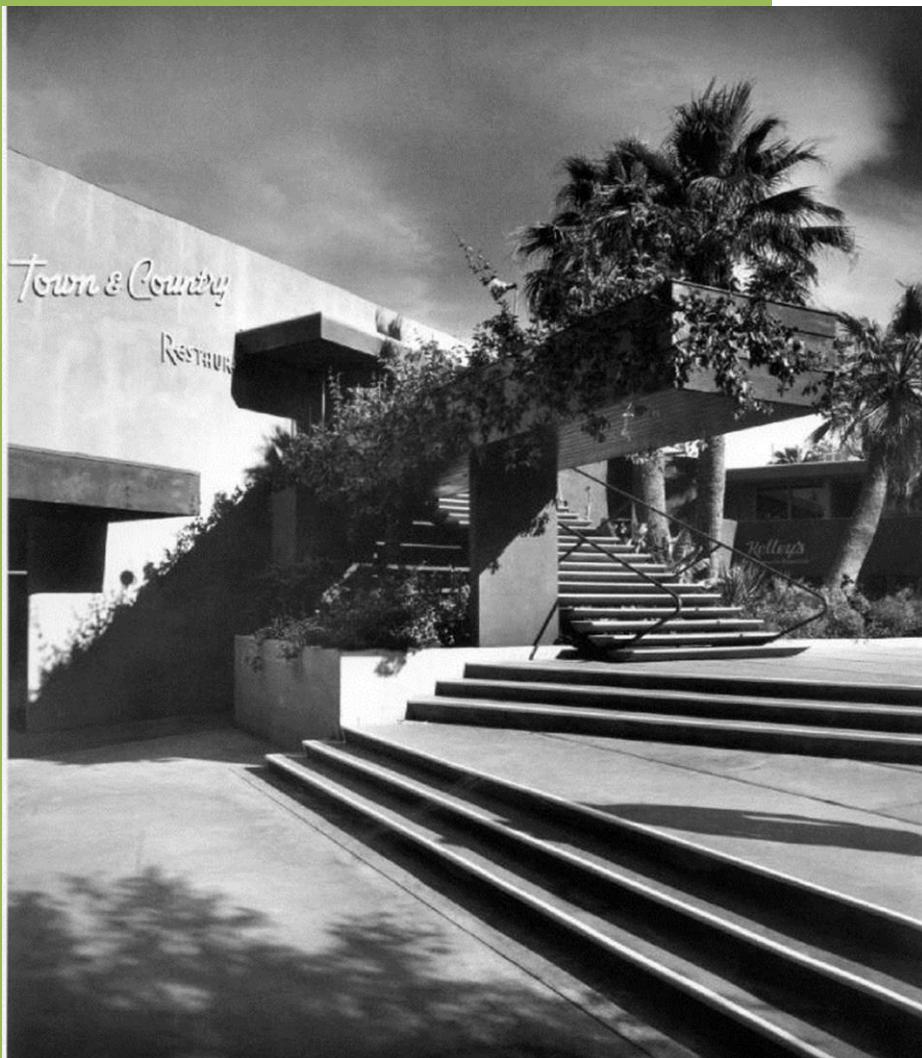


# Town & Country Center

146, 156-66, 168 and 174 North Palm Canyon Drive  
167-81 North Indian Canyon Drive  
Palm Springs, CA 92262

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



Prepared by

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for the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

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## **Acknowledgements**

*The author would like to thank the following individuals for either research or editing assistance:*

**Ron & Barbara Marshall**



**View of the Town & Country Restaurant from beneath the semi-circular overhang located in the northwest corner of the courtyard. Surprisingly, all of these elements are extant, subject to rehabilitation.**

**Cover image: Courtyard view of the entrance to the Town & Country Restaurant.  
(Julius Shulman)**

# **Town & Country Center**

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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 December of 2013, PSPF endorsed the preparation of the Town & Country Center nomination to the California Historical Resources Commission, and ultimately the National Register. On September 28, 2015, the Town & Country Center was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). As a result of being determined eligible for the National Register, this property has been listed in the California Register of Historical Resources.

This nomination, originally written in 2009 by PSPF board member Patrick McGrew, has been revised to reflect the additional research involved with the National Register nomination. It is with deep appreciation and gratitude to Patrick that we continue the legacy of preservation of the Town & Country Center, which is now nationally-recognized as a valuable historic resource.

The current owner of the Town & Country Center has stated publicly and in writing that he does not support the historic designation of the property.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**SIGNIFICANCE:** The Town & Country Center was designed by two Los Angeles-based architects, A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams, and three local architects, Donald Wexler, Albert Frey, and John Porter Clark. As an important and highly intact example of a desert modernist commercial complex, it exhibits numerous stylistic markers that place it in the historic context of Palm Springs' modern period.

**DESIGNATION CRITERIA:** (On June 24, 2009 the Town & Country Center was denied Class 1 Historic Site status by the Palm Springs city council.)

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

8.05.020 (a) paragraph 1 - **Events:** This criterion recognizes properties associated with events or patterns of events or historic trends. In this nomination, the applicable “pattern of events” is the gradual rise of Palm Springs’ prominence in midcentury architectural excellence. Hence, the Town & Country Center is an outstanding example of commercial design within the context of midcentury desert modernism. *The Town & Country Center is associated with that pattern of events, and is associated as well with Criterion 3 for its ability to exemplify particular periods of the national, state or local history. Therefore, the Town & Country Center qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criterion 1.*

8.05.020 (a) paragraphs 3, 4 & 5 - **Design/Construction:** The Town & Country Center is eligible under the theme of Modern architecture because it possesses numerous distinctive characteristics that make up the modernist style, including horizontality, expansive amounts of glass, use of natural materials, etc. Additionally, the combined work of numerous renowned architects (Jones, Williams, Wexler, Frey and Clark) must be catalogued as the work of “Master” architects because of their records of nationally-recognized excellence. *Therefore, for its distinctive characteristics, as the work of a Master, and for its high artistic values, the Town & Country Center qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Site under Criteria 3, 4 & 5.*

**SUMMARY:** This evaluation finds the Town & Country Center eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Site under 8.05.020 (a) paragraphs 1, 3, 4 & 5 of the local ordinance’s seven criteria. Additionally, the Town & Country Center appears to retain a high degree of architectural integrity.



# 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

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The City of Palm Springs allows for the local designation of historic buildings, sites or districts within the City (Section 8.05 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](mailto: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 a 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:

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**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 the 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.

