



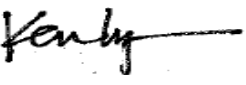
CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING SERVICES

MEMORANDUM

Date: October 11, 2016

To: The Historic Site Preservation Board

From: Ken Lyon, RA, Associate Planner 

Subject: **Case HSPB #99 – Initiation of Study for possible Class 1 designation of the automobile service station located at 2796 North Palm Canyon Drive, “The Cody Gas Station” – Submittal of the Historic Resources Report.**

On January 12, 2016, the HSPB voted (M/S/C Dixon/Hays) 6-0-1 (Williamson absent) to initiate study pursuant to Municipal Code Section 8.05.135 (*Investigation and Study*) of the subject site to inform the board of its possible historic significance.

Staff solicited proposals from several firms and awarded the firm, Architectural Resources Group (“ARG”) a professional services contract to study the site and prepare a historic resources report.

The historic resources report date stamped October 5, 2016 produced for the City of Palm Springs by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) of Pasadena will be provided to you under separate cover.



2796 North Palm Canyon Drive APN : 504 091 001

RECOMMENDATION: Receive the historic resources report prepared by ARG and direct staff accordingly.



2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive Historic Resources Report

Prepared for:

City of Palm Springs
Department of Planning Services
3200 Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, California 92263

Prepared by:



Architectural
Resources Group

Pasadena, California

October 6, 2016

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I. INTRODUCTION

At the request of the City of Palm Springs' Department of Planning Services, Architectural Resources Group (ARG) has prepared this Historic Resources Report for the property located at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County, California.

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is occupied by a one-story, commercial gas station comprising a series of gasoline fueling pumps, a mini-mart/convenience store, and a service garage. It was constructed in 1964 and designed in the Mid-Century Modern style. ARG has evaluated the property's eligibility for listing as a City of Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site.

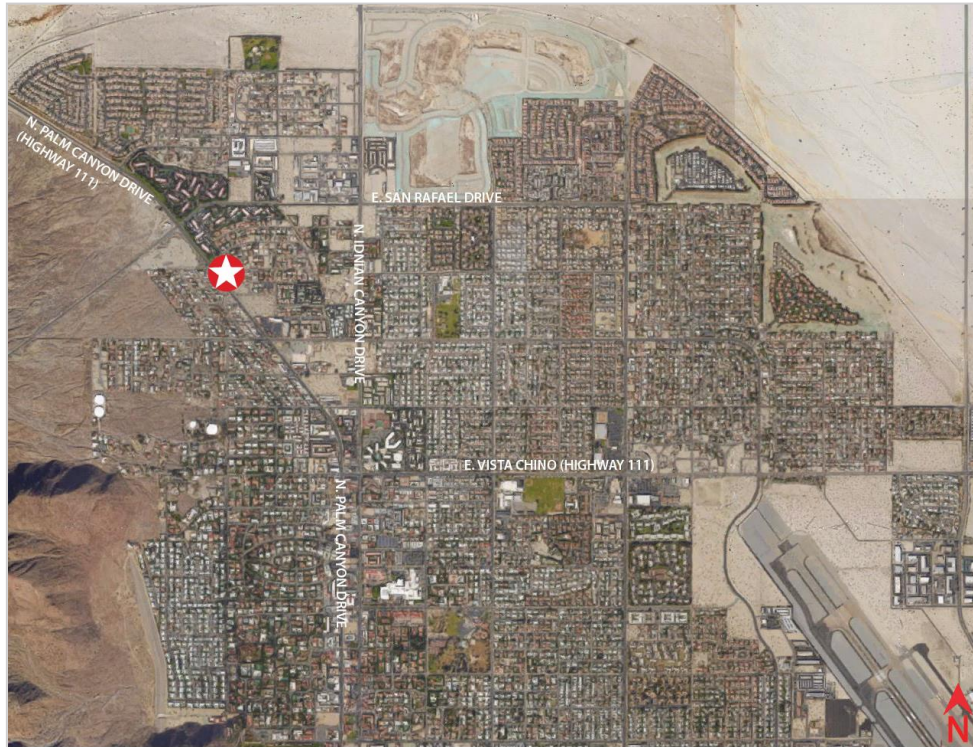
Completion of this assessment involved a site visit and visual inspection of the building on August 4, 2016; compilation and review of historic building permits and project documents obtained from the Palm Springs Building Department; primary and secondary source research conducted through various online repositories including a database of digitized *Desert Sun* issues in the California Digital Newspaper Collection, as well as the collection of William F. Cody papers located at the Robert E. Kennedy Library at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo; development of applicable historic contexts and themes; evaluation of the building's eligibility under City of Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site criteria; and evaluation of the building's historic integrity. This report was prepared by Katie E. Horak, Principal, and Mickie Torres-Gil, both of whom meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards* for Architectural History.¹

In summary, ARG finds that the property at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is eligible for listing as a City of Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site. The following report provides a contextual basis for analysis and a detailed discussion of how this determination was made.

¹ Katie E. Horak is a Principal and Architectural Historian in ARG's Pasadena office, with 12 years of experience in the field. She is a graduate of the Master of Heritage Conservation program at the University of Southern California (USC). Mickie Torres-Gil is an Architectural Historian at ARG's Pasadena office, with two years of experience in the field. She is also a graduate of the Master of Heritage Conservation program at USC.

II. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Site and Setting



Location map. The subject property, 2796 N. Palm Canyon Dr., is indicated with a red and white star (courtesy of maps.google.com)

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive (the subject property) is located at the southeast corner of N. Palm Canyon Drive (California State Route 111) and W. Yorba Road in the City of Palm Springs, Riverside County, California. It is located in the northerly part of the urbanized area of the city, approximately two miles north of the Central Business District. The topography of the area is generally flat, though the area west of N. Palm Canyon Drive embarks on a gradual upward slope into the San Jacinto Mountains and the Chino Cone alluvial fan. N. Palm Canyon Drive charts a skewed northwest-southeast course from Interstate 10 into the city's central core; at W. Vista Chino, south of the subject property, State Route 111 cuts east, while N. Palm Canyon Drive continues southward. Secondary arteries immediately adjacent to the subject property generally conform to the skewed axis generated by N. Palm Canyon Drive in this portion of the city. The remainder of the city generally follows an orthogonal grid oriented in the north-south direction.

