

Preservation Talks: Atomic Ranch + Palm Springs' 5 Preservation Foundations

Five organizations in Palm Springs have banded together to protect the city's past for the future.

Written by Camellia Ghotbzadeh • Posted April 05, 2018

Why does Palm Springs attract so many modernists? How does a town have so many Midcentury Modern homes and buildings? The answer is a thriving community of dedicated preservationists. Read on to learn about the five organizations that have banded together to ensure the city's architecture lives on. Plus, grab your tickets to attend the HSPB's 5th annual celebration of National Historic Preservation Month, April 15th event—where Brand Leader/Editor Sarah Jane Stone will be speaking.



Courtesy of Natural Trust for Historic Preservation, Photography by Jessica Sample

The El Mirador Tower of Palm Springs is one of several historic sites that was recommended for designation by the Historic Site Preservation Board and later designated by the Palm Springs City Council. Historic sites, such as the El Mirador Tower, and districts of the area are also protected by the Palm Springs Municipal Code "Historic Preservation". The ordinance is "intended to stabilize and improve buildings, structures or areas which are considered to be of historical, architectural, archaeological or ecological value, to foster civic beauty, to strengthen the local economy, and to promote the use of specific buildings for the education and welfare of the citizens of Palm Springs", according to the Municipal Code Section 8.05.

Historical Site Preservation Board for City of Palm Springs

Started in 1981, the Historical Site Preservation Board for the City of Palm Springs holds a significant influence on the designation of historic sites and districts of the area. Municipal codes made by the Palm Springs City Council are put in place to preserve and protect areas and specific buildings of the city that paint the picture of Palm Springs' cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history.

The Palm Springs City Council works closely with the Historical Site Preservation Board and appoints its members to serve in two or three-year terms with applicants requiring demonstrated knowledge and interest in the cultural, socio-economic, and architectural history of the Palm Springs area through experience, training, education or occupation. Members

selected for the Board recommend nominations of certain properties submitted for historical and architectural city designation to the City Council, where the Council has the final approval.

Dick Burkett, the Vice Chair for the Board, is one of seven board members who have contributed immensely to the Palm Springs historical and architectural community. “HSPB is the vehicle for review, designating and monitoring”, Burkett says. In addition to designating residential and commercial properties as well as districts of the area, the Board is responsible for reviewing any requests to a designated property, such as changes to the exterior. As an outreach to the community, the HSPB creates an Annual Preservation Event with an educational Symposium at the convention center followed by 10 tours and an After Event for the residents of Palm Springs.

For tickets to the HSPB’s 5th annual celebration of National Historic Preservation Month, April 15th event—where Brand Leader/Editor Sarah Jane Stone will be speaking, [click here](#).



Courtesy of Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, Photography by Patrick McGrew

Designed by renowned Swiss-born architect Albert Frey in 1958, the North Shore Yacht Club still stands today and was re-opened to the public as a “senior center, community center and museum” in May of 2010 according to the Palm Spring’s Preservation Foundation website. It is one of many restored and renovated buildings of the Palm Springs area that are protected by the Foundation and has continued to function in use since its early construction.

Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

A non-profit preservation organization, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation’s 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.” Founded in 1997, the Palm Springs Historic Site Foundation still remains true to its original mission with historical appreciation efforts to educate others about the importance of retaining the historical and architectural side of Palm Springs.

The foundation is known for its publication of tribute journals dedicated to various desert architects and builders of the area such as William F. Cody, E. Stewart Williams, and the Alexander Construction Company. The tribute journals also celebrate Spanish colonial revival and Polynesian architecture, popular design styles featured in Palm Springs.

Holding a prominent part in Palm Springs’ Modernism Week, the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation sponsors and holds many events in the area to educate the public on the importance of historical preservation and architectural appreciation.

For more on the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, [click here](#).



