

Public support is critical to the success of any cause, and no less so for efforts to recognize and preserve California's modern resources. The following article gives a peek into Palm Springs' annual Modernism Week event, one of the more visible and successful public outreach efforts on behalf of all things Modern.

## All Things Mod: Modernism Week in Palm Springs

By Cindy Duffy, O'Bayley Communications

Modernism Week, a singular event celebrating midcentury modern design, architecture, art, fashion and culture in the Palm Springs area of southern California, has grown significantly in its ten-year history. The idea for the event grew out of a 2005 discussion between William Kopelk and Stewart Weiner, then President and Vice President, respectively, of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. The two men felt there needed to be a way to keep visitors in the city during the week between the Modernism Show—the three day event typically held on President's Holiday weekend—and the Art Museum's Design Symposium held the following Saturday. Kopelk and Weiner decided on Modernism Week, an event that would emphasize the city's mid-century modern history. The two men contacted

and coordinated the other preservation organizations in town and launched the first Week that same year. As William Kopelk recalls, "We were quite excited we had six events and 300 people



House Tour during Modernism Week (© David A. Lee)

participating that first year. We figured we would try it out again the next year."

Since that inaugural year, Modernism Week's scope and importance

has grown in step with the increasing recognition of and appreciation for mid-century modern resources. Organizers estimate that attendance at this year's festival, which took place February 12-22, 2015, reached nearly 60,000, an increase of more than thirty percent over 2014. Besides being a cultural and financial boon to the community (the week generates an estimated \$22 million in tourism revenue into the local economy), Modernism Week is a non-

*"Attendance at this year's festival reached nearly 60,000, an increase of more than thirty percent over 2014"*

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Continued from page 5)*



Kaufmann House by Richard Neutra (© David A. Lee)

profit organization whose mission is to foster appreciation of mid-century architecture and design, and to support education and preservation in those fields. That mission was evident this year, as in years past, in the numerous lectures and events offered during the 11-day festival.

To address the question “Why Isn’t the 1947 Neutra Kaufmann House on the National Register?”, a working panel hosted by the California State Historical Resources Commission’s (SHRC) Modernism Committee led a discussion on Sunday, February 15, during which the integrity standards, and interpretations of them, standing between many mid-century modern structures and the coveted National

Register designation were addressed. The panel included Beth Edwards Harris, Ph.D., SHRC Commissioner and Modernism Committee Chair; Alan Hess, San Jose Mercury News architecture critic and SHRC Modernism Committee member; William Menking, Founder and Editor-In-Chief of The Architect’s Newspaper; Brian Conway, State Historic Preservation Officer for the State of Michigan; Adrian Scott Fine, Director of Advocacy, Los Angeles Conservancy; Katie Horak, Senior Associate, Architectural Resources Group and founding member Docomomo US/SoCal; and Christine Lazzaretto, Principal, Historic Resources Group and founding member Docomomo US/SoCal.

The distinguished group of architectural preservationists discussed the Kaufmann House and other case studies in which the integrity standards used to evaluate National Register nominations are in conflict with the material realities of mid-century modern structures. Built with mass-produced, vulnerable, and easily replaced materials, significant mid-century buildings are often deemed



Panel discussion during Modernism Week (© David A. Lee)

*(Continued on page 7)*

(Continued from page 6)

ineligible by the very design concepts that define them.

Later the same day, Modernism Week attendees joined local preservationists and historians to celebrate the City of Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Designation of the Town & Desert Apartments. Currently known as the Hideaway, these “apartments of tomorrow” were

designed by Palm Springs architectural designer Herbert W. Burns in 1947. Receiving national attention in the May 1948 issue of *Architectural Record*, the article was lavishly illustrated with beautiful photographs by renowned architectural photographer Julius Shulman. Ron and Barbara Marshall

prepared the nomination application for the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, and o2 Architecture sponsored the event.

Modernism Week broadened its focus beyond Palm Springs with “Michigan Modern Monday” on February 16. Michigan Modern is more than a design movement—it is also a cultural phenomenon, an intersection of indigenous, imported, and exported design, and a newly defined epoch. The series offered six lectures, one film, lunch, and an opportunity for attendees to immerse themselves in fascinating

Michigan-centric topics including Eero Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center, the work of legendary Herman Miller designers Charles and Ray Eames and George Nelson, and the pioneering industrial architecture of Albert Kahn, among others. The day devoted to Michigan’s significant, yet often under appreciated, contribution to modern architecture and design throughout the



General Motors Technical Center by Eero Saarinen  
(© James Haefner)

twentieth century was one of the most well-attended lecture series during Modernism Week.

A free lecture titled “Lost, Saved & Endangered: Modernist Architecture in Palm Springs” was presented by the Palm Springs

Preservation Foundation (PSPF) on Wednesday, February 18. The entertaining, informative, and wildly popular talk, delivered by Modernism Week and PSPF board member Gary Johns, was replete with amusing anecdotes and rarely seen vintage photos.

More than twenty local neighborhood organizations offered tours featuring homes that have been lovingly purchased, restored, and landscaped—often by past attendees of Modernism Week. The tours generated more than \$463,000 for the neighborhoods to fund

*“Built with mass-produced ... and easily replaced materials, significant mid-century buildings are often deemed ineligible by the very design concepts that define them.”*

(Continued on page 8)

*(Continued from page 7)*



Modernism Week's Double-Decker Bus Tour (© David A. Lee)

Committee, whose Education Committee provided in-class curriculum and arranged for a donation of educational tools on the topic of Modernism. Renowned midcentury architect William Cody designed part of the school in 1968.

Partner events co-produced during Modernism Week proved to be effective fundraising tools, bringing in more than \$900,000 to fortify other preservation groups including Palm Springs Modern Committee, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, and Palm Springs Historical Society, as well as Palm Springs Art Museum, and additional collaborators. Modernism Week's sustaining popularity is due to a number of important factors: a stable and visionary all-volunteer Chairman and Board of Directors; a dedicated Executive Director and staff; a strong and transparent financial foundation; an abundant financial return to the neighborhood, and partner organizations; and a diverse and timely variety of events that capture the interest of both the initiated and uninitiated public.

As William Kopelk observes, "we successfully created and established Modernism Week as a brand that is synonymous with California's mid-century modern architecture. This celebration of style seems to resonate with all who are sincerely interested in architectural preservation. While we still have a long way to go in Palm Springs to preserve its pertinent architectural resources, Modernism Week can continue to be an example of how to showcase its significance."



improvements such as landscaping, signage, restoration, and charitable contributions. Modernism Week also conducted a special edition of its iconic Premier Double-Decker Architectural Bus Tour for area high school and college students, and provided opportunities for students to attend lectures and participate in other activities.

An exhibition of projects by grade school students inspired by local and international architecture was on display at St. Theresa Catholic School's art classroom from Tuesday, February 17 through Thursday, February 19. The exhibit included models of significant Palm Springs Modern architecture by the school's sixth grade class, alongside modern artworks by seventh graders derived from iconic modern architecture in Palm Springs and throughout the world. The St. Theresa Catholic School student projects were supported by a partnership with Palm Springs Modern

To learn more about Modernism Week Fall Preview (October 9-12, 2015), and about the 11th annual Modernism Week (February 11-21, 2016), visit the Modernism Week website: <http://www.modernismweek.com/>

*Cindy Duffy is a publicist with O'Bayley Communications in Palm Springs, and since 2013, has crafted messaging and generated publicity for Modernism Week.*