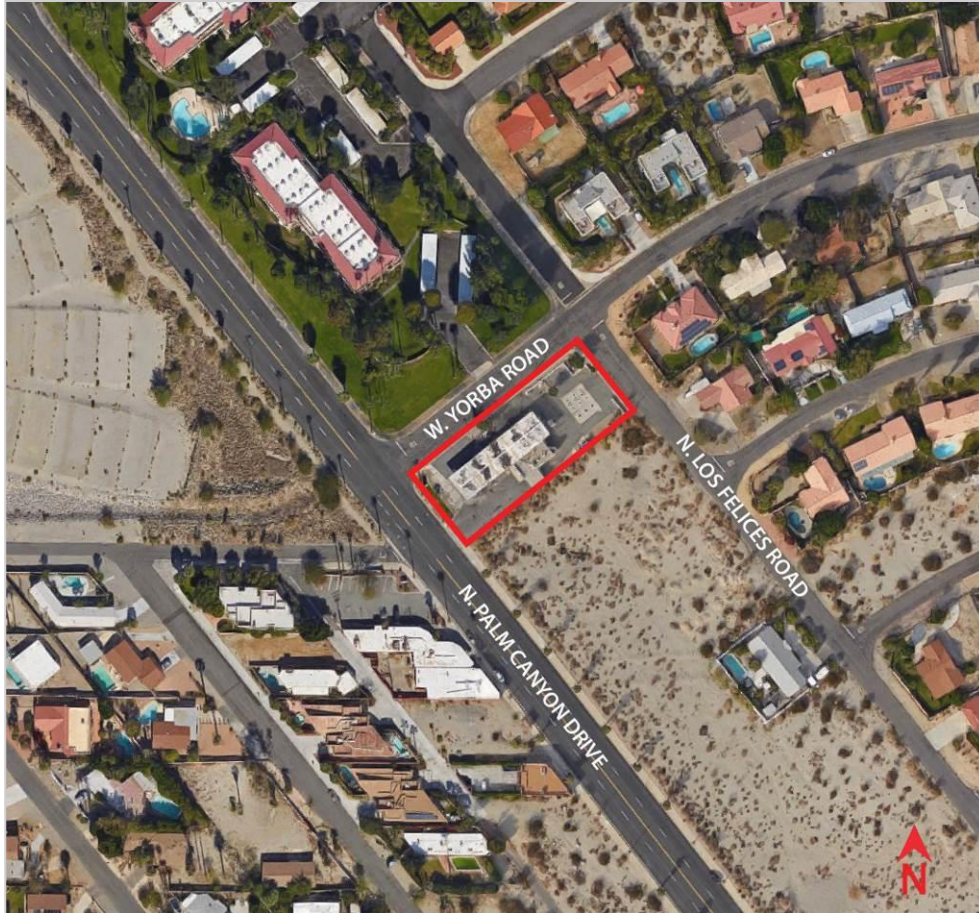
N. Palm Canyon Dr.
(CA State Route
111) and N. Indian
Canyon Dr., to the
left and right,
respectively, 1956
(Los Angeles Public
Library Photo
Collection).



The subject property is occupied by a one-story gas station and located in a neighborhood of low-density commercial properties and modest one-story, single- and multi-family residences comprising the neighborhoods of Racquet Club West and Chino Canyon (to the east and west, respectively). Low-scale commercial development occurs along N. Palm Canyon Drive, a major thoroughfare on the City's General Plan Circulation Map, though many parcels along the thoroughfare remain undeveloped in the northern portion of the city. Much of the development surrounding the subject property occurred between the 1970s and early 2000s, though the subdivision of land and some construction occurred prior to this.

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive occupies a 100-by-200 foot rectilinear parcel sited on an irregular block that conforms to the angled axis of N. Palm Canyon Drive.² The block is bounded by N. Palm Canyon Drive to the west, W. Yorba Road to the north, N. Los Felices Road to the east, and W. Alvarado Road to the south. The portion of the block south of the parcel comprises mostly undeveloped parcels fronting N. Palm Canyon Drive, with the exception of a small residential property sited approximately halfway between W. Yorba and W. Alvarado Roads and fronting N. Los Felices Road.

² Though the site conforms to an angled axis, cardinal directions will be used to describe the site and the subject property for the purposes of this report herein.



Site map. The subject property, 2796 N. Palm Canyon Dr., is outlined in red (courtesy of maps.google.com)

The property has vehicular access from N. Palm Canyon Drive, W. Yorba Road and N. Los Felices Road. Low concrete block walls border the parcel along its southern boundary and along the northeast corner of the site. Landscaping is minimal and comprises a small cluster of trees along W. Yorba Road.

Building Exterior

West and south elevations, view north. All existing conditions photos were taken by ARG on August 4, 2016.



The building at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is dominated by a 1,044 square foot flat-roofed concrete canopy which is raised approximately 12 feet, 5 inches above finished grade. The canopy shelters a service garage with a two-bay wide overhead metal door that opens onto Yorba Road, mini-mart/convenience store, and four gasoline fueling pumps, which are accessed by four vehicular lanes. The canopy is supported by ten squared steel columns. An “X” configuration is precast in the underside of the roof canopy and extends outward from each column, serving as structural support while allowing the outer edge of the canopy to be only a few inches thick. At the rear (eastern) end of the canopy is a service garage that opens onto W. Yorba Road.

The service garage is constructed of painted concrete slump stone units to a height of approximately ten feet. The masonry wall supports clerestory windows set within thin metal frames that extend to the underside of the canopy. The northernmost portion of the service garage extends to the underside of the canopy, contrasting with the rest of the structure which is completely independent from the canopy. The service garage projects out from beneath the canopy along its southern edge. On the north façade, underneath the canopy, the garage is two bays wide and retains a heavy steel frame door with corrugated metal cladding on its outer face. On the east façade, where the garage extends out from beneath the canopy, is an additional service bay, also equipped with a metal, single-stall overhead garage door. A concrete slump stone porte cochère is appended to the south façade of the projection and also opens onto the small parking lot. The roof of the port cochère comprises metal panel “planks” supported by walls of concrete slump stone.



North and west elevations, view southeast.



West elevation, detail of canopy, view northeast.



East elevation, view southwest.



Detail of service garage interior, showing slump stone construction and clerestory windows, north elevation, view south.

Alterations to the property include the 1984 addition of mini-mart/convenience store to the west façade of the service garage, fronting N. Palm Canyon Drive; the addition expanded the footprint of the station and obstructed expansive glazing along the façade. The addition is constructed of existing concrete slump stone and new aluminum composite wall panels with fixed metal windows. While the flat-roofed addition remains detached from the canopy, the addition of a metal parapet increases the height of the building along this façade. Other alterations to the property include the replacement of the gasoline fueling pumps and concrete islands in 1991, the boarding up of original troffer lighting recessed within the canopy, the addition of new fluorescent lights to the underside of the canopy, and the addition of a metal storage enclosure to the east façade. These alterations and those noted on a site visit on August 4, 2016 have been confirmed, where possible, with available primary and secondary source documentation. They are more fully discussed in *Section III: Alterations and Chronology of Development*.³

III. ALTERATIONS AND CHRONOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT

Upon review of historical building permits and original documents provided by the City of Palm Springs' Building Department, Palm Springs City Council staff reports, and digitized issues of the *Desert Sun*, ARG created the following chronology of development for 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive. This chronology provides a summary of the property's development as well as a summary of all documented alterations.

June 1963: Palm Springs City Council approved a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for a gas station.⁴

August 1963: A building permit was issued for the construction of a gas station on lots 1 and 15 in the Spaulding's Palm Springs Estates tract, Riverside County.⁵

February 1964: At least three "concrete cylinder compression test reports" were issued during construction of the station's concrete canopy. The project was named "Frazier Shell Oil Station," after the station's

³ See Exhibit A for a more complete set of existing conditions photos for the property.

