

Palm Springs benefits from saving places like the Town and Country

There is a good reason why a sign on Interstate 10 declares: "Palm Springs and other desert cities." There is only one Palm Springs, California. There are plenty of other desert cities.

The most recognized distinction between Palm Springs and other desert cities is our architecture from the early 1920s through the late 1960s. The abundance of buildings from these architectural periods has brought us international recognition.

As a city, we have learned that preserving our architecture has led to the revitalization of neighborhoods and has created jobs. Unarguably, our architecture attracts tourists from around the world. Preservation has been good for Palm Springs.

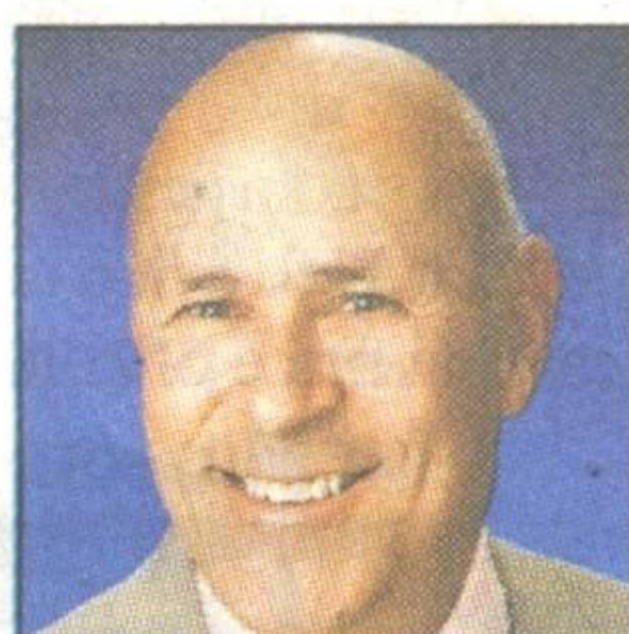
The Tramway Gas Station, (Albert Frey 1965) was once slated for demolition. Today, the iconic architecture has become synonymous with Palm Springs. Proudly owned by the city, it serves as the official Visitors Center and welcomes thousands yearly.

Preserving the Santa Fe Federal Savings building, (E. Stewart Williams 1967) is a good lesson. The Palm Springs Art Museum is in escrow to purchase the building with plans for a design and architecture museum. This new museum will draw more of the cultural tourist and will revitalize the neighborhood. It is doubtful that the museum would even consider the building had it not been preserved.

We learned from the successful restoration of the El Paseo building, (Spanish Eclectic 1926). The building's mix of high-end specialty retailers anchors the thriving Uptown District. The area is vibrant and alive with shoppers. Preservation and restoration led to the revitalization of the area.

Modernism Week has grown successfully over the past several years and we recently learned that the 2011 economic benefit to the city was more than \$7 million. The double-decker bus tours, that showcase our architecture sell out. As a tour guide, on many of the tours, I can attest firsthand to the appeal our architecture has to the visitor. They know they're not in Kansas.

The City Council will soon decide the fate of three significant architectural buildings: Two by Paul R. Williams and A. Quincy Jones and one by Donald Wexler (the recently identified E.F. Hutton building 1955). These buildings make up the Town



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and Country Center. The plan before the city demolishes these buildings with no regard for preservation. It is inexplicable that such a plan is even being considered.

Since the citizens will pay for the plan, why isn't there a preservation component? I support raising the necessary funds, through a tax increase, but the money should be allocated toward development and preservation. Invest in the future and in the past.

A restored Town and Country Center could be open and operating within 18 months. By virtue of its location and its unique architecture it will be a natural tourist attraction and the much needed, downtown public restrooms are already there. The restrooms could be remodeled and open to the public even sooner. There is no reason to believe that a restored Town and Country Center would be any less popular to retailers and shoppers than The Corridor Shops.

The Planning Commission recently rejected the plan, three commissioners stating multiple objections. The City Council should heed this omen. In the mid-1960s, planning commissioners rejected the development to build the mall. The council ignored the planners and proceeded with the development. The results of that decision bring us full circle.

I trust the Planning Commissioners — in the 1960s and today — to have the community's best interest at heart. They are unpaid volunteers, not politicians running for re-election or making campaign promises.

Preservation has benefited the city. It has resulted in a world-class visitors center, a new museum, high-end shops, thousands of tourists and the important branding that keeps Palm Springs from becoming one of those "other" desert cities. A precedent is set: Preserving our architecture is good. Ignoring the advice of the Planning Commission? Not so good.

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