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**1. Property Information**

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Historic name: Town & Country Center

Other names: The Center, Colburn Center, Town & Country Restaurant

Address: 146, 156-66, 168 and 174 North Palm Canyon Drive; 167-81 North Indian Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Assessor Parcel Number: 513 092 09 and 513 092 10, merged circa 1975 to become 513 092 026 (See Appendix I)

Owner's Name(s): Wessman Holdings/Development Company

Owner's Address: 555 South Sunrise Way, Suite 200

City: Palm Springs State: CA Zip: 92264

Telephone: 760.325.3050

Fax number: N/A

E-mail address: N/A

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## 2. Classifications

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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
5	Buildings
1	Sites
	Structures
	Objects
<hr/> 6	<b>Total</b>

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"

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## 3. Use or Function

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Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: business
Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: professional
Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: financial institution
Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: specialty store
Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: restaurant
Cat: Domestic	Sub: multiple dwelling
Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)	
Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: specialty store
Cat: Commerce / Trade	Sub: restaurant

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## 4. Description

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Architect: A. Quincy Jones, Paul R. Williams, Albert Frey, John Porter Clark, Donald Wexler

Construction Date and Source: 1946 (Permit), Completion 1948-1955

Architectural Classification: Modern Movement

Construction Materials:

Foundation:	Reinforced concrete	Roof:	Built-up composition
Walls:	Cement plaster	Other:	Storefront: Glazing with steel frames Structure: Steel and wood

Building Description: *Attach a description of the Building/Site/District, including all character defining features, on one or more additional sheets. (See pages 11-16)*

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

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### **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

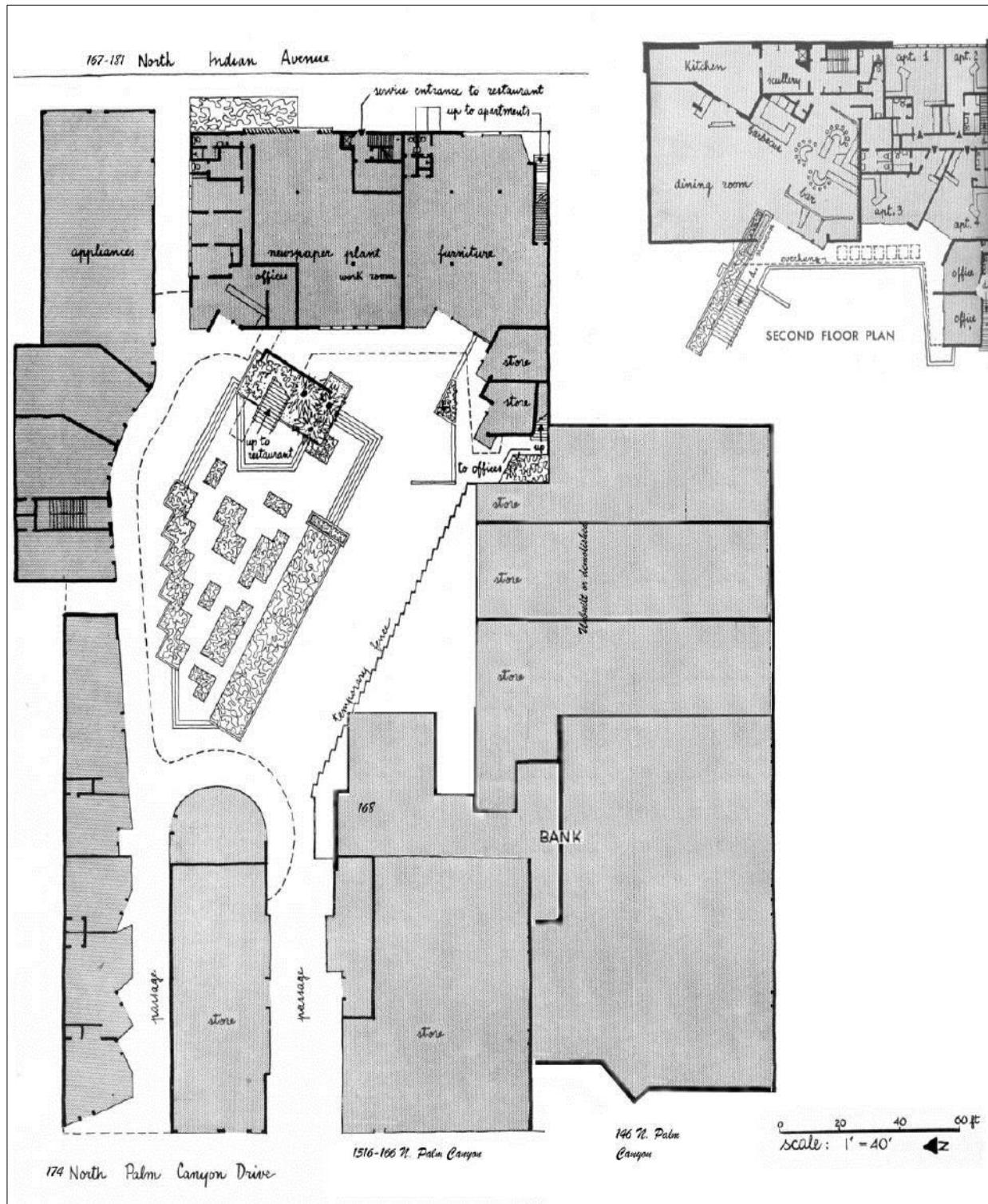
(6) Fill this box if the property represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

### **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



**Site Plan of the Town & Country Center in the 1951 book *Shopping Centers, Design & Operation*.**



The 100 block of Main Street (North Palm Canyon Drive) circa 1930  
showing Patterson's Drug Store and other buildings then existing on the  
site of the Town & Country Center.  
(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)



The 100 Block of North Palm Canyon Drive showing the Town & Country Center in 2009.

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## **6. Statement of Significance**

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### **Narrative Description**

The block south of Andreas Road, east of North Palm Canyon Drive, west of North Indian Canyon Drive, and north of Tahquitz Canyon Drive is rich in local history. The village's first church was built on the northwest corner of the block, and next door was the village's first hardware store. Both were located just north of the nominated property. The site of the church is now the location of the Carnell Building, architect Harry Williams' first project in the City of Palm Springs, and now a Class 2 site per the City of Palm Springs historic resources inventory. Next door, the Lykken & Bartlett Department and Hardware Store of 1914, altered in the 1930s, is a Class 1 Historic Site. A portion of the nominated property was once occupied by Patterson's Drug Store at 160 North Palm Canyon Drive, and was first recorded into the California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) in 1983 and designated Site 33-7545. The site record from that survey notes, "This modern commercial building has stucco walls with a flat roof. It has small four pipe designs on stucco panels on the second story while the first story consists of a storefront." (Henderson and Hough 1983:1)

The transformation of the desert village into a first-class travel destination was the result of its discovery by the rich and famous of Hollywood in the 1920-1930s, making Palm Springs the favored getaway destination. The new buildings in pre-WW II Palm Springs were predominantly Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival in style, inspired by both the arid natural landscape and a romanticized vision of California history. In the post-WW II era, a major shift took place in the architectural aesthetic of Palm Springs as the city sought to accommodate the sophisticated tastes of wealthy visitors who desired private vacation homes and upscale shopping in the secluded desert.