⁴ Palm Springs Department of Planning Services, *City Council Staff Report* (City of Palm Springs, 2015), 2.

⁵ Palm Springs Department of Planning Services, *Staff Report*, 2; Riverside County Office of the Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder, accessed 19 July 2016, <http://www.asrclrec.com/>.

landowner M.E. Frazier.⁶ Copies of the reports were addressed to William F. Cody and the Shell Oil Co.

- July 1964: The station opened under the name “Tramway Shell Service Station” and was lauded in the *Desert Sun* for its Modern design and amenities.⁷
- August 1984: A building permit (B4405) was issued to remodel and add 1,485 square feet of enclosed space for a mini-mart/convenience store. It stated, “add to existing service station to provide for self-service station attendant booth and enlarged sales area.”⁸
- March 1991: Building permit (B20276) was issued to “remove existing gas dispensers and concrete islands. Pour new concrete islands and install new dispensers.”⁹
- May 1991: Building permit (B20683) was issued to “install two 14’ high area lights for service station,” in conjunction with permit B20276.¹⁰
- June 1996: The Palm Springs Planning Commission approved a revision to the CUP for a 467 square foot retail space (“mini-mart”).¹¹

In addition to the aforementioned alterations, ARG noted the following additional alterations to the exterior of the building that are not documented in building permits or other source materials. These alterations were identified by visual inspection of the building conducted by ARG staff on August 4, 2016. In the absence of building permits, ARG was not able to determine when these alterations occurred.

- A metal parapet was added to the west façade, at the roofline of the non-original mini-mart/convenience store and continuing to the original service garage.
- A metal storage enclosure was added to the east façade
- An original Shell sign was removed from the northwest corner of the parcel.
- Original hardscape and landscape features including a fountain and reflecting pool were removed from the front of the site.¹²

⁶ “New Shell Station has Unique Features,” *Desert Sun*, July 3, 1964.

⁷ Ibid; see Exhibit B for original articles.

⁸ Department of Planning Services, *Staff Report*, 2; City of Palm Springs Building Permit No. B4405, August 28, 1984.

⁹ City of Palm Springs Building Permit No. B20276, March 22, 1991.

¹⁰ City of Palm Springs Building Permit No. B20683.

¹¹ Ibid.

IV. HISTORIC CONTEXTS

Post World War II Commercial Development in Palm Springs

In the years immediately following World War II, Palm Springs evolved into a first-class resort town. The city's growth was marked by an increase in tourism and leisure activities, which had become more accessible to a broader socio-economic class, as well as an ever-increasing permanent residential population. Between 1940 and 1950, the city's permanent population rose from 3,434 to 7,660, and by 1953, it had surpassed 10,000; the same year, the seasonal resident population was estimated at 35,000, with many hailing from the Pacific Northwest.¹³ Five years later, the city had a total population of 12,443 permanent residents and 50,000 seasonal residents.¹⁴ For these reasons, postwar commercial development ultimately had to serve two purposes: the tourism trade for the seasonal population, which included the development of hotels, large resorts, and attractions such as golf courses, as well as daily services for the permanent population, such as banks, stores, and gas stations.¹⁵ In Palm Springs, postwar commercial development largely reflected the popular variations in Modern architecture that were emerging throughout Southern California.

In Palm Springs, postwar commercial development primarily occurred as infill within the town's original commercial core and along Palm Canyon and Indian Canyon Drives. The growing popular interest in car culture in postwar America made roadside architecture increasingly important. With the widespread use of the automobile and certain derivatives of Modernism, such as Googie, which more blatantly targeted the automobile user through bold designs and signage, the city saw an increase in car-centric architectural styles along its major commercial corridors. This was particularly apparent in the construction of gas stations and restaurants along the northern section of N. Palm Canyon Drive (Highway 111), one of the major arteries used by vehicles to enter and leave Palm Springs. Albert Frey's 1965 Esso Station (now the Palm Springs Visitors' Center, HSPB Case #33 and #37) is an excellent representation of the union between architecture and the automobile that occurred during the postwar period. Located at 2901 N. Palm Canyon Drive, the first major intersection encountered

¹² While it is unclear where these features were located on the site due to a lack of historic photographs for the building, the 1964 article "New Shell Station Has Unique Features" from the *Desert Sun* specifically notes their existence as part of the extensive landscaping plan advocated by the "Desert Beautiful Committee."

¹³ Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*, 178.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Historic Resources Group, *Citywide Historic Context Statement*, 268.

upon one's entrance into the city's commercial core, the Esso Station features a dramatic hyperbolic paraboloid-shaped steel canopy that has become a symbol of the Palm Springs' Modern architectural vocabulary.



Albert Frey's Esso Station/Tramway Gas Station (now the Palm Springs Visitors' Center) (Palm Springs Historical Society)

Although it may be the most prominently located automobile service station, the Esso Station was neither the first nor was the only gas station in Palm Springs to take a relatively mundane program – that of a service station – and turn it into a design opportunity. By 1967, a *Palm Springs Life* article boasted the construction of six “attractive service stations” throughout the city, all constructed within the previous two years.¹⁶ Such a hearty increase, the magazine asserted, proved that Palm Springs was “a forerunner in a trend which other communities are expected to follow – the idea of making service stations decorative as well as functional.”¹⁷ This significant, yet brief, trend of stylizing the generic gas station became one that gas station designers and major oil corporations alike used as a tactic to attract customers. Like Frey's Esso station, 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is an excellent representation of the postwar gas station and one that is also unique to the City of Palm Springs, having resulted from stringent design standards enforced by the city in the 1960s that eschewed corporate branding and embraced Palm Springs' progressive attitudes. Designed by prominent local

¹⁶ “Garish Stations? Not in Palm Springs,” *Palm Springs Life* (September 1967).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

architect William F. Cody, the station reflects nationwide trends in gas station design while embracing a regional Mid-Century Modern aesthetic.

The Postwar Gas Station

Completed in 1964, 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is representative of the postwar gas station typology. The gas station became a distinctive architectural type as postwar America became increasingly dependent on the automobile, and as Modern architects made concerted efforts to cater building designs to the automobile user. The gas station became a prominent building typology around the second decade of the 20th century, as large oil companies found that an entire building dedicated to the servicing of cars could be profitable. Previously, small commercial businesses, such as the general store, had contracted with oil refiners to provide gasoline to their customers by installing pumps, invented in 1905, in front of their buildings.¹⁸ By the early 1920s, designs overwhelmingly reflected trends popular in residential architecture, such as Period Revival styles (the “House-type” gas station), which served as a branding strategy and instilled a sense of trust, loyalty and comfort in the customer.¹⁹



Pure Oil “English-Cottage” type station (left, Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*) and Texaco “House with Bay” station (right, Jakle, *The American Gasoline Station*).

Like most industries, oil companies were greatly affected by the Great Depression as gas revenues decreased. To meet the challenges of the Great Depression, oil companies sought to increase consumerism by standardizing service station design, under the impression that establishing a recognizable image of a corporate gas station, no matter where one was filling his or her tank, would foster brand loyalty. These prototypes continued to “showcase everything from tires to motor oil, provide better service bays, and above all to present a fresh

¹⁸ Chad Randl, *Preservation Brief 46: The Preservation and Reuse of Historic Gas Stations* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2008), <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/46-gas-stations.htm>, 1.

