANT to

Wendell P. Martin, an unmarried man

The following described Real Property in the State of California, County of Riverside

Lot Block N of Las Palmas Estates as per map recorded in Book 13, Page 27 and 28 of Maps, in the office of the County Recorder of Riverside County



Subject to: 1. 2nd half taxes for the fiscal year 1952-53
2. Conditions, covenants, restrictions, easements and rights of way of record
3. Trust Deed in favor of Coachella Valley Savings and Loan Association

John H. Staten
John H. Staten

Hilda Staten
Hilda Staten

State of California
COUNTY OF
Riverside
March 9, 1953 before me, the undersigned, a Justice of the Peace in and for said County and State, personally appeared

John H. Staten and Hilda Staten

known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged to me that he executed the same for the purposes and consideration therein expressed.

WITNESS my hand and official seal.

Julius M. Shaw
Notary Public in and for said County and State

NOTED AND RECORDED THIS 10th DAY OF MARCH 1953 AT
COACHELLA VALLEY SAVINGS AND LOAN ASSOCIATION
DUNSMITH ST., PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
Box 463 E

SPACE BELOW FOR RECORDERS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FOR RECORDS
MAR 17 1953
COUNTY CLERK
JACK A. ROSS
FEE \$ 1.00

Original deed.

63879

RECORDING REQUESTED BY

Bank of America N.T. & S.A.
WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO
Liberace
c/o Mr. Lawrence H. Deutch
1680 N. Vine - Suite 607
Hollywood 28, California

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
JUN 21 1966

AT 9:00 O'CLOCK A.M.
At Request of
TITLE INS. & TRUST CO.
Recorded in Official Records
of Riverside County, California

W.H. Deutch
Recorder

FEES \$ 2.00

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

Bank of America
NATIONAL TRUST AND SAVINGS ASSOCIATION

L.R.S. \$ 55.00

TITLE ORDER NO. _____

ESCROW NO. 950-15515

SEE TAX STATEMENTS TO:

AFFIX
INTERNAL REVENUE STAMPS
HERE

Grant Deed

INDIVIDUAL

FOR A VALUABLE CONSIDERATION, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged,

JOHN W. MELLOR and VIRGINIA MELLOR, husband and wife,

do hereby GRANT to

LIBERACE, a single man,

all that real property situated in the City of Palm Springs County of Riverside
State of California, described as follows:

Lot 8 Block N of LAS PALMAS ESTATES as per map
recorded in Book 15 Page 15 of Maps, Records of
Riverside County, California

1966 Deed to Liberace.

Appendix IV: Photographs of Piazza di Liberace taken January 2019



The primary façade facing North Kaweah Road.



The original fountain with cherubs installed by Liberace is extant.



Liberace's distinctive piano-shaped mailbox.



***Top: A statuary lion greets guests.
Bottom: Liberace's topiary olive tree remains, as do a number of mature olives, palms, etc.***



Liberace's original Corinthian columns remain, as does the brick paving.



The driveway and tandem garage on Camino Norte.



The entry features Liberace's double-height double doors, candelabrum, and a framed portrait.



Iron gates adorned with musical notes.



The large living room with Liberace's bar.



Pieces of Liberace's original brick paving in the living room.



The pool area with Liberace's concrete urns.



Original aluminum sliding glass doors were replaced with accordion-fold aluminum and glass doors.



More accordion-fold doors facing Camino Norte.



The Camino Norte façade.



Appendix V: Liberace

Władziu Valentino Liberace (known professionally as Liberace, May 16, 1919-February 4, 1987) was an American pianist, singer, and actor. A child prodigy and the son of Polish and Italian immigrants, Liberace enjoyed a career spanning four decades of concerts, recordings, television performances, and motion pictures. At the height of his fame, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Liberace was the highest-paid entertainer in the world, with established concert residencies in Las Vegas, and an international touring schedule. Liberace embraced a lifestyle of flamboyant excess both on and off stage, acquiring the nickname "Mr. Showmanship."

