

Nomination Application for  
Palm Springs Class 1 Historic Site  
**James Logan Abernathy Residence**  
611 North Phillips Road  
Palm Springs, California 92262

## James Logan Abernathy Residence



Submitted by the  
Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

10/1/2012

## Executive Summary:

### Statement of Significance:

Palm Springs is known internationally for its significant concentration of midcentury modern residential and commercial construction. It has been said that no American city is more closely identified with this particular period of American architecture. As a perfect example of the domestic architecture of the period, the James Logan Abernathy Residence truly exemplifies this period of national, State and local history. The Abernathy residence is significant primarily for its architectural quality. Master architect William F. Cody's design for the 1962 home exemplifies Midcentury Modern desert architecture and that period of local architectural history. It embodies the distinctive characteristics and construction methods of a private residential retreat of its era. Furthermore, the home is a unique representation of the high artistic values that may be found in a desert residence.

As an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of the type, period, and methods of custom residential styling, the building displays distinctive characteristics and physical features. These features define resort-style living, expressed in this home as a cluster of pavilions that focus on gardens through large expanses of glass. The exterior spaces were fully developed to promote the year-round use of multiple outdoor amenities such as patios, spas and swimming and reflecting pools. This property contains enough of these characteristics to be considered a true representative of its particular type, period, and method of construction. The subject is a model for desert or resort residential construction for the wealthy of the mid-century period. The defining characteristics include form, proportion, structural grid, floor plan, stylistic and architectural detailing, and materials among the most sophisticated in the region. The building serves as a reference to ideas of design and construction in plan and form in the ways it combines particular construction materials in a unified whole. The way in which the defining characteristics of this property are related by style, choice and availability of the materials and technology utilized in its construction is emphasized because the home is a perfectly intact and important example of its type, and of the building practices of the 1960s. The house and site utilization represent an important phase of the development of Palm Springs' architecture that influenced the development of later custom estates.

To understand how William F. Cody qualifies as a "master architect" it is necessary to review his background and career. A short biography of William F. Cody is included in this nomination application as a separate attachment. To summarize, Cody qualifies as a master architect because he is a figure of generally recognized greatness in his profession as exemplified by the subject property. The Abernathy residence expresses the distinctly midcentury modernist phase in Cody's career for which he continues to be known. As an example and prototype, the subject property possesses high artistic values as expressed in both architectural and site planning design.

To summarize, based upon the above statement, *the building appears to qualify for listing as a Class 1 site under Criteria 3, 4 and 5.*



## Office Use Only

Date:
Case No.
HSPB No.
Planner:

---

### 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 designation, 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.

---

### 1. Property Information

---

Historic name: Abernathy Residence

Other names: N/A

Address: 611 North Phillips Road

Assessor parcel number: 507201006-1

Owner's name: Eric Ellenbogen

Owner's Address: Same

City: Palm Springs

State: California

Zip: 92262

Telephone:

Cell:

Fax:

E-mail address:

---

## 2. Classifications

---

Ownership of Property:. Check as many boxes as apply.

- ☒ Private
- ☐ Public - Local
- ☐ Public - State
- ☐ Public - Federal

Category of Property

- ☒ Building(s)
- ☐ District
- ☒ Site
- ☐ Structure
- ☐ Object

Number of Resources within Property. Total must include at least One (1) in Contributing Column.

Contributing	Non-contributing	
1		Buildings
1		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
2		Total

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

---

## 3. Use or Function

---

Historic Use or Function: Single Family Residence

Current Use or Function: Single Family Residence

---

## 4. Description

---

Architect: William F. Cody

Construction Date and Source: 1962, per Riverside County Assessor's Records

Restoration, 2006, Architect: Michael Haverland

Architectural Classification: Desert Modern / Midcentury Modern

Construction Materials:

Foundation: Concrete

Roof: Wooden Shake Shingles

Walls: Wood Frame w/ Slump Stone, Board &  
Batten Siding

Other: Painted tubular sheet metal  
Colonnade.

**Building Description:** See continuation sheets

---

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

---

**Events**

- ☐ (1) Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**Persons**

- ☐ (2) Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**Architecture**

- ☒ (3) That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, State or local history, or
- ☒ (4) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or
- ☒ (5) Represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or
- ☐ (6) Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**Archaeology**

- ☐ (7) Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Check all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ removed from its original location.
- ☐ a birthplace or a
- ☐ grave. a cemetery.
- ☐ a reconstructed building, object, or
- ☐ structure. a commemorative property.
- ☐ less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

---

**6. Statement of Significance**

---

Attach an explanation of any of the numbered criteria selected in Section 5 (above).