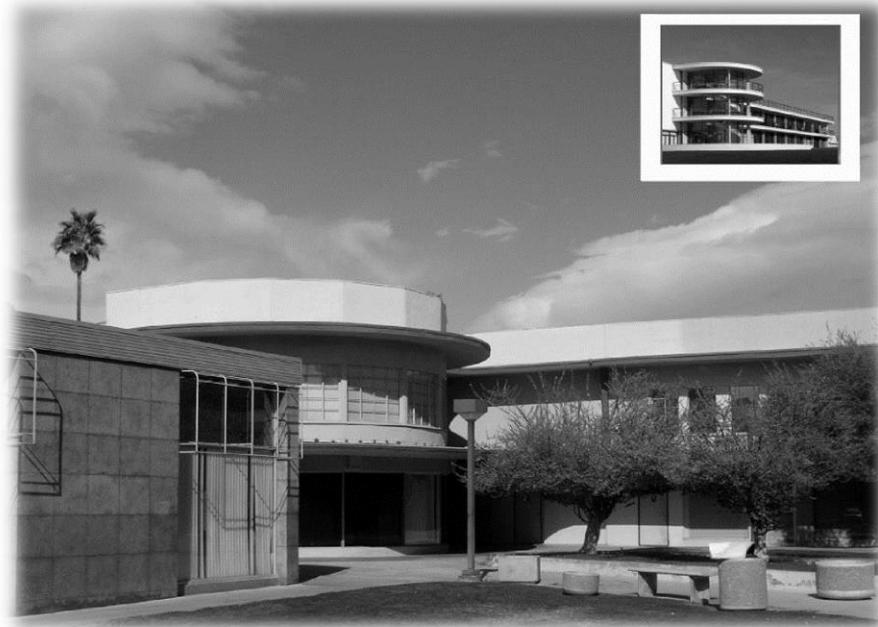
Palm Canyon Drive was the center of this architectural transition, as newly constructed markets, hotels, and retail shops increasingly defined the downtown cityscape. Viewing the traditional Mission and Spanish style buildings then dominant in the area as too old-fashioned, this new clientele developed an appreciation for a type of architecture that was more explicitly modern. The result was inspired in part by the clean lines, flat roofs, glass walls, and unornamented façades of the International Style buildings made famous by architects such as Mies van der Rohe, Eric Mendelsohn, and Le Corbusier, tempered in part by the desert landscape and climate. The attention given to the desert landscape fostered an aesthetic variation in which the austerity of the International Style is influenced by the inclusion of local natural elements such as rock, granite, and wood on the interior and exterior, and by the use of neutral colors to better help the buildings blend into the surrounding environment. Water is also a predominant feature of these buildings, as many include pools, fountains, ponds, and waterfalls. Much of the downtown Palm Springs area reflects the latter phase of architectural transformation since a number of important buildings from this period are still extant.

The previous buildings on the nominated site were demolished in phases to make way for the development of the property originally named The Center. The Center became known as Town & Country Center within a year of its construction, due to the popularity of the Town & Country Restaurant placed prominently facing the courtyard of the shopping center. A local publication stated, "A distinguished restaurant in the center of the Village...Famous for its 'Smorgasbord' Lunch and Dinner...Cocktail hour in a delightful setting."

As designed, the complex was configured to feature an enclosed courtyard with street front elements facing North Palm Canyon Drive on the west and North Indian Canyon Drive on the east. Linked to the streets by passageways, the focal point of the complex is the landscaped courtyard in the center of the property that was surrounded by shops. Additional shop fronts also faced the streets. When the complex was built, the two streets had not yet been combined into a one-way couple and both street façades were equally important. Since the introduction of the one-way couple, North Palm Canyon Drive emerged as the more important street and the North Indian Canyon Drive façade, while architecturally stunning, is considered to be the rear of the building.

In addition to the benefit of frontage along both North Palm Canyon and North Indian Canyon Drives in the downtown core, the complex had additional retail and office suites facing onto the interior courtyard. When built, the dramatically landscaped courtyard formed the focal point of the shopping center, bordered by a large, glassy semi-circular element on the west side of the courtyard and an angled exterior staircase to the Town & Country Restaurant on the east side.

The original plans referenced the buildings by street address.



**In this image, the Town & Country Center's glassy semi-circular element is compared to Mendelsohn's influential De La Warr Pavilion of 1938, England's first modernist public building.**



Historic Postcard of the Bank of America branch at 146-150 North Palm Canyon Drive.

### 146-150 North Palm Canyon Drive (Bank of America Building)

This two-story commercial building of reinforced concrete construction was designed to house a Bank of America branch. Although constructed at the same time and by the same architects as the rest of the project, the building has its own distinct identity. Rectangular in plan, this building features a set of angled louver-like vertical glazed openings on the upper level of its primary façade. The street level façade is divided by a projecting horizontal band that shades passersby and served as a marquee bearing the name of the bank. The Bank of America building was a highly stylized and eye-catching commercial building when first constructed.

Historic photographs illustrate the original International Style design of the building's principal façade, expressed through the contrast between the array of large concrete louvers painted blue, and the massive sand-colored towers that anchored both ends of the façade. The name of the bank was spelled across the top of the projecting cornice in white, widely spaced letters.



**Current image of the Twin Buildings at 156-174 North Palm Canyon Drive. The passage to the Courtyard is partially blocked by an outdoor seating area. Palm Springs has no other examples of this kind of pairing.**

### **156-166 and 170-174 North Palm Canyon Drive (Twin Buildings)**

Separated by a 20-foot wide passageway, the two buildings at 156-166 and 170-174 North Palm Canyon Drive have nearly identical street façades. The west elevations of these buildings along North Palm Canyon Drive feature flat roofs with a wide cornice treatment composed of painted vertically oriented corrugated aluminum panels added in the 1980s, and concrete block wall sections that sub-divide a series of storefront spaces. Each is glazed with metal-framed storefront sections. The City of Palm Springs Museum Market Plaza Environmental Impact Report asserts that the building on the right is the remains of the Patterson Drug Store. While identical on the street façades, the northern building (170-174) extends eastward along the north property line thus forming the northern wall of the courtyard. It contains shops at the street level and offices above. The semi-circular element on the courtyard side of this building, with its curvilinear overhangs and large ribbon windows on both levels, is one of the architectural highlights of the complex.



168 North Palm Canyon Drive about 2008.

### 168 North Palm Canyon Drive (E. F. Hutton Building)

The 1955 addition is a one-story commercial building built of steel and concrete. It is a flat roofed building, with green terrazzo floors. Metal and glass storefronts, green terrazzo floors, and concrete walls are intact. Character defining features include a simple rectangular plan, aluminum storefronts with floor to ceiling glass, poured terrazzo flooring, and a geometric grid pattern of original concrete tile on the two façades facing the courtyard. It is the only single story building in the complex. Unlike the other four buildings of the Town & Country Center, this building faces onto the courtyard, with no other exposure to North Palm Canyon Drive or North Indian Canyon Drive. The original function of the building was administration and finance. The building reflects the modern style of the other four buildings, albeit in a more understated eloquent and simplistic form, responsive to the pedestrian scale of the courtyard. The interior is vacant and not accessible. The original flooring, a dark green, poured concrete terrazzo, is visible through the windows. It extends to the exterior of the building, a common design feature of midcentury modern structures that exploit the blurred boundaries between interior and exterior spaces.



**East elevation of 167-181 North Indian Canyon Drive.**

### **167-181 North Indian Canyon Drive (East façade)**

This two-story commercial building was constructed of steel, wood, and plaster. A prominent feature of the building is an angled exterior staircase to the Town & Country Restaurant on the west side. The broad concrete stairs, resting on a multi-level asymmetrical podium and accompanied by a seemingly airborne planter jutting out from the building behind, led to a rectangular balcony across the front of the restaurant. The dynamic interaction among the various geometric shapes and intersecting planes of the building facing onto the courtyard represent the most notable character defining features of the Town & Country Center's International Style design. The east elevation, facing North Indian Canyon Drive, is a largely intact composition that features two projecting cornices that interlock into a two-story high, wedge-shaped frieze. Historic signage for "The Center" located near the North Indian Canyon Drive entrance remains intact.

## **BACKGROUND**

Master Architects Jones and Williams, based in Los Angeles, designed the original Town & Country Center, then collaborated with local architects Clark, Frey, and Wexler to further develop the mixed-use center. The success of the Town & Country Center was due largely to a scale that is both pedestrian-friendly and in harmony with its desert and mountain surroundings. Jones and Williams artistically designed the complex as a series of distinct volumes and planes, solids and voids, with a dynamic use of space. It attracted high profile commercial tenants, and the first Town & Country Center shops to be completed were so busy that the rest of the tenants were pressuring the property owners to finish their spaces so they, too, could benefit from its success. The Town & Country Center is an example of the courtyard shopping experience that was developed and successful throughout Palm Springs. It is the only midcentury modern example extant within the City.