Because he was so frequently on the road touring, having a home to return to was very important to Liberace, as a place to retreat, relax, and entertain, in privacy. The creation of his homes was a very personal exercise for Liberace, where he could express his own unique, and increasingly flamboyant, style. Several of the themes expressed at his Palm Springs home were evident in the first of his many homes, this one in Sherman Oaks. It was in this first home that Liberace began what would become his signature—design that was inspired by the instrument that brought him tremendous fame and fortune, the piano. Piano-themed design would be present in all his subsequent homes.

Liberace Residence, 15405 Valley Vista Blvd, Sherman Oaks (1953-1957)

In 1953, Liberace built his first house, and it began his obsession with piano and musical-themed design. Reported at the time to cost \$100,000, the 4,000 square foot home was designed by architect Al Dingman and built by contractor William Steiskal. "The home fills every one of its owner's requirements...partly because Liberace knew his own mind so well, and partly because the architect and builder understood their client."¹⁶ Compared to his later homes, the style of the Sherman Oaks home was contemporary, with Liberace remarking, "When I first began to make big money, I had no knowledge about antiques and wasn't even interested in them. I had a house in Sherman Oaks, which was very push-button, very modern. I thought that was the way to go—with the latest gadgets, the last word in this, that, and the other thing. My taste was very sleek, up to the minute, and, I guess, 'safe.'"¹⁷ In what would become a Liberace signature, the interior design had a piano theme. There was a black-and-white color scheme, with "touches of his favorite gold, red and green."¹⁸ Liberace had a collection of over 200 miniature pianos displayed in the living room, valued at over \$50,000.

Outside, Liberace famously had a piano-shaped pool installed, with black and white piano keys painted on one end. He was able to get the pool installed at no charge, in exchange for publicity photos which the pool contractor could use to advertise his business. After the photographs were published of Liberace standing near the pool, Liberace recalled that, "Tourists flocked to my house in great numbers to get a look at it. And because I think I should always be gracious to anyone who takes an interest in me, I welcomed one and all and made it possible for them to have a look at what some called Liberace's folly. This quickly became too complicated. After all, the pool was part of my home. I built it not to show off but to swim in and for my friends to enjoy. The constant flow of tourists made this impossible."¹⁹ He complained that the draperies at the street-facing large picture windows had never been opened. "As soon as it was built, the house was included on every Hollywood sightseeing route. Tourists trampled the lawns and the bolder even pressed noses against the window panes. 'They're just curious,' he

explained 'without malice, but it certainly killed our privacy. A guard had to be engaged to protect the property and to prevent these 'curious' from mobbing the occupants.'"²⁰

Liberace shared the house with his mother Frances. In July 1957, Frances was attacked in the garage by two men in black hoods. At the time, Liberace was embroiled in a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against *Confidential* magazine, which had run an article alleging his homosexuality. It was widely believed that the attack on Frances was a threat to Liberace, the result of Liberace having testified in the trial that very day. (Liberace was not home at the time of the attack. He was performing at the Moulin Rouge.)

Because of the negative experience owning the house, he sold it that same year to Kirk Kerkorian, who Liberace joked "seemed to think that as long as I was no longer on the premises, the spot had lost its main attraction. He was wrong. What a blow that was to my vanity. Nobody had come there to see me. It was the pool!"²¹





