

# Every house is important in the story of Palm Springs

Todd Hays, Special to *The Desert Sun* Published 4:22 p.m. PT Feb. 27, 2018 | Updated 4:56 p.m. PT Feb. 27, 2018



(Photo: *Desert Sun* file)

When we lose a house, we lose a story. We lose a unique opportunity to tell future generations what something was like when that house was built, who designed it, who occupied it and the stories that made it special. In turn, we lose an opportunity to tell future generations why the city of Palm Springs is such a special place.

For all its efforts in protecting its important architecture, the city of Palm Springs is not doing enough. The city is still losing significant pieces of its architectural history.

Perhaps the most recent, sad example is a home in Old Las Palmas that was designed by John Porter Clark for one of the first mayors of Palm Springs. Owned by the same family for more than 75 years, it sat, unchanged, all these years. Its story also stood the test of time, intact. That home was recently sold. Loopholes in the city's code allowed significant portions of that house to be demolished — with permits. Now, after standing pure and proud for all these years, its story has been unceremonious taken away to a local landfill.

In another part of town, passionate neighbors recently saved a house only because that owner attempted to demolish the entire structure. Had the owner gone the route of simply leaving a wall or two standing, that story, too, would have been lost.

The loophole of leave a wall, lose a story needs to be closed. Architecture defines a city. Each time the city of Palm Springs allows one of these treasures to be demolished, even in part, it loses a part of its identity.

To its credit, the city recently commissioned a revised Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey that catalogued nearly every property within its

boundaries. An amazing tool, this new database is easily accessible and searchable. Within moments, a property address can be researched for any possible historical significance.

This tool needs to be put to use.

While some properties are more significant than others, every property tells a story. Sometimes, those stories go undiscovered and untold until years after they are lived. The city needs to tighten its code so each time a request is made to demolish even just part of a property, that property is evaluated for its historic context before any demolition is allowed to take place.

Codes requiring evaluation for architectural significance prior to issuing permits for remodeling or demolition are common in cities up and down the state and across the country. It's time for the city of Palm Springs to enact similar protections so future generations can enjoy the same wonderful architecture we do today and those stories, told and untold, have an opportunity to live on.



**Todd Hays** *(Photo: Courtesy)*

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