¹⁹ Randl, *Preservation Brief 46*, 3; an exception to this model during the 1920s and 1930s was the programmatic station which assumed various shapes to appeal to passing motorists

and modern corporate image to the traveling public.”²⁰ By the mid-1930s, corporate branding of gas station design was standard practice, and the “white, enameled-metal” box housing a small attendant’s office, a large display window, storage space, a restroom, automobile service bays, and decorated with corporate imagery, could be found throughout the United States.²¹ Designed in various Art Moderne and International style motifs, this box typology became the industry standard in gas station design prior to World War II.

A streamlined Texaco “Box-type” gas station (photo by Walter Dorwin Teague via Getty Images from Sarra Sedghi, “Time Travel: The History of Gas Stations,” Paste, September 15, 2015.



While World War II led to reduced operations and even the closure of small, independent stations, a dramatic increase in the demand for gasoline in the postwar period caused an economical shift in the industry as “independents started looking for ways to capture a heftier share of the market.”²² In 1947, a California station owner named George Urich built what has been widely acclaimed as the country’s first self-service gas station – an unprecedented model which was almost immediately followed by independent owners and corporate entities alike.²³ While the public initially opposed the idea of pumping their own gas, the model was increasingly supported by the oil industry. Economic advantages offered by the self-service station model included an increased number of pumps to stations (and therefore more money towards pump

²⁰ Chester Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 104.

²¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 104.

²² *Ibid*, 108.

²³ *Ibid*, 108.

manufacturers) to increase service, and additional profits to major companies who could sell large quantities of fuel to gasoline dispensaries.²⁴

In the early postwar years, major oil companies continued the trend of simplified and standardized service station design, and “as a result, the prewar box, with minor modifications, continued to be built.”²⁵ However, these companies soon felt the competitive pressure of gas station design undertaken by smaller, independent companies, which had more creative freedom in the designs of their stations. By the mid-1950s, these larger chains found low-cost opportunities to “visually energize the basic box,” through the “exaggeration of once purely functional architectural features.”²⁶ This typology became known as the “stylized box.”

The gas station canopy, in particular, reemerged as a popular element of design expression and creativity after the war; however, whereas prewar canopies extended only just past the main service building to the pump, postwar canopies evolved into megastructures that could cover a substantial portion of the property, including the increased number of pumps and pumping lanes at self-service stations. As certain subsets of Modernism evolved specifically in response to the automobile, the canopy was used to grab attention, particularly for those stations that were more non-descript, in addition to providing shelter.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid, 109.

²⁵ Ibid, 111.

²⁶ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 111.

²⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 110 and Randl, *Preservation Brief 46*, 6.



Examples of the exaggerated postwar canopy, decorating the simplified “box” (top left: Jakle, *The American Gasoline Station*; top right: Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*; bottom: photograph by Julius Schulman for architects Smith and Williams, 1956, accessed from the Anaheim Historical Society blog, the *Anaheim Gazette*).

The era of the “stylized box” was short-lived, and by the 1960s, worsening environmental problems initiated a growing animosity towards anything that contributed to pollution or the destruction of the natural environment, including the automobile, and with it, the gas station. As a result, gas station design reverted to the comforting motifs of the early twentieth century, in timely interpretations of Ranch and Colonial styles.²⁸ More natural materials were incorporated into these designs, such as cedar shakes and wood siding, which catered to environmentalists but overall proved unfavorable by critics and the local community.²⁹ Pioneering this transition was the Shell Oil Company, which became the first major oil company to introduce the Ranch style gas station as its corporate image; with the exception of gas stations built in Palm Springs, the style became a widely accepted precedent in 1960s gas station design.

²⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 111.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 111 – 113.

Shell Oil's Corporate Image in the 1960s

The Shell Oil Company, a subsidiary to one of the largest oil companies in the world, Royal Dutch Shell, is one of several major oil corporations that followed and even set trends in corporate gas station design throughout the twentieth century. Corporations often followed an established design, which guided a station's architectural vocabulary, its site placement, and the amenities it offered, while distinguishing it from its competitors and implanting a recognizable image in the minds of the everyday driver. Royal Dutch Shell was first established in 1907 but did not begin marketing itself in the United States until 1912, under the name American Gasoline Company. Like the design of its logo, which has experienced several transformations since its introduction in 1900, Shell Oil's corporate design for its gas stations has also evolved over time.

Following national trends in service station design in the 1920s, Shell gas stations generally featured a simple box and canopy, with some stations exhibiting Art Deco ornamentation.³⁰ By the following decade, the "box" took on a subdued Streamline Moderne design.³¹ Shell's signage changed to incorporate its evolving logo, and the company adopted red and yellow striping.³² In the immediate postwar period, Shell gas stations were Modern in style, featuring stucco cladding and expansive glazing.³³ Shell's signage became more prominent, with the recognizable sea shell logo mounted on tall poles along the street or highway. While some Shell stations retained the canopy structure through the 1950s, others adopted towers or pylons.³⁴



Top: A Shell gas station in La Grange, CA, c. 1920 (photo accessed from the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the property); Bottom: An Art Deco Shell station (unsourced, undated photo from Pinterest.)

³⁰ W. Dwayne Jones, *Historical Studies Report No. 2003-03: A Field Guide to Gas Stations in Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas Department of Transportation, Environmental Affairs Division, Historical Studies Branch, 2003), 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁴ John A. Jakle, "The American Gasoline Station, 1920 to 1970," *Journal of American Culture* 1.3 (1978): 530.



Top: A 1940s Shell gas station in Salinas, CA (1941, Pat Hathaway Archives, accessed from Pixels.com); Bottom: 1950s Shell stations (both un sourced photos from Pinterest.com).



In 1958, Shell embarked on a redesign of its service stations and became the first oil company to introduce a “Ranch style” design.³⁵ The Ranch station “was unique in that it was the first one designed to blend in with the environment,” which was increasingly characterized by large residential subdivisions comprising Ranch style dwellings.³⁶ The movement towards Ranch style stations also responded to a growing disfavor of “gaudy porcelain and plastic oblongs” (the “stylized box”) by the American public.³⁷ Though constructed of metal, the style featured rustic

³⁵ Ibid, 91.

³⁶ “The History of Shell Oil Company,” Shell, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.shell.us/about-us/who-we-are/the-history-of-shell-oil-company.html>.

³⁷ Jakel, “The American Gasoline Station,” 532.

elements such as brick, cedar shakes and low-pitched gable roofs with overhanging eaves to instill a warmer vision that starkly contrasted with the widespread “ice box.”³⁸ By 1966, 3,500 of the new stations were in operation, many of which were former boxes that had been revamped.³⁹



Top: An example of Shell’s Ranch style gas station, circa 1967 (“The Golden Age of Gas Stations,” Pleasant Family Shopping, March 19, 2011).