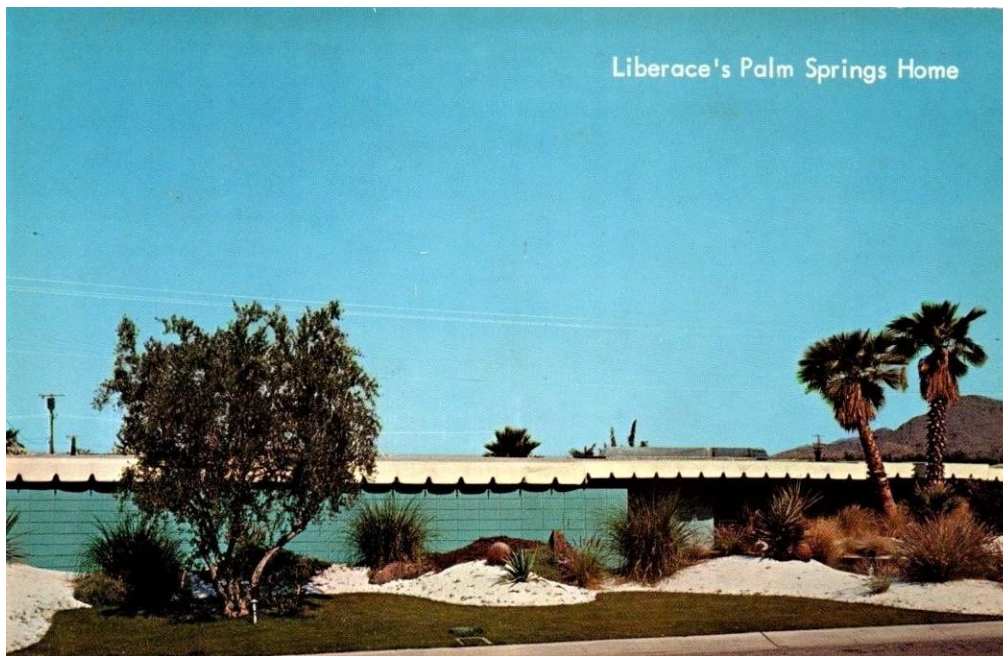
Liberace in Palm Springs

Palm Springs had long held a special place in Liberace's heart. He began performing in Palm Springs in the early 1950s, most frequently at the Chi Chi, and as he would later recall, "I was playing my annual engagement at the Chi Chi when I was first approached by the television people." Liberace considered Palm Springs his "springboard to TV fame."

Shortly after buying his first house in Palm Springs, *Confidential Magazine* ran the infamous cover story in 1957 asking "Why Liberace's Theme Song Should be 'Mad About the Boy,'" alleging his homosexual relationship with a press agent. Liberace learned that several drug store owners in Palm Springs had pulled *Confidential* from their shelves and refused to sell it. In addition, many Palm Springs residents sent him letters of support, which Liberace acknowledged in the *Desert Sun*: "I have learned of the steps you have taken on my behalf. By banning the sale of *Confidential* magazine and aligning yourselves with me in this fight, you have given proof that the great American public is just that, THE GREAT AMERICAN PUBLIC! My deepest thanks to each and every one of you for the type of support most needed right now...moral support. Since I own a home in Palm Springs and feel as though I 'belong' there...it is very heart-warming to know that my 'neighbors' are ready to assist me to defend my name, reputation and in a sense, my home."²² He later remarked, "I'm real friendly with the townspeople in Palm Springs, the people who run the hardware store, the drugstore and people who work in a lot of other shops. A sort of folksy atmosphere exists in the town. My gardener and his wife call me by my first name. I have been known to cook dinner for my servants on several occasions."²³

Liberace felt more comfortable in Palm Springs than almost anywhere, and it was to Palm Springs that he would most often return after a long tour. He felt fortunate to have found his desert retreat, writing, "most people leave home to go on vacation. I do just the opposite. I've spent so much of my life on the road, performing in most of the world's greatest cities and resorts. But that's work. For a holiday, there's no place like

home.”²⁴ He later explained further: “A lot of people know how I entertain when I’m on the stage. Not too many know how I entertain my guests when I’m not on tour and have time to invite them to enjoy the beauty and comfort of the homes in Hollywood and Palm Springs that my good fortune has enabled me to create for myself. They mirror the way I like to live, my love for beautiful things, and my need for luxury and elegance. That was probably psychologically induced by the poverty I knew when I was a child. It is in my homes that I enjoy the fruits of my labor, the rewards my talents have won for me, the pleasure of companionship and the privilege of privacy. I think anyone who spends as much time before the public on the road and on the stage as I do, has a right to some sanctuary where he can do exactly as he pleases. Even the wild birds now have sanctuaries.”²⁵