The subject building appears to be Architecturally significant under Criteria 3, 4 and 5; see continuation sheets.

---

## 7. Integrity Analysis

---

Attach an analysis of the Building & Site's integrity based on the criteria in this section.

**Integrity: (See Integrity Statement, Continuation sheets).**

In addition to being determined eligible under at least one of the applicable designation criteria the building must also retain its architectural integrity. Integrity is based on significance to explain why, where and when a property is important. Only after significance is fully established can a determination be made with regard to the issue of integrity. In this case, the building's significance lies in its midcentury architecture. To retain historic integrity, a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects of integrity which include **Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling and Association.**

As described in the continuation sheet, extensive landscaping has minimally altered the setting. Otherwise, the building and site possess six of the seven aspects of integrity. This is sufficient to provide no impediments to listing as a Class 1 Historic Site.

---

## 8. Bibliography

---

See Continuation sheets

---

## 9. Geographical Data

---

Acreage of Property:

Property Boundary Description. The boundary includes all of Riverside County Assessor's Lot No. 507201006; Legal description: Lot A RS 037/005

ERIC ELLENBOGEN

September 4, 2012

Via Certified Mail

Mr. Craig Ewing  
Director of Planning Services  
City of Palm Springs  
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way  
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Re: 611 North Phillips Road, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Dear Mr. Ewing:

Please accept this letter as my authorization for the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) to act as my agent/representative in matters regarding the Class 1 Historic Site designation of the Abernathy "Pavilion" House (William F. Cody, 1962) at 611 North Phillips Road in the City of Palm Springs, California.

It is my desire that as much of the site as possible be designated as historic.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Mr. Ronald Marshall of PSPF at (760) 837-7117.

Sincerely yours,



Eric Ellenbogen  
Property Owner

cc: Ron Marshall (via email - modpod\_one@yahoo.com)  
Lance O'Donnell (via email - lance@o2arch.com)

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

**Building Description:**

The Abernathy residence is a 4,680 sq. ft. single-story structure. A spacious parking court leads to the entrance, a central pyramidal-roofed pavilion that houses the Foyer and Living Room. The underside of the roof is exposed to provide a 26-foot high Douglas Fir tongue-and-groove ceiling. L-shaped wings are attached to the central pavilion at the northwest and southeast corners. The resulting plan recalls Richard Neutra's "pinwheel" floor plans. Each wing is surmounted by a hipped roof structure finished with shake shingles. The northernmost wing functions as a carport; the west wing houses the Dining Room, Kitchen and Guest Room. The east wing contains a Library / Den and the south wing houses the Master Bedroom suite. Extending out from the southwest corner of the central pavilion is the swimming pool and surround. Evenly spaced wooden columns support a nearly continuous pergola that surrounds most of the house and connects the outer pavilions to the center, thus extending the "roofed" area to nearly 10,000 sq. ft. Grounded by a reinforced concrete foundation, the home is built of standard wood frame construction. Exterior walls are either painted slump stone or conventional frame walls faced with painted vertically scored wood siding.

The glazing and its detailing reflect Cody's sure hand. Although this house doesn't necessarily seek to minimize the division between the interior and the exterior in the style of many midcentury homes, Cody still minimizes the window framing details to the point of near invisibility. Frameless, trimless fixed glass windows are found at the end of corridors and other focal points to extend the view into the gardens. Similarly detailed clerestory windows in bathrooms, bedroom and closet areas give the illusion of floating roofs. Entire walls of floor to ceiling windows and sliders are framed in natural aluminum with minimally slim profiles and are similarly trimless and frameless. New double-glazed low-e glass sliding door and window systems have replaced the originals. The Bronze entrance doors appear to be the originals, manufactured by a Los Angeles custom door manufacturer: Forms and Surfaces. Otherwise, the house is so open and fluid in plan it appears that no interior doors were required; those that do exist are flush panel, frameless and trimless. A single massive slump stone chimney stack is centered on the north façade of the central pavilion.