Bottom: a double-gabled, Ranch-style residence that recalls Shell’s Ranch-style gas stations of the 1950s and 1960s; the building was designed by Palmer & Krisel between 1957 and 1958 in the Ramon Rise neighborhood of Palm Springs. (Dave Cornoyer, “The Krisel Connection” on October 4, 2016, <http://www.kriselconnection.com>).

Despite this general overhaul of Shell’s stations, some cities opted to eschew the company’s new corporate image. 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is an example of a Shell gas station that was constructed during a period of popularity for the Ranch style station, but instead features a distinctly Modern style conveyed by a refined appearance stripped of unnecessary ornamentation and dominated by an exaggerated canopy.

³⁸ Jakel, “The American Gasoline Station,” 532.

³⁹ Ibid.

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive (Tramway Shell Station)

In September 1963, Palm Springs' City Council approved the construction of a "modernistic gasoline station" at the southeast corner of N. Palm Canyon Drive and W. Yorba Road – a decision that concluded a record length building application first begun in 1961.⁴⁰ When completed in 1964, the Shell station was lauded for its Mid-Century Modern design of concrete masonry and glass, and "unique features" such as air conditioning and the newest service equipment.⁴¹ Designed by local architect William Cody, the pièce de résistance of the station was a 1,044 square foot concrete canopy – noted in a *Desert Sun* article announcing the station as a "Cody trademark" – which appeared to float above the main station and its pumping lanes.⁴² The design also included extensive landscaping "in the style advocated by the Desert Beautiful Committee," and included a decorative pool and fountain.⁴³ Upon its opening, the station was briefly known as the Tramway Shell Service Station, due to its proximity to the recently opened Palm Springs Aerial Tramway (1963). The station occupied a lot owned by M.E. Frazier and was operated by Robert G. Simmons of Palm Springs.⁴⁴

An advertisement for the Tramway Shell Service Station in the *Desert Sun*, October 22, 1964 (California Digital Newspapers Collection).



When the gas station debuted in 1964, it was drastically different from the homey, Ranch-style gas introduced by the Shell Oil Company just six years before and unique even to the standard of the "stylized box" perpetuated in corporate gas station design in the postwar period across the United States. Cody had created an image of the box delicately slid under an incredibly thin concrete slab;

⁴⁰ "Gas Station Dies from Tie Vote," *Desert Sun*, July 12, 1963; "Northend Gas Station's Coming," *Desert Sun*, September 9, 1963.

⁴¹ "Northend Gas Station's Coming;" "Presenting...Tramway Shell Service," *Desert Sun*, July 3, 1964.

⁴² "Northend Gas Station's Coming.

⁴³ "New Shell Station has Unique Features."

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

no longer was the canopy simply decorating the box, it was defining the box. The design was both true to Cody's own style and fit within the architectural vocabulary created and advocated by the City of Palm Springs, which eschewed corporate branding in architecture. In fact, William Cody had actually designed a Shell gas station for Palm Springs in 1961 in the company's signature Ranch style, to have been located at the intersection of Sunrise Way and Ramon Road but was ultimately never built.⁴⁵ The conclusion of the unbuilt project (as well as the lengthy approval process for the Tramway Shell Station) was likely the result of the Palm Springs Planning Commission's strict design guidelines, which promoted distinctive designs over common corporate branding and imagery. Noted the City's Director of Building and Planning, Richard J. Smith, in 1967: "The planning commission requires that the service stations be unique and attractively designed – and not of the typical oil company design."⁴⁶ He continued:

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 obviously, this approach helps add something to Palm Springs which Palm Springs believes pleases people from outside strongly enough to bring them back.⁴⁷

The numerous conditions imposed by the Planning Commission and its Architectural Advisory Committee afforded the Commission substantial control over all elements of service station design, including signage, lighting, landscaping, materials and colors.⁴⁸

Though it diverged from the Ranch style developed by Shell, the Mid-Century Modern design of the Tramway service station did not entirely renounce the goal set by Shell for its Ranch stations, specifically, of blending into the surrounding environment. In the mid-twentieth century, Palm Springs became a coveted backdrop for Modern architecture; the area's hot climate and expanses of flat desert lent itself to several of the basic tenets of Mid-Century Modernism. Noted the *Desert Sun* in a 1964 article: "[2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive] was custom-designed to compliment [sic] its surroundings and blend with other attractive features of the desert community," which it characterized as full of "unusual architecture décor."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Original project documents and drawings for the unbuilt station can be found in the William F. Cody Papers archive, located at the Robert E. Kennedy Library at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

⁴⁶ "Garish Gas Stations?"

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "New Shell Station has Unique Features."

Mid-Century Modern Architecture

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is an excellent example of Mid-Century Modern architecture applied to a commercial property. Mid-Century Modern is a classification often used to describe the various iterations of postwar Modern styles and substyles, which drew reference from early 20th century architectural movements both in Europe and America. The International Style emerged out of Europe in the 1920s and is characterized by simple geometric forms, smooth wall surfaces, honesty of structure and materials, and the absence of exterior decoration. In America, and Southern California specifically, the style coincided with the work of innovative practitioners, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Irving Gill, who were working toward the establishment of a new American architecture that eschewed historical precedents. Mid-Century Modernism represents the convergence of these two schools and the adaptation of their ideas and principles to the local climate, innovative new building technologies, and the postwar need for efficiently-built buildings and infrastructure to house a growing population. Although Mid-Century Modernism is a national movement, Southern California houses an unparalleled collection of postwar architecture due to the prosperity of its postwar industry, the temperate climate (which melded perfectly with the Mid-Century Modern tenet of indoor-outdoor living), and the incredible talent represented by young architects graduating from its schools of architecture. In Palm Springs, the style was adapted and honed by a group of architects who have come to be recognized as developing a local Modern tradition, including Dan Palmer and William Krisel, John Porter Clark, William F. Cody, Albert Frey, Donald Wexler, and E. Stewart Williams.

The basic characteristics of Mid-Century Modernism generally include a clear expression of structural elements and building materials, the application of standardized or prefabricated, mass-produced elements, flexible and open interior plans, and a blurring of the line between indoor and outdoor spaces. In Palm Springs, practitioners adapted these basic tenets to the extreme climate of the region through the use of poured-in-place concrete, concrete block, and brise soleil. “Screen walls” of concrete block units, metal, and even wood, were used to effectively block the sun from entering interiors, while allowing natural breezes to cool interior spaces. Other character-defining features of the style include one- or two-story configurations, horizontal massing, flat or low-pitched roofs with wide overhanging eaves and cantilevered canopies, unadorned wall surfaces, and exterior wall panels or accent materials of wood, glass, plaster, concrete, steel or brick.⁵⁰ The Mid-Century Modern style became the representative style of postwar architecture in Palm Springs and was used in almost every property type.

⁵⁰ Historic Resources Group, *City of Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings* (City of Palm Springs: Department of Planning Services, 2016), 322).