**Liberace Residence, Deep Well Estates
1516 South Manzanita, Palm Springs (1957-1966)**

After selling his house in Sherman Oaks, Liberace bought the first of his Palm Springs homes in 1957, in Deep Well Estates. Like his Sherman Oaks home, the Palm Springs house was contemporary in style. Liberace said at the time, “Perhaps I can find more time to relax in Palm Springs now that I have just acquired a new home here. Villagers gave me the wonderful feeling that they were all personally concerned with my career and its progress and it will now be doubly enjoyable sharing my life with the people of Palm Springs as well as my work.”²⁶

The December 1958 issue of the *Palm Springs Villager* featured an article on the home, titled “Liberace’s Home in the Sun.” “When he wants to work, and when he wants to relax—in fact, whenever he can get away from the city, Liberace comes to Palm Springs, to his comfortable, three-bedroom house in Deep Well Estates.” It described the living room as “large and sunny, with a restful garden atmosphere pervading from the tropic plantings in the entrance hall and the pool area beyond an east wall of glass.” Relatively opaque to the street, in contrast, the home featured walls of glass at the back, with Liberace explaining, “I seek privacy and quiet for work. And beauty. When one can look at beautiful mountains and a clear desert sky, the mind is more creative.” Liberace’s producer, arranger, and conductor also had Palm Springs homes, making it convenient for collaboration and rehearsal.²⁷

Once again, the home had a primarily black-and-white color palette, this time accented with pink. There was once again a piano theme, and Liberace’s obsession with candelabrum seemed to have been born here. “A large bar extends as an ell of the house to corner the swimming pool. In the windows facing the pool, shelves hold Liberace’s special-design glasses decorated with candelabra of black and gold. The candelabra signature is evident in many forms, ranging from a many-branched twist of gold, a relic of the Gold Rush days which Liberace found in Virginia City, to starkly modern holders of brass, enamel, and silver.”

“The pool is the major entertainment area. Rectangular, it is surrounded by gardens and night-lighted by three dozen votive candles placed at intervals top and bottom around the surrounding white fence. At one end of the pool, a white gravel bed depicted a piano accented with black fingers of stone in a keyboard pattern. Up from the gravel rise garden torches which Liberace himself twisted into candelabrum shape.”



The kitchen of Liberace's Deep Well Estates home.

THE CLOISTERS 226 West Alejo Road (1967-1988)

In September 1967 it was reported that Liberace had purchased the Cloisters, for about \$90,000 from owners/realtor Muriel Fulton, and architect Wallace Neff. Built by Alvah Hicks for his own family in the 1920s, the home had long been owned by Ludovica Graham of Reno. Liberace claimed to have “exciting plans” for the hotel, but intended to keep those plans secret, though he did intend to retain the “Spanish styling.”²⁸ “Rumor is that Liberace plans to use it as accommodations for entertainers he hopes to bring into Palm Springs to a combination restaurant and theatre-in-the-round similar to Anaheim’s Melodyland, where he appeared this summer. A possible location for the Liberace project is the old Chi Chi, but that is also reported as the possible location of the new UHF-TV station.”²⁹

“The same urge to save something from destruction that led me to acquire the Hollywood house, made me buy the Palm Springs place. It was an exclusive, small hotel, built almost like a monastery with high walls and lovely sequestered gardens surrounding it.”³⁰

“The location has leaked out and it’s become as big a tourist attraction as my house in San Fernando, the one with the piano-shaped swimming pool, used to be. Over weekends there are honest-to-goodness traffic jams created by tourists driving by to catch a glimpse of the place. They see nothing but the walls and the flowered hedges growing above them and occasionally me and my dogs.”³¹

Liberace died at the Cloisters in 1987.