Courtesy of Palm Springs Modern Committee

Unfortunately, not all buildings can be saved. After the Palm Springs Modern Committee presented a case for the restoration of the building, the Spa Bathhouse and Hotel was lost and demolished entirely in June 2014. Designed as a collaboration between modern architects William Cody, Donald Wexler, Richard Harrison, and Philip Koenig in 1955, the building had a striking concrete-domed colonnade, which led visitors diagonally to the Bathhouse.

Palm Springs Modern Committee

Also a non-profit organization, the Palm Springs Modern Committee was started in 1999 and combines preservation of desert modern architecture and design. Education, advocating for local buildings, and promoting heritage tourism are important factors that distinguish this organization.

“It’s a learning process for all of us,” Nickie McLaughlin, the Executive Director of PS ModCom, says. PS ModCom is strong on education and has multiple outreach programs in the community. The committee also sponsors scholarships for graduating high school seniors that are interested in architecture, design, and engineering and hosts an annual event for the students and their families.

Initially started to advocate saving an Albert Frey fire station and over years of fundraising and fighting for preservation, PS ModCom has become one of the key players in turning the city into an architectural destination. Members of the committee also conduct annual modern home architectural tours and assist property owners restoring and upgrading historic buildings. Receiving the American Institute of Architects Institute Honors for Collaborative Achievement Award in 2013, the Palm Springs Modern Committee has gained prominent recognition both inside and outside the city’s borders for their architectural effort and powerful change to the area through design.

A founding partner of Modernism Week, the Committee also hosts the Annual Preservation Awards, the seasonal opener that takes place every fall celebrating recent architectural and design projects and the individuals behind them.

For more on the Palm Springs Modern Committee, [click here](#).



Courtesy of the Palm Springs Museum, Photography by Lance Gerber

The Tennis Club Villa Salon is one of several events held by the Architecture & Design Council of the Palm Springs Museum. Many of these council events feature tours that take visitors through the design and renovation process of featured complexes, highlight the key components of construction, and discuss the architectural and historical significance of the properties.

Architectural & Design Council of the PS Museum

With over 500 members, the Architectural and Design Council of the Palm Springs Museum focuses on modern and contemporary issues and innovations in architecture and design. Offering a multitude of lecture series, tours of architecturally significant sites of the area, and council events known as “salons.” The council has continuously grown since its start and continues to evolve with more residents and visitors to the museum every year.

Designed by acclaimed California architect E. Stewart Williams in 1974, The Palm Springs Museum Architecture and Design Center reflects the Architecture and Design Council’s desire for transformative experiences through architectural exhibition, art, culture and community. The building has become a center for the Palm Springs Art Museum’s exploration of architecture and design as well as a research space and storage area for its expanding collections and archives.

For more on the Architectural & Design Council of the PS Museum, [click here](#).



Courtesy of Palm Springs Life, Photography by Lydia Kremer

The Welwood Murray Memorial Library is a prominent historical site preserved by the Palm Springs Historical Society. The recent renovation of the library has transformed it into a center for research, tourist information, and public community meetings. The library houses a state-of-the-art archive and extensive research files on a large variety of subjects and personages.



Palm Springs Historical Society

Founded in 1955 by Melba Bennett, the Palm Springs Historical Society is a non-profit organization that operates the two oldest remaining buildings in the Palm Springs area: the McCallum Adobe, built in 1884, and the Cornelia White House, built in 1893. Both had architectural and historical significance in their heyday and are used together today as a museum for ever-changing exhibitions. In addition, the organization has a state-of-the-art archive on a multitude of subjects and personages in the Welwood Murray Memorial Library.

Their research library also “serves as a resource for preservationists, homeowners, businesses, author, etc. when the historical information is pertinent and invaluable”, says Director and Curator of the Palm Springs Historical Society, Jeri Vogelsang. With an operating staff of four and over sixty volunteers, the Palm Springs Historical Society offers several walking tours that are full of history, fun stories, famous architecture and profound interest. All proceeds of the tours go toward benefiting the organization and sharing knowledge with residents and visitors alike.

For more on the Palm Springs Historical Society, [click here](#).