Modern Innovations in Concrete

The goals of the Modern movement to create innovative architecture that was both accessible to the broader public and inexpensive, yet efficient, was met with enthusiastic experimentations in materials and building technologies. In this sense, Modern architecture was marked by “a desire to place architecture and engineering on a shared and rational basis.”⁵¹ Reinforced concrete became a common material of the Modern architecture movement due to its strength, versatility and low-cost; left exposed and unadorned, concrete structures could be architecturally pleasing while conveying honesty of materials and construction. When reinforced thin-shell concrete construction was introduced to the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, its ability to conform to extraordinary geometries and span large spaces while appearing lightweight lent itself both aesthetically and structurally to the Modern movement, and practitioners of Modern architecture became intent on furthering the model.

Reinforced thin-shell concrete construction was extensively used during World War II in the construction of thin-shell domes and vaults for industrial and military facilities. By the 1950s, architects had fully adopted the technology due to its seemingly endless sculptural, aesthetic and structural possibilities. It became particularly useful in the construction of the soaring hyperbolic paraboloid roof structures prominent in the Guggie and Expressionist styles of the Modern movement.

The gas station at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is an excellent example of the Mid-Century Modern style, exhibiting such characteristics as unadorned concrete slump stone construction, low, horizontal massing, and clerestory windows that give the roof and canopy a floating appearance; together, these elements convey principles of the style that advocate for honesty of materials and simple, restrained design. The dramatic and incredibly thin precast concrete canopy sheltering the station is also an excellent example of innovations in the thin-shell concrete technology that accompanied the Modern movement and lent itself to its ideals of efficient and accessible architecture. The precast concrete X-configuration on the underside of the canopy was used structurally to enable the overall thinness of the structure, while the squared steel columns freed the concrete slump stone walls of the service garage and original attendant shop from supporting the canopy’s additional load. The canopy was a hallmark of its architect, William F. Cody, who was lauded for his refined aesthetic and ability to push the limits of architecture and concrete construction.

⁵¹ Thomas E. Boothby and Charlene K. Roise, “Soaring or Crashing? – The Challenges of Preserving Thin-Shell Concrete Structures,” Historic Preservation Education Foundation, accessed September 28, 2016, <http://hpef.us/publications/preserving-the-recent-past-publications/soaring-or-crashing>.

William F. Cody

The gas station at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive was designed by William F. Cody, who is known for the wide variety and breadth of architectural contributions he made to the City of Palm Springs between 1942 and 1972. Cody obtained a Bachelor's degree in Architecture from the University of Southern California in 1942, training under renowned Modern architect Cliff May. During his time spent with May, Cody developed an appreciation for functional and efficient design. His relationship with Palm Springs began in 1946 when he began working as staff architect for the Desert Inn; in 1947, he began his own firm, William F. Cody & Associates and designed the Del Marcos Hotel. Also in 1947, Cody designed his own home, which encapsulated the qualities he valued most in architecture: openness, variation in spaces, simplicity and elegance.

Cody designed a substantial and impressive portfolio of buildings in the City of Palm Springs during his firm's tenure, including resorts and hotels, office buildings, residences, a church, and a library center. His conversion of the 1935 Thunderbird Dude Ranch into the Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage also initiated a chain of subsequent design commissions for at least ten more country clubs.⁵² His largest commission was the design of the Palm Springs Spa Hotel and Bath House, commissioned by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians on the site of the area's original hot springs.⁵³ Cody became known for his painstaking attention to detail and technical expertise; in describing his distinct style, *Palm Springs Life* colorfully noted:

He didn't just slap the slender modern rectangle down in the desert – he put it on a diet and shaved it down to nothingness. He extended rooflines out 12 feet to create shade as well as outdoor living spaces. He flowed water through channels and into reflecting pools. He placed swimming pools right up against living areas. Cody's designs hid doorframes within walls, elongated steel roof spans, and reduced steel beams to slivers so that absolutely nothing interfered with the views of the outdoors.⁵⁴

The exaggerated concrete canopy (or roof sheltering a glass "box") became one of Cody's trademark designs, and the motif can be seen in many of his works, including the Perlberg Residence (1952), the El Dorado Country Club (1957), the Racquet Club Garden Villas (1959), the Goldberg Residence (1964), and the Palm Springs Glass House (1967). The barrel-vaulted entrance canopy of the Palm

⁵² "William F. Cody," Palm Springs Modern Committee, accessed August 8, 2016, <http://psmodcom.org/index.php/william-f-cody>.

⁵³ Greg Niemann, *Palm Springs Legends: Creation of a Desert Oasis* (San Diego: Sunbelt Publications, Inc., 2006), 174; Cody collaborated with Donald Wexler, Richard Harrison and Philip Koenig on the design of the hotel and bath house

⁵⁴ Adele Cygelman, "Modern Sophisticate," *Palm Springs Life*, December 31, 2014, <http://www.palmspringslife.com/modern-sophisticate/>.

Springs Spa Hotel (1959-1963) also reflects the range of Cody's experiments with thin-shell concrete technology.

Much like in the design of the gas station at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive, these examples convey Cody's affinity for the canopy-box relationship, which lent itself well to the "stylized box" gas station typology of the postwar period. However, Cody's design of the gas station was one of the more extravagant variations of the motif, as seen by the apparent detachment of the box from the canopy. While the box is still physically connected to the canopy above the service garage, Cody's use of clerestory windows further played to the image that the canopy was floating above the station. While Cody had several residential commissions in which he integrated this motif, the subject property is the only known gas station designed by Cody in Palm Springs, and as such, is one of the few properties to represent Cody's most celebrated stylistic ideals on a small, commercial scale.

Though Cody is perhaps best known for his work in Palm Springs, he also produced a number of projects in other cities including Phoenix, San Diego, Palo Alto and Havana, Cuba. Cody was inducted into the Fellowship of the American Institute of Architects in 1965.⁵⁵



The Palm Springs Glass House, 1967 (top left, photo by Don Chavkin) and the El Dorado Country Club, 1957 (bottom left, photo by Julius Shulman) both accessed from "William F. Cody," Palm Springs Modernism Committee; the brise-soleil at the Palm Springs Spa Hotel, 1959 (right, Getty Research Institute, accessed from Palm Springs Life).

⁵⁵ ⁵⁵ Historic Resources Group, *City of Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context Statement*, Appendix C. Biography of Local Practitioners.

V. REGULATIONS AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

City of Palm Springs Historic Site

The City of Palm Springs administers a local designation program in which individual properties and concentrations of properties can be designated as Historic Sites and Historic Districts, respectively. The designation of Historic Sites and Districts is governed by Title 8, Chapter 8.05, Article III (Procedure for Designation of Historic Sites or Districts) of the Palm Springs Municipal Code, which establishes and authorizes a seven-member Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) to identify, nominate and recommend potential historic sites or districts to the City Council. To facilitate this process, the Ordinance establishes requirements that a property must meet in order to qualify for designation as a historic site.⁵⁶

Per the Municipal Code, a Historic Site is defined as “a building; a structure, including but not limited to archways, tiled areas and similar elements; an archaeological excavation or object that is unique or significant because of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect.”⁵⁷ A property may be designated a Historic Site if it satisfies one or more of the following seven evaluative criteria:

- 1) It is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community; or
- 2) It is associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to national, state or local history; or
- 3) It reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history; or
- 4) It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or
- 5) It represents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value; or

⁵⁶ The City of Palm Springs is also a designated Certified Local Government (CLG), which is a preservation partnership between the National Park Service (NPS), the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and local communities with a goal to create local commitments to historic preservation.