**Integrity:**

Having had only four owners,<sup>1</sup> the building has survived essentially unaltered. "Refreshed" by its second owner, interior designer Hal Broderick, he described his restoration efforts as repainting some trim, removing heavy layers of drapes, and polishing the terrazzo floors.

With his colleagues Darren Brown and Thomas Morbitzer, Architect Michael Haverland retained Cody's work while updating the house to offer the comforts of a modern lifestyle. The restoration project began by analyzing the architect's original drawings housed in the Cody Archive at Cal Poly University in San Luis Obispo. An understanding emerged of the grids and systems that generated the plan and section of the house and its relationship to the site. Once the original design was understood, modifications and restoration, including replacement of glazing, interior room redefinition in the service wing, new bathrooms, restoration of previous modifications and the garden reconfiguration was developed utilizing Cody's principles. The architects brought to light the original details while allowing an elegant updated atmosphere to emerge.

The biggest exterior change was to extend the terrazzo to the entire pool surround. This resulted in a seamless change in the flooring from the interior to the exterior. Broderick, who purchased the home from Abernathy's widow, described the landscape as "over-planted." Under the current ownership, the grounds were stripped and redesigned with an imaginative choice of drought-friendly materials to create a series of outside spaces that

---

<sup>1</sup> James Logan Abernathy (1962-1991), Harold Broderick (1991-2004), Perry McKay (2004-2006) and Eric Ellenbogen (2006-present).



PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

respond to the owner's different needs. Otherwise the interior finishes strongly recall those originally created for the Abernathys by interior designer Noel Birns. The Abernathy Residence was given PS ModCom's Best Restoration Award in 2010.

**Context:**

The area was platted by developer Culver Nichols as the "Palm Springs Estates" sub-division in the late 1920s. The sub-division featured estate-sized parcels large enough to develop homes for the wealthy. Soon, new homes being built included George Heigho's "*Invernada*," (1930, Architect Unknown) at 657 Via Miraleste, a Class 1 site; Harry Hanbury's home at 796 Via Miraleste (1934, Ross Montgomery, Architect); and Henry Huntington's spinster daughter Marian's sprawling 1933 estate at 735 East Granvia Valmonte.

The block containing the Abernathy house was framed by Via Miraleste, Tamarisk Road, Avenida Caballeros and Granvia Valmonte / Park Avenue. Mrs. Mabel (née Judson) Cox Harrison<sup>2</sup> (1884-1956) was the first to build on this block following her purchase of the southwest quadrant of the property. Twice divorced by 1919, Mrs. Harrison had already developed a certain degree of notoriety and chose to relocate to California to embrace a quieter lifestyle. Although she maintained a Los Angeles apartment on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 1424 North Crescent Heights Boulevard, in 1933 she began construction of two Spanish style homes on lots 14 and 19. Access was via a long formal entrance drive from Via Miraleste. Both of the Harrison homes are extant but their setting has been radically altered. In 1939 Mrs. Harrison sub-divided her property and sold the front third of the parcel (Lot 3) that became the site for a home built by Texans Edward C. and Della Thompson with the address of 650 Via Miraleste. The sale required a new access road from Granvia Valmonte be built for the Harrison properties, one of which was then land-locked in the center of the block and not visible from the street. The new addresses for these properties became 670 and 678 East Granvia Valmonte. Upon Mrs. Harrison's death, her acreage was again sub-divided into smaller lots and the new Phillips Road, along with the Tamarisk Lane and Camino Real cul-de-sacs were built to allow additional development on the once large parcel. The first of the second-generation houses on the new small lots was built in 1958 at 755 Phillips Road. An unusual low masonry wall borders two sides of the Abernathy property. It actually encloses four contiguous lots that surrounded the Harrison property after Lot 3 was sold. Lot 7, just north of the Abernathy house, remained undeveloped until 2011, when a new home was built at 661 North Phillips Road.