## **EVALUATION**

**Criterion 1:** Significant Event (*Completed because Criterion 1 is marked above*).

To qualify for listing under this criterion, a property must be associated with one or more events important in the defined historic context. Criterion 1 recognizes properties associated with events or patterns of events or historic trends, such as the gradual rise of the city's prominence in architectural excellence in midcentury modern architecture. The Town & Country Center is an outstanding example of commercial design and construction of buildings within the context of midcentury desert Modernism.

One of the most compelling aspects of the Town & Country Center's history is its close ties with the pattern of events that contributed significantly to the rapid growth of downtown Palm Springs as the dominant urban center in the Coachella Valley during the 1940s to 1950s. Situated prominently at the core of downtown Palm Springs, this multi-use commercial complex, with its bold International Style architecture, stylish restaurant, and appealing courtyard, promoted the post-WW II tourist boom that perpetuated the city's claim as one of America's leading winter resorts. For this historical contribution to community planning, the Town & Country Center holds a unique place in the post-WW II development of the city and continues to be a well-known local landmark.

The Town & Country Center is associated with two general historic trends that made a significant contribution to the development of Palm Springs: the modernization of the courtyard shopping plaza as a uniquely appropriate venue for the city's leisure lifestyle, and the accommodation of much desired luxury services for the city's rapidly growing resort clientele after WW II. Prior to the war, Palm Springs was a retreat destination that provided its well-to-do and celebrity visitors with therapeutic spas, desert tranquility, poolside fun and western-styled getaways. After the war the range of resort attractions grew, including the growth of golf and tennis as popular pastimes, and the city began attracting many long-term visitors, particularly snowbirds from the northwest. In

addition, the city campaigned vigorously for business and convention tourism as a way to extend its season for as long as it could. Hotel expansion abounded and so the city had to also provide this growing visitor base with the luxuries and services they enjoyed at home, including high-end shopping and services, restaurants and banks. The Town & Country Center provided for all these needs and in a style that was considered both luxurious and forward thinking.

The Town & Country Center was one of the earliest Modern mixed-use complexes to be built in the city's prime downtown center known as the "Village." The center was finished in 1948, at approximately the same time as Bullocks Wilshire by Wurdeman and Beckett, a stand-alone Modern department store no longer extant. The introduction of Modern architecture, with its inherent efficiencies and structural and technical possibilities, allowed the city to build and grow quickly after the war and meet its goals of attracting and serving its burgeoning resort population. Modern became the preferred style for all commercial architecture in the post war years. As one of the last remaining examples of pre-1950 Modern commercial buildings downtown, the Town & Country Center serves as a reminder of this important stylistic transition in the city's overall growth during this pivotal decade. It not only heralded what was to become the dominant aesthetic associated with commercial architecture in the city, its distinctive Modern aesthetic became synonymous with the city's leisure identity and eventually a resort attraction unto itself. (Note: In addition to many histories that have noted the importance of midcentury modern architecture in the growth of Palm Springs, the city's 2004 Historic Resources Survey attests to this growth. Ironically, the importance of the Town & Country Center as a transitional example of the style was also noted in a draft Environmental Impact Report for a project that is slated to raze the building.)

The Town & Country Center is also a rare example of a courtyard-style complex in the midcentury modern style. Courtyard design has a long history in California and the Spanish southwest, a style associated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with individual houses and in the early twentieth-century adapted for garden apartments and small shopping complexes. The courtyard plan worked well for an in-town public commercial space as it provided a spacious and protected usable outdoor room removed from busy sidewalks and roadways. The design and siting of the Town & Country Center also enhanced the outdoor experience by providing shade from the harsh desert sun. Although Palm Springs has a few extant Spanish Revival courtyard centers, notably La Plaza (1935) and El Paseo (1926), the Town & Country Center is its only modern iteration.

As a commercial enterprise, the Town & Country Center became even more successful than its Spanish predecessors in that it was larger, provided for more commercial space, and was more centrally located. The success of the center was well noted soon after opening, documented in both the 1951 book, *Shopping Centers, Design and Operations* and an *Architectural Record* article in 1950. Even in later decades, when the 1980s behemoth indoor shopping mall was failing directly across the street, the Town & Country Center, along with the other smaller courtyard centers, maintained a steady following because they allowed

visitors to get the services they wanted and still engage in the outdoors in a pedestrian-friendly environment. The Town & Country Center had a decided influence on other Modern buildings that borrowed its planning style, not the least of which was the E. Stewart Williams' Oasis Hotel built the following year, no longer extant.

While a number of smaller midcentury modern storefronts remain in northern and southern parts of Palm Springs, the destruction of the significant modern stores in the Village core, notably Bullocks Wilshire, Saks Fifth Avenue (Welton Beckett, 1958), and Haggerty's Department Store (E. Stewart Williams, 1959), makes the Town & Country Center the only midcentury modern retail resource left in the Village core as well as the city's only midcentury modern courtyard complex.

Another broader historic trend that the production of the Town & Country Center exemplified was a time of change in the culture of architectural practice when professionals from separate offices began to collaborate either out of practicality or to take advantage of unique expertise. Prior to this time most architectural practices were based on an atelier model where, regardless of the size of the firm, there was only one master architect who took credit for all work. The Modern practice fostered an atmosphere of shared authority in an environment where junior architects could succeed through the ranks much like a corporation. Stemming from the co-op ethos promoted first at the Bauhaus and later in American educational institutions, post-war modern architects (unlike pre-war modernists) saw themselves as facilitators of the process and did not demand sole credit for the work their offices produced. They were comfortable outsourcing both design and production as needed. This kind of collaboration was a forerunner of large corporate architectural firms such as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) and it still informs the culture of practice today.

The Town & Country Center represented a broad collaboration that included two major Los Angeles based architects, A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams, and three local architects, Donald Wexler, Albert Frey, and John Porter Clark who worked on tenant improvements, construction and later additions. The Town & Country Center embodies this historic shift in the culture of professional practice.

*The Town & Country Center is associated with these patterns of events for its ability to exemplify the modern period of the national, state and local history. The Town & Country Center qualifies 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 contribution to national, state or local history. *The Town & Country Center does not qualify 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).*

The Town & Country Center was designed by a host of nationally-renowned or locally prominent architects. The stylistic markers of the building place it directly in the historic context of Palm Springs' Modern Period. The Town & Country Center represents a prime and intact example of the significant modernist architecture for which Palm Springs is widely known. As such the Town & Country Center may be viewed as an important component of the historic trends that have come to define Palm Springs' image as a center of important midcentury architecture. *This historic trend exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history. The Town & Country Center qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 3 (see also narrative found in Criterion 1).*

**Criterion 4:** (*That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or 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.