⁵⁷ City of Palm Springs Municipal Code, 8.05.020 – Historic Preservation, General Provisions, Definitions.

- 6) It represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- 7) It has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.⁵⁸

In order for a property to qualify as City of Palm Springs Historic Site, it must not only be significant under one or more criteria but also retain integrity, which the National Park Service defines as “the ability of a property to convey its significance.”⁵⁹ While the City of Palm Springs Historic Sites Ordinance does not explicitly include language about integrity, it does state that a historic site’s uniqueness and significance can be determined through its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect.⁶⁰ In nominating historic sites to the local register, the City of Palm Springs follows guidelines on integrity established by the National Park Service for the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register has identified seven aspects of integrity as follows:

- 1) **Location:** the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.
- 2) **Design:** the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.
- 3) **Setting:** the physical environment of a historic property.
- 4) **Materials:** 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.
- 5) **Workmanship:** the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.
- 6) **Feeling:** a property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.
- 7) **Association:** the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.

To convey historic integrity, a property will possess several, if not most, of these aspects.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin #15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria For Evaluation* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior, 1990), 44.

⁶⁰ City of Palm Springs Municipal Code, 8.05.020.

⁶¹ National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin #15*, 44.

Should a property satisfy one or more of the aforementioned criteria and retain integrity, it is categorized into one of the following classifications by the Palm Springs City Council:

Class 1. Structure/site qualified for city designation; may be qualified at the federal, state and/or county level... (Intended for use when the structure or site still exists as it did during the historical period or is restorable).

Class 2. Site qualified for city designation; may be qualified at the federal, state and/or county level... (Intended for use when the site is not occupied by a modern structure or use which is different than that of the historical period or if structure is unusable, nonconforming, unrestorable, or the like).

Class 3. Structure/site was constructed before 1969, or a year to be determined by the City Council, or construction date cannot be confirmed. Eligible for a six-month stay of demolition.⁶²

Class 1 Historic Site designation serves as the highest level of local designation in Palm Springs, ensuring that a “structure/site may not be modified nor objects removed without approval of the city council,” while it’s usage may also be regulated or limited to “the extent that it may impair the integrity of the site.”⁶³

VI. EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

Previous Surveys and Designations

The property at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive was previously identified and evaluated for its historical significance in the *City of Palm Springs Historic Resources Survey Summary Report*, completed by ARG in 2004. The survey, which identified and documented 200 properties, found that 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive was potentially significant for designation on the City of Palm Springs’ Official Register of Historic Sites and Districts for its architectural merit and assigned the property a status code of 5S3, which conveys that the resource appears to be individually eligible for local listing or designation through survey evaluation. The preservation planning firm Historic Resources Group (HRG) is currently concluding an updated and more intensive historic resources survey of the City of Palm Springs; the survey confirmed previous findings of potential eligibility for local listing. The property has not been formally designated at the local, state or federal levels.

⁶² City of Palm Springs Municipal Code, 8.05.125 – Created by Council.

⁶³ Ibid.

In 2015, the Palm Springs HSPB provided recommendations in response to a proposed project at the subject property, comprising an addition to the non-original mini-mart/convenience store. Recommendations included designation of the site as a Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site and the denial of the proposed project. A subsequent appeal to the decision of the Planning Commission by the Palm Springs Modernism Committee was also rejected by the City Council.

City of Palm Springs Historic Site

Upon evaluation of 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive against City of Palm Springs Historic Site eligibility criteria, ARG finds that the property appears eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site, as follows:

Criterion 1: *It is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community.*

The property at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive is not associated with a singular event that has made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community. Research did not indicate that any significant events occurred at the subject property, nor did it reveal that construction of the property occurred as a result of any one event; rather, the building was constructed in response to a commercial need for service stations resulting from transportation trends of the postwar period. Therefore, ARG does not find the subject property eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under city of Palm Springs Criterion 1.

Criterion 2: *It is associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to national, state or local history.*

The subject property does not appear to be associated with persons who have made meaningful contributions to national, state or local history. Research indicates that the original owner of the land occupied by the station, M.E. Frazier, was active in community and civic life in Palm Springs, holding such positions as Vice Chairman of Authority, Chairman of the Economic Development Panel, and Tramway Authority member. While Frazier may have been a part of major events within the city, he does not appear to have made any meaningful contributions himself. The station's owner and the lessee of Frazier's land, Shell Oil Co., owned thousands of service stations across the country, and prominent individuals within the company did not have a notable relationship with the subject property itself. Research also did not reveal that the operator of the station, Robert G. Simmons, was important to the history of Palm Springs. Finally, as a gas station, the building has been used by myriad people throughout its existence. While its consumers may or may not have been important to the history of Palm Springs, the subject property itself is not associated with any singular person. Therefore, it does not appear eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under City of Palm Springs Criterion 2.

Criterion 3: *It reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history.*

The subject property is associated with commercial development in Palm Springs in the postwar period, specifically, the overall expansion of automobile-related resources resulting from a rise in the popularity, accessibility, and mobility of the automobile. Like most of postwar America, the City of Palm Springs experienced a growing popular interest in car culture that made the development of auto-centric architecture increasingly important. As a result, a building's architecture, site placement and amenities increasingly targeted the automobile user.

Located at the intersection of N. Palm Canyon Drive (CA State Route 111) and W. Yorba Rd., the subject property is one of the first auto-related services present upon entry into the city via one of its primary thoroughfares; its distinct siting along N. Palm Canyon Drive was intended to grab the attention of automobile users as they entered or left the city. Completed in 1964, the gas station preceded Albert Frey's Esso Station (1965), constructed one block north of 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive, which also made the subject property the nearest service station to the city's Aerial Tramway (1963), another convenience for those travelling to and from Palm Springs. In the years following the station's construction, six more gas stations were constructed in Palm Springs, reflecting the growing need for auto-related services within the city and the growth of its postwar commercial character as it related to the automobile; the subject property is one of the few stations remaining from this period. As such, the subject property is a product of postwar transportation trends and their effect on auto-related commercial development within the community. For these reasons, ARG finds the property at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under City of Palm Springs Criterion 3.

Criterion 4: *It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.*

The subject property embodies the Mid-Century Modern style through the following distinctive characteristics: simplified concrete slump stone walls housing a service garage, minimal ornamentation, a distinct connection to the site and an expansive, concrete canopy, which exemplifies an innovative method of construction used by practitioners of the style. The subject property is also an excellent example of the thin-shell concrete method of construction, which became a popular technology during the Modern movement due to its versatility, strength and inexpensive cost. The precast X-configuration seen on the underside of the canopy supported the structure's incredible thinness.. Finally, the subject property exhibits elements of the "stylized box" property type associated with postwar gas station design and construction, characterized by an oversized canopy that extends over the "box" and its gas pumps. The "box" itself is non-descript, reflecting the popular strategy of incorporating design trends through

the addition of stylized or dramatized elements. Therefore, the subject property appears eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under City of Palm Springs Criterion 4.