**Persons Associated with the Property:**

James Logan Abernathy (1890-1980) purchased 611 Phillips Road (Lot 6) in the early 1960s. It was the south-eastern one-third of the Harrison property. He commissioned William F. Cody to design his desert home. Abernathy was the eldest of three children born in Leavenworth, Kansas to Harry Thomas and Mary Abernathy; his siblings were Taylor S. Abernathy and Cora Abernathy Hull. Abernathy was named for his grandfather, Civil War Col. James Logan Abernathy (1833-1901), an important figure in Kansas / Missouri mercantile and banking history, having established the Logan Furniture Co in 1873, and later, the First National Bank of Kansas City, MO. James Abernathy attended DePauw University where, in 1911, he was listed in the Sigma Xi Directory. In 1913 he married his childhood sweetheart Zemula Johnson (1891 - 1951) with whom he fathered two children, William Logan Abernathy and Mary Scott Abernathy. James Logan Abernathy worked as an insurance broker in the 1920s, but ultimately joined the family furniture business, rising to the level of Vice-President in 1940. Following the death of his first wife, in 1957 Abernathy married Helen K. Beatty, a decorator

---

<sup>2</sup> Her second husband was an extremely wealthy and attractive American diplomat who became Governor-General of the Philippines. At age 45, he divorced Mable and married an 18-year-old Philippine girl. Within a couple of years, he married her younger sister, the 4<sup>th</sup> of his six marriages.

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

at Bullock's, who was described *Palm Springs Life* as a landscape painter. As a couple, they moved in Palm Springs art and social circles, where he became the president of the Civic Arts Association. Abernathy was widowed a second time within a few years, and soon began a relationship with Magdalen H. "Madge" Phillips, a portrait painter. It was during this period that the Abernathy Residence was built. Cody's project files confirm that the house was designed for "James and Madge." Two years later, at the age of 73, in 1964 Abernathy and Phillips were married. Widowed in 1980, Madge remained in the house until 1991, when she sold to interior designer Hal Broderick. Broderick retired in 1996, moved to Sonoma, California and sold the house to Perry S. McKay in 2004. Broderick died in 2006 in Sonoma. McKay sold the house to the current owner in 2006.



The following are the four categories of criteria that may qualify a property for listing. A nominee need qualify under only one criterion, and have a high degree of integrity to qualify for listing as a Class 1 site

**Events**

(1) A property may be associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

No specific events associated with the historic context of this property in any important way have been discovered. *The property is not found significant under this criterion.*

**Persons**

(2) A property may be associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

Over the period during which this property was developed, it is associated with a several interesting individuals, but "persons significant in our past" refers to those individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, State, or national historic context. The criterion is generally restricted to those properties that illustrate (rather than commemorate) a person's important achievements. *The property is not found significant under this criterion.*

**Architecture**

- (3) A property may reflect or exemplify a particular period of national State or local history, or
- (4) A property may embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or
- (5) A property may represent the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or

*The property is found significant under Criteria 3, 4 and 5 as documented in the following Statement of significance.*

(6) A property may represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. *This criterion is reserved for historic districts; the subject property is not found significant under this criterion.*

**Archaeology**

(7) A property may have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history. *The property was not examined for significance under this criterion.*

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

**Statement of Significance:**

Palm Springs is known internationally for its significant concentration of midcentury modern residential and commercial construction. It has been said that no American city is more closely identified with this particular period of American architecture. As a perfect example of the domestic architecture of the period, the James Logan Abernathy Residence truly exemplifies this period of national, State and local history. The Abernathy residence is significant primarily for its architectural quality. Master architect William F. Cody's design for the 1962 home exemplifies Midcentury Modern desert architecture and that period of local architectural history. It embodies the distinctive characteristics and construction methods of a private residential retreat of its era. Furthermore, the home is a unique representation of the high artistic values that may be found in a desert residence.

As an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of the type, period, and methods of custom residential styling, the building displays distinctive characteristics and physical features. These features define resort-style living, expressed in this home as a cluster of pavilions that focus on gardens through large expanses of glass. The exterior spaces were fully developed to promote the year-round use of multiple outdoor amenities such as patios spas and swimming and reflecting pools. This property contains enough of these characteristics to be considered a true representative of its particular type, period, and method of construction. The subject is a model for desert or resort residential construction for the wealthy of the mid-century period. The defining characteristics include form, proportion, structural grid, floor plan, stylistic and architectural detailing, and materials among the most sophisticated in the region. The building serves as a reference to ideas of design and construction in plan and form in the ways it combines particular construction materials in a unified whole. The way in which the defining characteristics of this property are related by style, choice and availability of the materials and technology utilized in its construction is emphasized because the home is a perfectly intact and important example of its type, and of the building practices of the 1960s. The house and site utilization represent an important phase of the development of Palm Springs' architecture that influenced the development of later custom estates.