The Town & Country Center is eligible under the theme of Modern architecture because it possesses distinctive characteristics that embody the International Style such as overall horizontality, expression of structure, expansive amounts of glass, use of inexpensive, machine-produced materials, etc. Additionally, the Town & Country Center is eligible under this criterion because it represents an important example of building practices in Palm Springs at midcentury. *The Town & Country Center qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Site on the local registry under Criterion 4 (see also narrative found in Criterion 1).*

**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:** A master is a figure of generally recognized greatness in a field, a known craftsman of consummate skill. The property must express a particular phase in the development of the master's career, an aspect of his work, or a particular idea or theme in his craft. A property is not eligible as the work of a master, however, simply because it was designed by a prominent architect. For example, not every building

designed by Frank Lloyd Wright is eligible under this portion of Criterion 5, although it might meet other Criteria.

Architecturally, the Town & Country Center, as built in 1948, is among the collaborative works of innovative and acclaimed architects A. Quincy Jones and associated architect Paul R. Williams, both of whom individually earned national distinction during their careers. The Town & Country Center was built by the Palm Springs Corporation on property owned by Bank of America as a collaboration between architects Jones and Williams. At the same time, the architects were also commissioned to design the Palm Springs Tennis Club Restaurant (later the Bougainvillea Room) and, in 1950, Romanoff's on the Rocks, a local restaurant.

Archibald Quincy Jones (1913-1979) was noted for designing university and office buildings towards the end of his career, and he first gained recognition for his residential work. As a participant in John Entenza's Case Study House Program, Jones became deeply devoted to the experiment's goal of reinventing houses to reflect how people lived in the post-WW II era. His conviction that the quality of life could be improved through architecture led him to introduce new materials and design elements to his residential projects, such as glass walls, usable atriums, high ceilings, and post and beam construction. In his non-residential buildings, Jones was recognized as an innovator and master of improving the integration and efficiency of mechanical systems while maximizing usable space.

While Jones is known for elevating the lowly post-war tract house to high-art architecture, Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980) is best remembered as a designer of elegant mansions for the rich and famous of Hollywood. Among his clients were Frank Sinatra, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, Tyrone Power, Barbara Stanwyck, Danny Thomas, and Lon Chaney, Sr. Among his most easily recognized buildings in southern California are the Beverly Hills and Ambassador Hotels, Chasen's and Perino's restaurants, the theme building at the Los Angeles International Airport, Saks Fifth Avenue, and the Music Corporation of America building. In all, Williams designed or participated in over 3,000 projects.



Architects A. Quincy Jones (left) and Paul R. Williams (right).

Although there is no mention of the Town & Country Center in Williams' monograph, it is featured prominently in Cory Buckner's Phaidon monograph *A. Quincy Jones*. The Town & Country Center does appear to represent a particularly important milestone in the development of Jones' architectural style. It is an unusual property type for Jones and is a good expression of its period and method of construction. Additionally, it remains a good example of an International Style commercial building that contributes materially to the historical fabric of the village and to Palm Springs' well-established status as a center of mid-century modern architecture. Evidenced by original drawings in the A. Quincy Jones archives, the architectural firm of Clark & Frey collaborated with Jones and Williams on the Town & Country Center. Albert Frey (1903-1998) was born in Switzerland, and studied architecture there. After graduation, he moved to Paris, and worked in the atelier of visionary modernist architect Le Corbusier, detailing one of Corbusier's masterworks, the Villa Savoy. In 1930, Frey moved to the United States, convinced that it was the land of opportunity for modernist design. He worked for several prominent architects in New York, then moved to Palm Springs in 1939 and formalized a professional relationship with John Porter Clark. Although they collaborated on some early Spanish-infused designs, they became part of the emerging modernist movement. In 1949 Clark and Frey worked with Jones and Williams to develop the commercial spaces in the Twin Buildings fronting North Palm Canyon Drive.

John Porter Clark (1905-1991) studied architecture at Cornell University, and graduated in 1928. While working in Pasadena, Clark was invited to relocate to Palm Springs, where he became the first important regionalist Modernist to open an office. By 1934 Albert Frey had also arrived in Palm Springs to supervise the construction of the Kocher Samson Office Building. Based upon a shared compatibility and aesthetic, Clark and Frey established their partnership. Palm Springs projects of significance, either collectively or independently, include the Palm Springs Woman's Club Building, several private residences, the Welwood Murray Memorial Library, elementary schools, Loewy House, Aerial Tramway Station, and the Tramway Gas Station that is now the iconic Visitor Center located at the northern gateway to the city of Palm Springs.

Donald Wexler (1926-2015) is an influential mid-century modern architect whose work was predominantly in the southern California desert. He is known for pioneering the use of steel in residential design. He received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Minnesota, and upon graduation moved to Los Angeles where he worked for Richard Neutra, whose influence can be seen in Wexler's work. In the early 1950s, Wexler established his own practice in Palm Springs. Among his clients were Dinah Shore, Frank Sinatra, the Alexander Construction Company and the Walt Disney World Resort. Wexler's designs for public buildings, including the dramatic Palm Springs Airport, served as both soaring and practical models for other municipalities to emulate. His Steel Development House Number 2 is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Wexler designed the E. F. Hutton Building added to the Town & Country Center in 1955.

Donald Wexler's last major works were an annex to the Palm Springs Unified School District Center (1998) and the District Headquarters and Operating Facility in Indio, California (1999). He sold his practice in 2000 and donated his archives to California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

**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 Town & Country Center, with its interior courtyard, is a modernist commercial reinterpretation of the hacienda form found in earlier generations of desert architecture. The design provides shelter and shade from the harsh desert sun, and allows fresh air to circulate throughout the open air courtyard. This convergence of interior and exterior space was a common practice in midcentury modern design.

*As the work of Masters, and for its high artistic values, the Town & Country Center qualifies 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. As such, Criterion 6 does not apply. *Hence, the complex 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). *The complex does not qualify for listing on the local registry under Criterion 7.*

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

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### 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 property owner will not permit access, and is opposed to the listing of the Town & Country Center as a Class 1 Historic Site. As a consequence, several doors and windows are covered in plywood. It is not possible to describe the physical condition of the interior spaces with authority. The original design of the Town & Country Center allowed for internal flexibility of tenant spaces and demising walls.

The Town & Country Center represents an established and familiar visual feature in downtown Palm Springs. Its long history of minor changes and deferred maintenance has taken a toll on the buildings, both physically and commercially. The Town & Country Center's integrity remains intact.

City of Palm Springs building safety records documented hundreds of permits issued on the Town & Country Center property. Besides the permits for the construction of the original buildings in the complex, the Palm Springs Corporation also secured a permit to construct a new concrete office building in the southwest portion of the courtyard. Originally intended for a business office, it later served as a women's apparel shop. This is the building designed by architect Donald Wexler. The other permits recorded in city files chronicle the physical modifications to the buildings in the Town & Country Center, most of them to accommodate changes in tenancy and usage in the shops, such as storefront remodeling, enlarging or extending display windows, or combining or dividing retail units.

Planting materials throughout the complex have not been maintained; some are missing, others are overgrown. All of these changes are reversible. In summary, the Town & Country Center retains most of the basic features of its International Style architecture, even though some of the storefronts have been altered to accommodate change of tenancy, as is often a common practice among retail-oriented commercial properties. Despite these alterations, the Town & Country Center retains sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling, workmanship, and association to convey that it is a masterpiece of mid-century design.

The Town & Country Center is in its original location, and available evidence suggests that the setting is much the same as it was during the period of significance 1948 to 1955. The primary character defining features of the International Style architecture remain intact. With the exception of some doors and windows, original materials are present, and the original workmanship is evident. The Town & Country Center projects the same striking feeling of modernity as when originally designed by Jones and Williams.

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## **8. Bibliography**

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Attached is a list of books, articles, and other sources cited or used in preparing this application and other documentation that may be relevant.