Criterion 5: *It represents the work of a master builder, designer artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or it possesses high artistic value.*

The subject property was designed by renowned local architect William F. Cody, who contributed a diverse and influential collection of Mid-Century Modern designs to the City of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley between 1942 and 1972. Many of Cody's works completed during this time, which included resorts and hotels, country clubs, office buildings, residences, a church, and a library center, have been celebrated for their innovative design. The subject property is the only gas station designed by Cody to be built in Palm Springs (plans for another gas station at the intersection of Sunrise Way and Ramon Road never materialized). Its design reflects Cody's unique aesthetic, specifically, his motif of the small glass box slid under the dominant concrete canopy; the subject property appears as an exaggerated version of this motif, where the canopy is detached from the box, appearing to float above it.

Because the subject property was designed by Cody, a master architect within the City of Palm Springs, and exemplifies Cody's distinct aesthetic in the design of a small commercial property (of which there are no other known examples), ARG finds the subject property eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under City of Palm Springs Criterion 5.

Criterion 6: *It represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

As the subject property is not part of a district, it does not represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction. Therefore, ARG concludes the property is not eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under City of Palm Springs Criterion 6.

Criterion 7: *It has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.*

The construction of 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive in 1964 involved the grading of the site in preparation for its development. Since the property has previously been graded and possesses no known archaeological resources, it is not likely to yield information important in history or prehistory, though it should be noted that an archaeological assessment was not conducted as part of this study. As such, it appears that the subject property is not eligible as a Class 1 Historic Site under City of Palm Springs Criterion 7.

VII. INTEGRITY ANALYSIS

The National Register and California Register have specific language regarding integrity. Both require that a resource retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance. In accordance with the guidelines established by the National Park Service, integrity is evaluated with regard to the retention of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The City of Palm Springs' Historic Preservation Ordinance does not explicitly include language regarding integrity, though it specifies location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and aesthetic effect as qualities that convey the significance and uniqueness of a historic site. However, in nominating historic sites to the register, the City of Palm Springs appears to follow National Register guidelines on integrity.

Following is an evaluation of these aspects at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive:

Location

The place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive has not been moved from its original location. Therefore, it retains its integrity of location.

Design

The combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.

2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive has experienced a few alterations which have somewhat altered its original form and plan. In 1984, a small, one-story mini-mart/convenience store was appended to the west (primary) façade of the existing service garage located at the eastern end of the canopy. While independent of the original canopy, the addition abuts the original service carport and projects south from beneath the canopy, effectively blocking the view of the original service garage from N. Palm Canyon Drive and W. Yorba Road and altering the building's original plan. The west façade, which originally featured extensive glazing, has been obstructed by the addition. The height of the addition also compromises the floating effect of the canopy over the original service garage, and the overall motif of the "box" slid underneath the canopy. Some original features such as the original Shell signage, a decorative pool and a fountain have also been removed. Despite these modifications, the most distinctive design feature of the building – its concrete canopy – remains unaltered. Reversible alterations to the station such as the addition of a metal parapet have weakened the visual separation of the canopy from the "box", but remain physically detached from the canopy itself. Thus, although the subject property's integrity of design has been somewhat compromised, it is not lost altogether.

Setting

The physical environment of a historic property.

The subject property was constructed in a small neighborhood of residential tracts subdivided prior to the 1950s. Today, the area where the subject property is located is largely composed of one- and two-story single-family dwellings, with expanses of undeveloped parcels intermixed to the north and south along N. Palm Canyon Drive, which retains a commercial character; a large hotel resort comprising several two-story buildings is also present to the north of the property. Though subdivided prior to the construction of the subject property, many of the surrounding streets were not substantially developed until the 1990s, and the surrounding neighborhoods still retain a handful of remaining vacant parcels. The scale and character of the immediate neighborhoods continues to reflect the area's low, desert landscape. As such, the subject property retains integrity of setting.

Materials

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 subject property retains most of its original materials including the concrete canopy and squared columns which delineate its exterior spaces; the concrete pumping islands and the original pumps themselves were replaced in 1991. The concrete slump stone walls and metal clerestory windows which comprise the property's original service garage have also been retained. The addition of a mini-mart/convenience store, composed of prefabricated aluminum composite panels and metal parapet, resulted in the removal of glazing on the building's west façade, but retained original slump stone walls. For these reasons, 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive's integrity of materials remains largely intact.

Workmanship

The physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory... [expressed through] both technological practices and aesthetic principles.

The subject property's original workmanship is most prominently conveyed through the construction of its large thin-shell concrete canopy; the subtle, precast pattern on the underside of the canopy and its incredibly thin structure reflect technological innovations in concrete construction during the mid-twentieth century. Though an addition has been made to the west façade of the original service garage, beneath the canopy, the property's workmanship remains in the restrained detailing of its concrete slump stone walls and the use of the clerestory windows to "support" the canopy. Thus, the subject property also retains integrity of workmanship.

Feeling

A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.

The expansive canopy and simplified service garage comprising the original design of 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive exemplified the “stylized box” property type of gas station design in the postwar period. The elements also embodied a motif commonly used by architect William Cody, that of the “box” slid under a concrete canopy, who expanded on the concept by visually detaching the box from the canopy; the resulting effect was that of an incredibly thin concrete canopy hovering over a small, non-descript box. The feeling originally instilled by this image, as evidenced in historic newspaper articles, was one of seemingly endless possibilities in architecture in the postwar period, manifested in the canopy’s lightweight, technologically advanced construction, and encouraged by the increasing mobility of the automobile. While the addition of a mini-mart/convenience store and a metal parapet in 1984 obstructed much of the space between the original garage and the canopy, weakening this original feeling of technological innovation, the most important features expressing the feeling of the building – the exaggerated canopy and simplified box – have been retained and continue to convey the period of time during which the subject property was constructed. Furthermore, the building’s setting, materials and overall characteristics remain intact. Therefore, the subject property retains integrity of feeling.

Association

The direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property type.

The subject property has been in continuous use as a gas station, associated with postwar transportation trends in the City of Palm Springs. The property also largely retains its original appearance, which exhibits characteristics of Mid-Century Modern architecture and conveys the architectural techniques used by master architect William F. Cody. Therefore, the property’s integrity of association remains intact.

Summary of Integrity

In summary, to be eligible for listing, a resource must retain enough of its historic character or appearance to be recognizable as a historical resource and to convey the reasons for its significance. 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive retains most aspects of its integrity – location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Its integrity of design has been somewhat compromised due primarily to the addition of the mini-mart/convenience store, which was appended to the west façade of the original service station. Despite this alteration, the property is still able to convey its overall design, technological

innovations, and historical period. Therefore, the 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Documentary research, site analysis, the development of historic contexts, and an evaluation against local eligibility criteria indicate that the property at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Drive meets City of Palm Springs Historic Site eligibility criteria 3, 4 and 5. The subject property also retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance. Therefore, 2796 N Palm Canyon Drive appears eligible for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site in the City of Palm Springs' Official Register of Historic Sites and Districts.

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