To understand how William F. Cody qualifies as a "master architect" it is necessary to review his background and career. A short biography of William F. Cody is included in this nomination application as a separate attachment. To summarize, Cody qualifies as a master architect because he is a figure of generally recognized greatness in his profession as exemplified by the subject property. The Abernathy residence expresses the distinctly midcentury modernist phase in Cody's career for which he continues to be known. As an example and prototype, the subject property possesses high artistic values as expressed in both architectural and site planning design.

To summarize, based upon the above statement, *the building appears to qualify for listing as a Class 1 site under Criteria 3, 4 and 5.*

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

**Bibliography (Partial):**

**Books**

Cygelman, Adele, *Palm Springs Modern*. Rizzoli, New York: 1999.<sup>3</sup>

Hess, Alan, *Palm Springs Weekend*, Chronicle Books: San Francisco: 2001.

Merchell, Tony with Andy Sotta, *The Architecture of William F. Cody, A Desert Retrospective*, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation; Palm Springs: 2004.

Schirmböck, Thomas with Jürgen Nogai, *Julius Shulman: the Last Decade*. Kehrer Verlag, Heidelberg: 2011.

Stevens, Walter Barlow, *Centennial History of Missouri (1820-1921)*. S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., St, Louis: 1921.

**Magazines**

Phillips, Ian. "Palm Springs Oasis" Architectural Digest (France): May 2012.

-----, "Golden Oldie" Belle Magazine (Australia): 2012.

-----, "Palm Springs 60s Oasis," Madame Figaro (France): 2012.

Meyerhoffer, Linda L. "Interior Motives" *Palm Springs Life*, December: 2009.

Paris, Ellen, "Wealth - Modernism as an Investment: Architecturally Significant Houses Require Special Consideration." *Palm Springs Life*, Feb: 2009.

*Palm Springs Life*, 1962-63 Pictorial: James and Helen Abernathy

*Palm Springs Life*, October: 1962: James and Helen Abernathy

*Palm Springs Life*, August: 1963: Noel Birns interior of the Abernathy Residence

*Palm Springs Life*, November :1962 Cover: James Logan Abernathy

**Reports and Other**

Architectural Resources Group, City of Palm Springs, 2004 Citywide Survey; DPR Form.

Merchell, Tony, *Classic Moderns*, a Home Tour Booklet. PSMoCom, Fall 2008.

Cal Poly University Archive: William F. Cody Papers: Abernathy, James and Madge, residential, Job # 6204, Palm Springs, 1962. The archive contains project files, photographs and drawings.

---

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the Cygelman text is the earliest found source that contains two errors that continue in print to this day. It is her work that mistakenly identifies the owner as "Ralph Abernathy" rather than James Logan Abernathy. Ralph Abernathy was a figure of some importance in the Civil Rights movement, but he is not related to James Logan Abernathy and was not associated with this property. Additionally, Madge Phillips was incorrectly identified as Abernathy's second wife; she was the third Mrs. Abernathy.

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

WILLIAM CODY BIOGRAPHY

"There is a fine line between minimalism and boredom. In the glass box high-rises and homes that came to dominate Modernism after World War II, in the buildings that shaved off ornament in the search for a pure concept and pure form, in the homes that became chaste altars on which architects sacrificed the mess and clutter of real life for the thin pleasures of stasis and stillness, a potentially vivid architecture was invented, but one that easily became as dry as the desert sand.

"Palm Springs architect William Cody (1917- 1978) played a unique if largely overlooked role. A designer committed to Modernism, to seeking ever more slender and daring expressions, he also brought a huge appetite for life that gave his spare buildings a liveliness and personality that others lacked. From his arrival in Palm Springs in 1942 to his death in 1978, his office was continually busy, but his reputation rarely escaped the Banning Pass. He made little effort to promote his work in the architectural journals, or to seek clients in the greater Los Angeles area; the projects he designed elsewhere were spinoffs from clients or projects he cultivated in Palm Springs—particularly in country club design.