¹ Jack Slaten (1910-1984) and his wife Hilda (1913-1985) had immigrated from Canada in 1938. He was initially in the lumber business, but by 1950 was a building contractor working out of Montebello, California.

² Ad in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1953, p. 20.

³ The Slatens moved into one of the other three homes at 1260 E. San Jacinto. The buyer of 320 Camino Norte, Wendell Phillips Martin, had been a successful dry cleaner in Fort Collins, Colorado. In 1944, he was charged with committing an “unnatural” and “immoral act” with a young sailor, Kenneth Zimmerman, who was himself charged (but later acquitted) of stealing Martin’s car and watch. Martin, who was in the process of being divorced, insisted the two sailors robbed him at his apartment and falsely accused him of the charge. Martin was convicted on May 25, 1944. The case went to the Colorado Supreme Court, and the sodomy charge was reversed. Martin then moved to Beverly Hills, working in investments, buying a home in the Sunview Estates tract of Palm Springs in the late 1940s.

⁴ Palm Springs Telephone Directory, 1964; In *Paul Whiteman: Pioneer in American Music, 1930-1967* By Don Rayno, the author says the Whitemans began renting the house in the 1950s.

⁵ “Glitter Stucco & Dumpster Diving,” by John Chase, Verso, 2000, p. 104.

⁶ “Liberace Buys Hotel in Palm Springs,” *Desert Sun*, September 13, 1967, p. 1.

⁷ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 284.

⁸ “Liberace Loves Palm Springs!,” *Palm Springs Life*, May 1968, p. 49.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Sun Strokes,” *Desert Sun*, January 14, 1967, p. 8.

¹³ “The Things I Love: Liberace,” Edited by Tony Palmer, Grosset & Dunlap, 1976, p. 153.

¹⁴ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 259.

¹⁵ Though he continued to use Piazza di Liberace as his primary residence in Palm Springs after buying the Cloisters, he did place the Piazza on the market in 1970, though he changed his mind. The house was listed for sale for \$175,000. The ad from Shelby Realty announced that “Liberace offers you his completely furnished residence situated in the heart of Palm Springs. Four bedrooms, five baths, secluded pool area with gazebo and barbeque. Formal living room complete with piano bar, wine cellar, fountain, statues. Décor by Liberace’s of Beverly Hills

with antiques from France, Germany, and Italy, oil paintings, objects de art, linens, silver included in the sale price.”

¹⁶ “His Home is His Castle,” unmarked magazine clipping, ca. 1954.

¹⁷ “The Wonderful Private World of Liberace,” by Liberace, Harper & Row, 1986, p. 187.

¹⁸ “His Home is His Castle,” unmarked magazine clipping, ca. 1954.

¹⁹ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 258.

²⁰ “Liberace’s Home in the Sun,” *Palm Springs Villager*, December 1958, p. 16.

²¹ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 258.

²² “Liberace Sends Appreciation for Village Support,” *Desert Sun*, May 29, 1957, p. 1.

²³ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 268.

²⁴ “The Wonderful Private World of Liberace,” by Liberace, Harper & Row, 1986, p. 49.

²⁵ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 257.

²⁶ “Guest Editor of the Month: Liberace,” *Palm Springs Villager*, February 1957.

²⁷ “Liberace’s Home in the Sun,” *Palm Springs Villager*, December 1958, p. 16.

²⁸ “Liberace Buys Hotel in Palm Springs,” *Desert Sun*, September 13, 1967, p. 1.

²⁹ “Liberace Loves Palm Springs!,” *Palm Springs Life*, May 1968, p. 49.

³⁰ “Liberace: An Autobiography,” by Liberace, G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1973, p. 266.

³¹ Ibid.