### Books

Architectural Record Book. *Motels, Hotels, Restaurants and Bars*. F. W. Dodge Corporation, New York, 1953

Baker, Geoffrey and Bruno Funaro. *Shopping Centers: Design and Operation*. New York: Progressive Architecture Library/Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1951.

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- Other Documentary Sources
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Hine, Al. "Palm Springs is Perfect." *Holiday*, February 1953: pp. 98-104.

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City of Palm Springs Building Permit, 1946.

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Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board. Inventory of Historic Structures, September 20, 2001.

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PROCESS: Architecture Number 41, A. QUINCY JONES: *The Oneness of Architecture*. Bunji Murotani, 1983.

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Wessman Holdings/Development Company. Letter to California State Historic Preservation Officer. Undated.

#### Other Sources Consulted

- City of Palm Springs (Planning and Building Departments)

- *The Desert Sun*
  - Palm Springs Historical Society
  - Palm Springs Public Library
  - Riverside County Assessor's Office
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## **9. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: 2.09 acres

Property Boundary Description: USGS Quad, Palm Springs, 7.5 quadrangle (Section 15, T4S, R45, San Bernardino Base Meridian). Assessor's parcel numbers 513 092 09 and 513 092 10, merged circa 1975 to become 513 092 026.

Boundary Justification: Boundaries that historically encompassed the nominated buildings and the landscaped courtyard, based upon parcel data.

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## **10. Prepared By**

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Name/title: Susan Secoy Jensen (secoyarch@sbcglobal.net)

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

**Consultant's Qualifications.** Professional Qualifications Standards: The Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61 defines the minimum education and experience required to perform historic preservation identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities. The minimum professional qualifications in architecture are a professional degree in architecture plus at least two years full-time experience in architecture; or a State license to practice architecture. The minimum professional qualifications in Historic Architecture are a professional degree in architecture or a state license to practice architecture, plus one of the following:

1. At least one year of graduate study in architectural preservation, American architectural history, preservation planning, or closely related field.
2. At least one year of full-time professional experience on historic preservation projects. Such graduate study or experience shall include detailed investigations of historic structures, preparation of historic structures research reports, and preparation of plans and specifications for preservation projects.

Susan Secoy Jensen received her Bachelor of Architecture from Kent State University in 1986, and her Master's Degree in Architecture and Urban Design from UCLA in 1994. Graduate studies included historic preservation studies in Mexico City, and adjacent communities. She has been actively engaged in the architectural profession, specializing in historic preservation

and modern design, since then. Secoy Jensen has been a licensed architect in the State of California since 1991. She possesses an in-depth knowledge of procedures and standards utilized in the identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment of historic properties. She has owned and managed Secoy Architects, Inc. since 1996, specializing in modern and adaptive reuse projects.

**Memberships and Professional Affiliations:**

Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, Board of Directors & Advisory Board

Palm Springs Historical Society

American Institute of Architects (AIA), member since 1991

Architecture and Design Council of the Palm Springs Art Museum

City of Orange Design Review Committee, member and Chair

City of Orange, Old Towne Preservation Foundation

NCARB certified

Lambda Alpha International Executive Board

Palm Springs Architectural Advisory Committee, member and Chair

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**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 districts boundaries.

**3. Photographs:** Eight (8) sets of color photographs showing each elevation of the property and its surroundings.

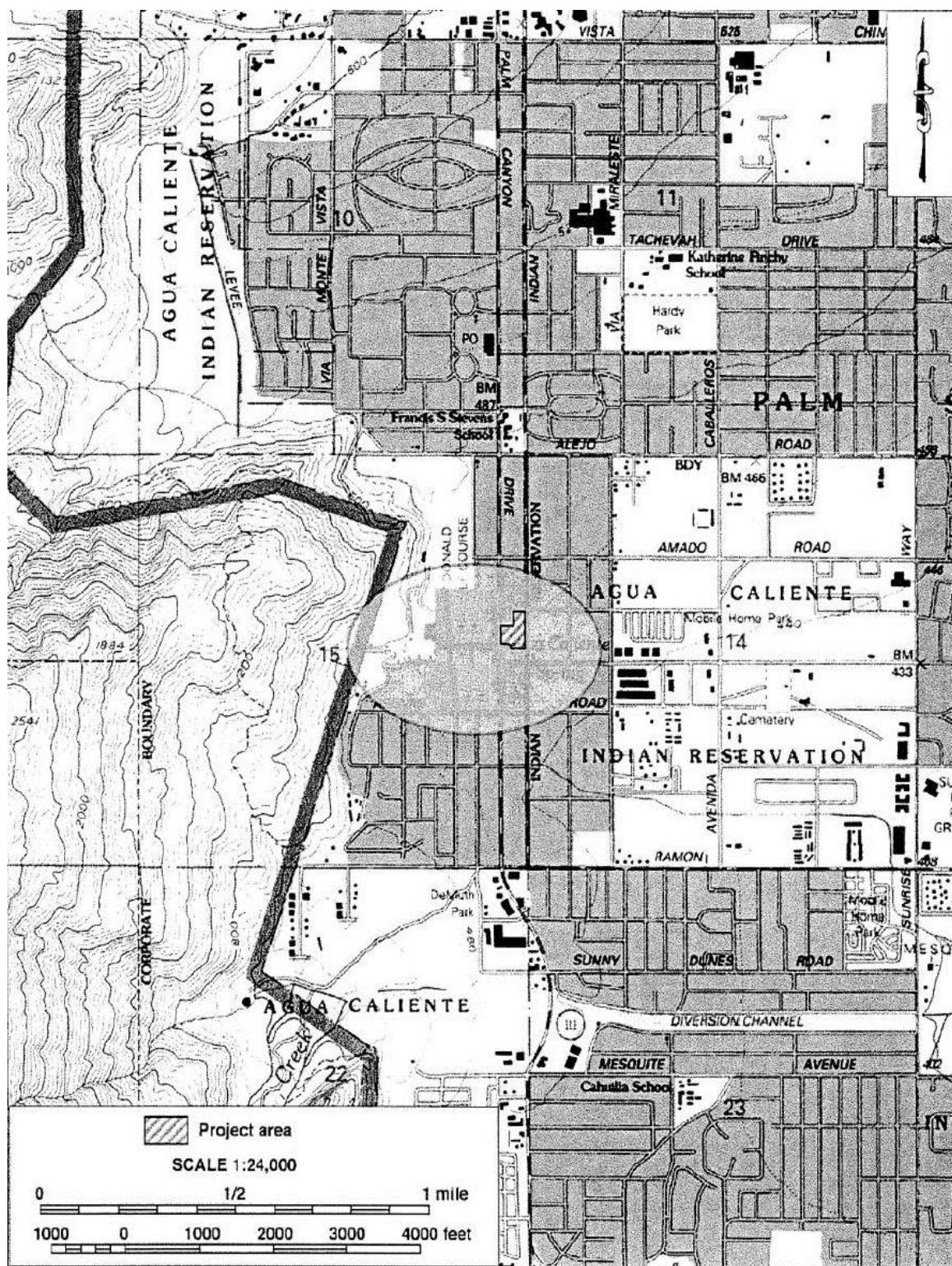
**4. Non-owner's Notarized Signature:** If the applicant is not the owner, a notarized affidavit shall be provided (see following page).