"Born in 1916 in Dayton, Ohio, raised in Los Angeles, Cody began in architecture early, working with Cliff May in the late 1930s even as he was going to the School of Architecture at the University of Southern California. He was already doing well, impressing fellow students with his convertible and hiring them on as draftsmen on his projects. Though admired today, May was never trained formally, yet developed residential designs of great warmth; their rambling lines, patios and ranch house imagery struck a lasting chord with westerners. May's designs drew on historic regional ranch and hacienda models as well as modern ways of life and construction techniques.

"The same care for warmth and lifestyle, overriding theoretical purity, echo through Cody's work. Modernism at first confused and angered Cody, reports his schoolmate and friend George Hasslein. When it was first introduced into the U.S.C. architecture school around the time of Cody's third year of design in 1941, it provoked controversy and arguing matches between Hasslein, who quickly embraced it, and Cody whose design sense was rooted elsewhere. Yet, Cody came around. Greater thinness and more striking elegance became the single-minded focus of his ongoing designs. The sense of gracious spaces remained in his buildings.

"This search for elegance was all the more surprising considering his personality. 'Cody overworked and overplayed,' remembers Stewart Williams, but 'he was a fine designer.' Donald Wexler, who first came to the desert from Neutra's office to work for a winter with Cody in 1952, recalls that the boss was never around during the morning hours. The office was a shack—some described it as a cave, some as a tent—in the middle of a palm grove. Wexler describes Cody as having earned the nickname "Wild Bill" from his social life after hours. It was an unignorable aspect of Cody's personality; Hasslein and Cody were considering going into business together, but Hasslein decided he would rather keep Cody as a friend than have him as a partner.

"Cody was aware of his contradictions, but he clearly funneled his attention to his designs. 'He was his architecture,' says Hasslein. 'He was also a skilled renderer,' says William Krisel, another U.S.C. schoolmate who went on to make important contributions to Palm Springs in the Alexander subdivisions. Cody could deftly flick a watercolor brush to perfect a rendering. His personal energy can be seen, remarkably disciplined, in the intensity of his designs, in the proportions, the energetic details, the polished compositions, the interwoven spaces. His buildings in the desert never became desiccated abstractions.

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

"Bill Cody moved to Palm Springs to ease his asthma after graduating from U.S.C. in 1942 - the illness made him 4-F for the army in wartime. He had a plan: 'If I go to Palm Springs I'll be doing architecture all over the world,' he told Hasslein. It was true; the kinds of clients he met in Palm Springs had connections, homes, and businesses around the United States and in Havana, while a school board client might be ill at ease with his larger-than-life style compared to someone like J. P. Clark, Cody's best clients were social friends like Robert McCullough, power tool millionaire, with whom he shared an outgoing approach to life. McCullough helped to select Cody to design the clubhouse for the Tamarisk Country Club, which led to the clubhouse for the even more prestigious Eldorado Country Club, designed with San Francisco Bay Area architect Ernest Kump.

"One of Cody's first designs for the desert, the 1947 Del Marcos Hotel, fittingly followed the lead of Taliesin West, then less than ten years old. Rubble stone walls contrasted with a framework of angled wood doglegs in a design that rose out of the earth. When Thunderbird Dude Ranch converted to Thunderbird Country Club in 1952, the Gordon Kaufmann-designed clubhouse required renovations and enlargements to the dining room, and Cody was hired. He kept its flavor of 'casual ranch-style' Modern, but in the bungalows he designed around it soon after, he adopted a simpler style: shallow gable roofs for a Modern bungalow. Clubhouses, bungalows and custom homes remained the mainstay of Cody's career in California.

"In Huddle's Springs restaurant of 1957 on South Palm Canyon Drive, Cody delved into Modernistic organic design again, with a superb rendition of the Googie style of design then popular in Southern California's roadside coffee shops; Eldon Davis and Louis Armet, prime purveyors of the style, were also Cody classmates at USC Architecture School, and had designed other Huddle's restaurants in Los Angeles. Huddle's design starts with a plan, a joyful play of oblique angles thrusting the restaurant's winds out into the landscape and creating dynamic polygonal spaces. The structure was equally complex, with wood beams soaring beyond the building line and touching down or doubling back in doglegs to claim the site. They also claim outdoor dining terraces, made pleasant with colorfully striped fabrics stretched between beams as sun shelter.

"Like other Coachella Valley architects, Cody worked on designs ranging from churches to gas stations to hotels. When developer Sam Banowit finally convinced the Cahuilla Tribe to lease the town's original springs to him for the 1955 Spa Hotel, he hired Cody and Wexler and Harrison. Cody oversaw the five-story hotel wing.

"Although Albert Frey's Tramway gas station has become the better known because of a 1997 preservation battle, Bill Cody also designed one nearby in 1964 that is as strong a piece of architecture. A long, thin, high slab of concrete stretches out over three open bays and an enclosed service bay. The slab is in effect a widened capital, akin to the mushroom-shaped columns Frank Lloyd Wright designed for the Johnson Wax offices in Racine, Wisconsin, though square instead of round, the two elegant gas stations, at the town's north gateway, make a point of announcing the Modern city that Palm Springs proudly considered itself in the late 1950s.

"Cody's St. Theresa's Catholic Church is a more expressionistic form; it combines a religious sanctuary, capped by a large spreading pyramidal roof, with surrounding cloister-like forms framed by dramatic concave walls. There is something vaguely oriental, as well as sheltered and mysterious, about the church's modernized stupa form. The thick perimeter walls create meditation courtyards, paved in packed sand. Inside, the great roof canopy is held aloft on an extravagant wood post-and-beam structure that recalls the upward soaring space and structural form of Gothic cathedrals. It is a strongly - and appropriately - introspective building.

"Cody's own house also focuses on an interior courtyard. The structure stretches the California ideal of indoor-outdoor living in a loose confederation of pavilions. We have seen these thin roof planes and spindly columns,

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---

used time and again in Case Study designs and scores of imitators. But in Cody's work the vocabulary takes on a very personal meaning and energy.

"Like the other architects of Palm Springs, Cody's work was varied. He designed motels, custom homes, a carwash, country clubs, mobile home parks, offices, townhouses, shopping centers, gas stations, and so on. Yet a distinct character can be seen in all of them. It is a restless energy that brings liveliness to his plans, elevations and details. The radical thinness of Cody roofs or the daring reach of a cantilever are clearly the result of a wrestling match between the architect and the materials and the laws of physics; that energy and striving remains in the building. This contrasts with the more measured, balanced composition of Neutra, for example. The spirited angles Cody used in plan and elevation show the breadth of his mastery; he could use organic forms as successfully as minimalist forms.

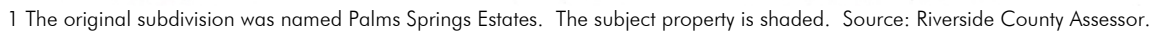
"The fact that Cody could take an established vocabulary and style and reinterpret it so vividly ranks him among the best of midcentury California designers - a field already crowded with talents like Eames, Koenig, Ellwood, Lautner, Frey, Neutra, Esherick, Callister, Jones and many others. It is time for his work to become more widely known."<sup>1</sup>

Following a debilitating stroke in 1973 that ended his career, Cody's firm continued under the stewardship of Frank Urrutia until Cody's death in 1978. Leaving behind a legacy of important contributions to what is known today as Desert Modernism; his career continues to serve as an inspiration to successive generations of architects. In addition to the work, his legacy included mentoring; among his apprentices were Richard Holden, William Johnson, Ric Harrison and of course Don Wexler among others. And the work is as fresh and exciting today as it was when it was built. Of Cody's sophistication as a designer, his contemporary E. Stewart Williams said: "He was the best designer of us all... Cody brought 5th Avenue into the Desert." Over time, many important Cody's have been lost to demolitions or inappropriate alterations. During Modernism Week 2012, Cody was awarded a Star on Palm Springs Walk of Fame.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hess, Alan, *Palm Springs Weekend*.

\*AUG 09 2005





PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---



2 Aerial view of Abernathy residence.

Source: Google Maps

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---



3 James Logan Abernathy with 2nd wife Helen Beatty with one of her landscapes in the background Source: *Palm Springs Life*

PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---



*Relaxed informality is invited by the planes and textures in the living room of the James Logan Abernathys' Palm Springs residence. Coordinated whites of the walls, ceiling and floor which features the huge polar bear throw are accented by use of lemon, soft oranges, and royal blues in the ottoman and chairs.*

4 Original interior design by Noel Birns. Source: Palm Springs Life Magazine



PALM SPRINGS HISTORIC SITE NOMINATION FORM  
Continuation Sheet

---



5 Upper: View from Auto Court. Lower: Corresponding view from rear yard. Source: Julius Shulman