**5. Site Plan:** One 1/8" to 1/4" scale drawing of the site, and eight reduction copies (8 1/2 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: Additional Documentation** (Additional photos provided on a separate CD)



**Building location (based on USGS Palm Springs, Calif., 1:24,000 quadrangle [USGS 1996]).**

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Page/Block: 092

LayerBlock 03

Haage, 10

Check Digit: 3

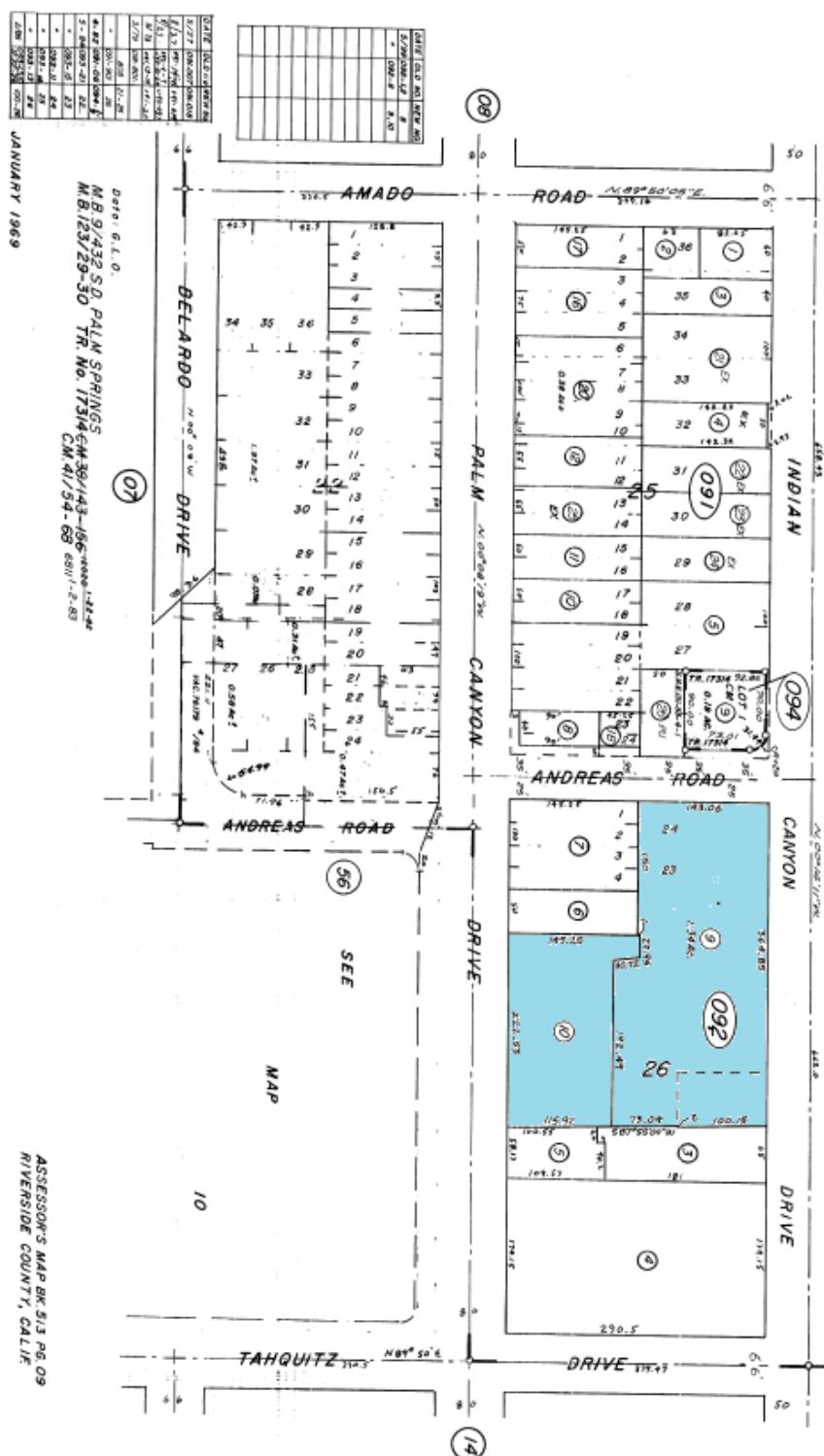
5/3-09

T.R.A. 1108

POR. E. 1/2 SEC. 15, T. 4S., R. 4E.

BK  
508

THIS MAP IS FOR  
ASSESSMENT PURPOSES ONLY



## Riverside County Assessor's Map showing the Town & Country Center parcel.

## Appendix II: Miscellaneous Historical Photographs & Ephemera

HOME OF THE  
VILLAGER MAGAZINE

In this flower-laden setting right in the center of Palm Springs. The Villager staff works to produce for you one of the most unique class magazines in America. Our offices are shown on the left of this color Vignette. The Villager is published and printed in its entirety in our own plant here.



Vignette OF "THE CENTER" WHERE  
THE VILLAGER MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED

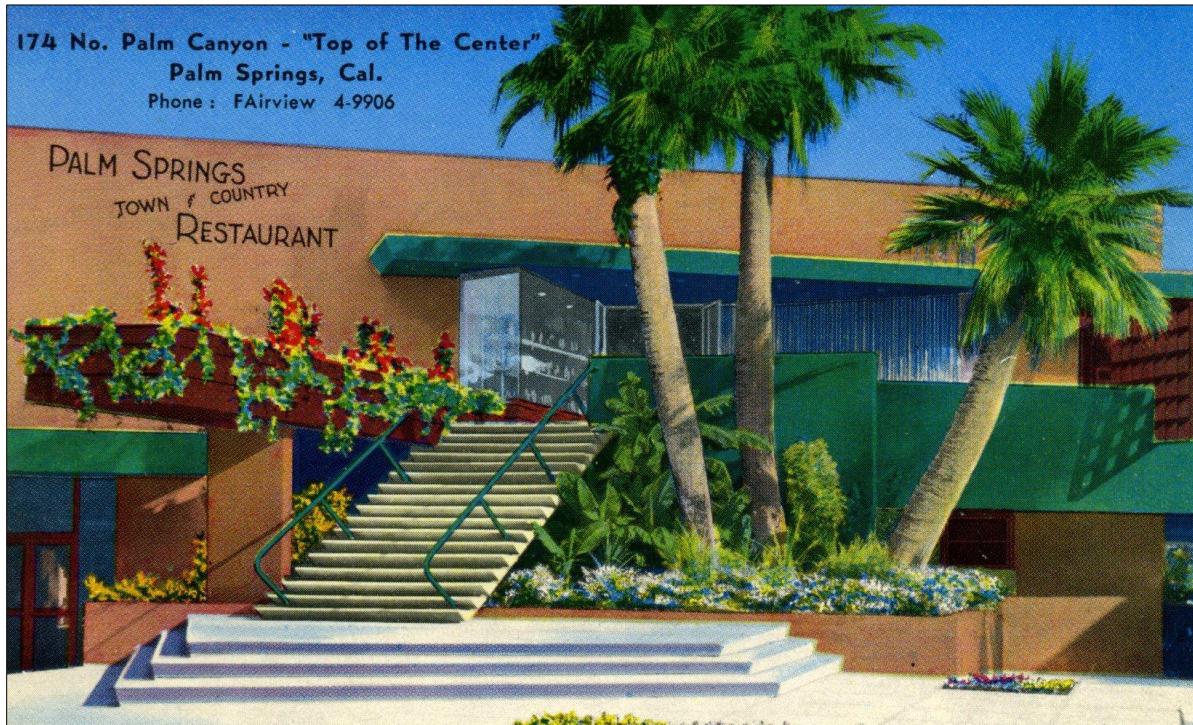
*Palm Springs*  
**Villager**

174 N PALM CANYON DRIVE PALM SPRINGS

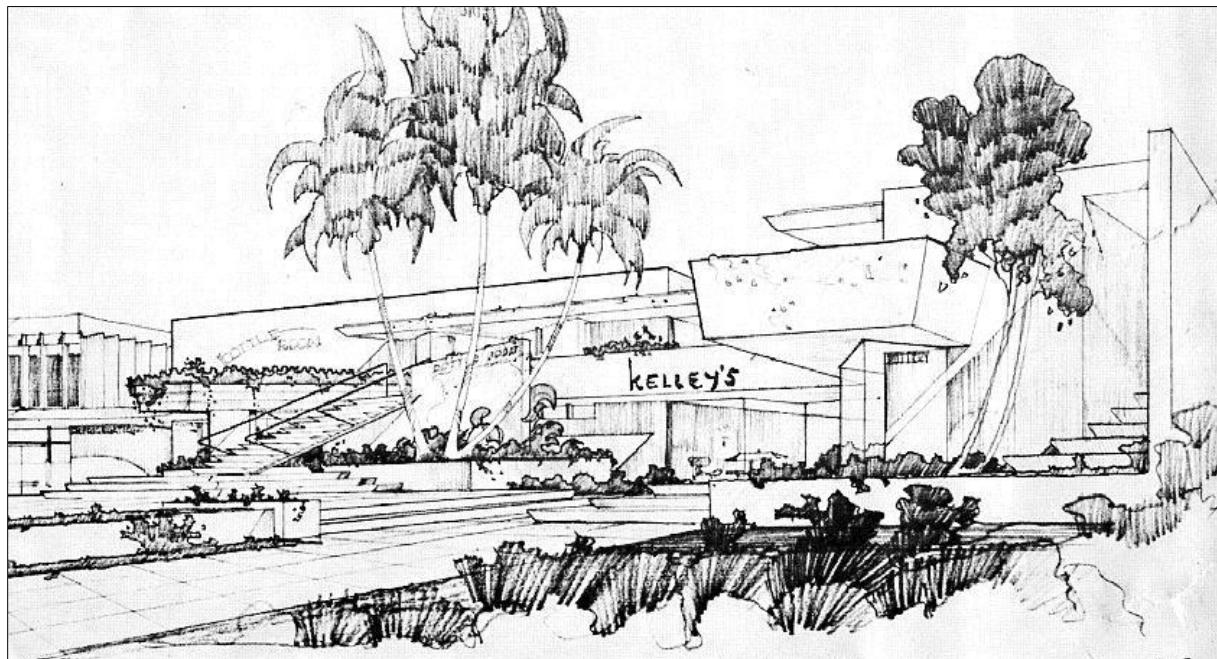
Advertisement from the May 1957 issue of *Palm Springs Villager* magazine.



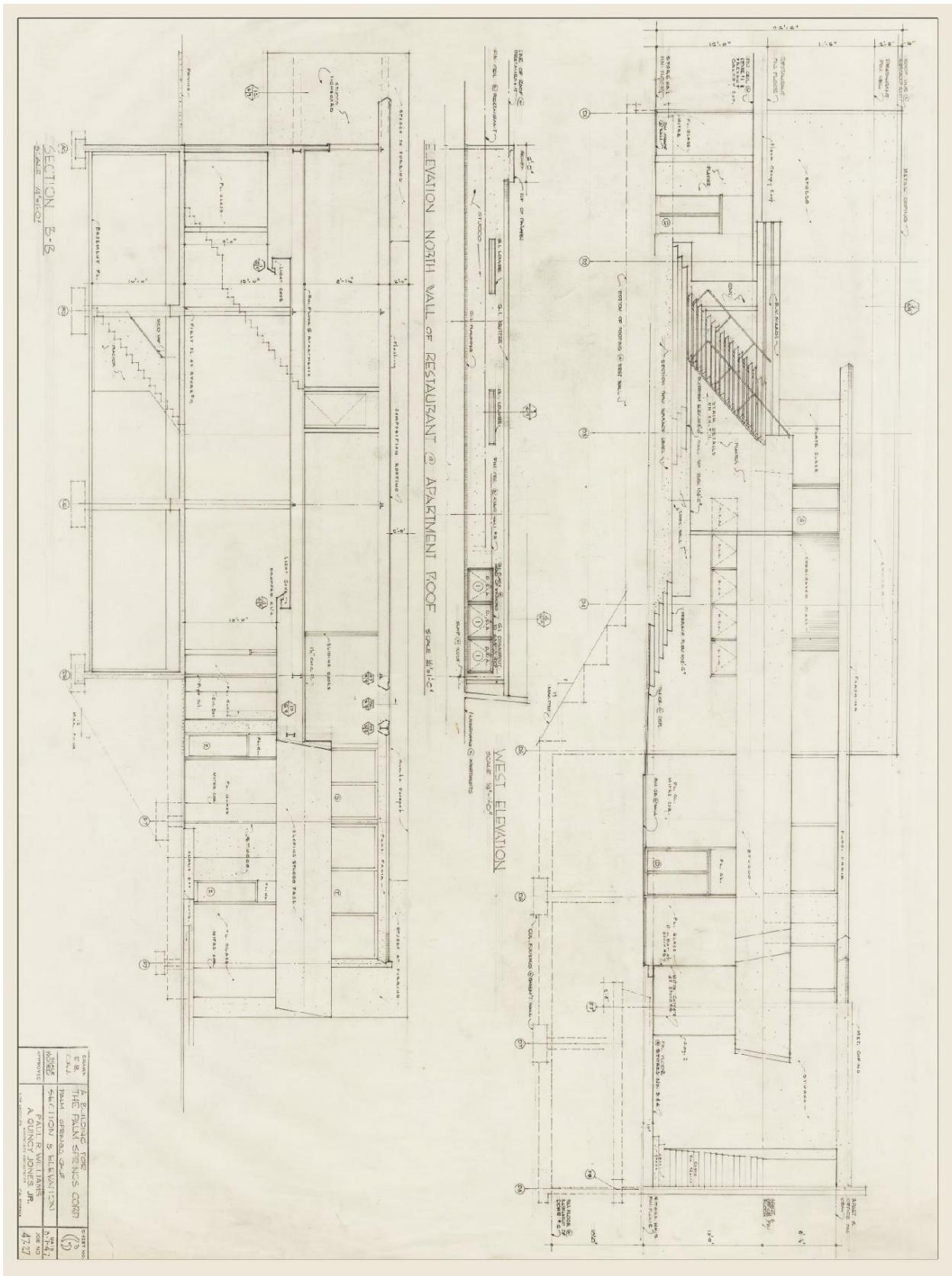
2011 aerial photo of the Town & Country Center.



Vintage postcard of the Town & Country Center circa 1960.



A 1947 advertisement showing a rendering of the new Kelley's Furniture Store (an early tenant of the Town & Country Center). The caption of the image reads (in part), "In the early part of 1948 we will move into our new location for which we have waited many long months. The new KELLEY'S will occupy approximately 10,000 square feet of the building now under construction in 'THE CENTER.'" (Palm Springs Historical Society)



One of the Town & Country Center "as-built" drawings as contained in the UCLA Library (Special Collections).