

The Robson and Helen Chambers Residence

695 South Warm Sands Drive
Palm Springs, CA 92264

**Nomination Application
for City of Palm Springs
Class 1 Historic Resource**



Prepared by

Steve Vaught

for the

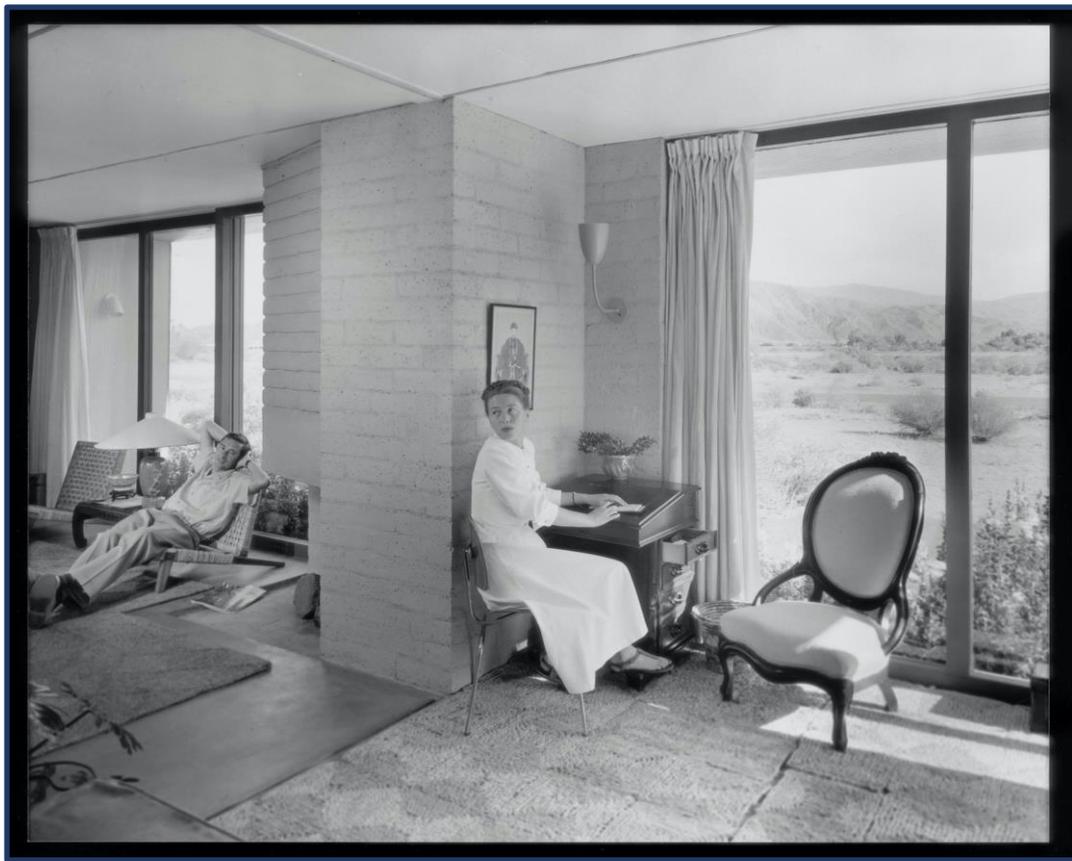
Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

November 2021 Revised

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Front cover: Robson & Helen Chambers Residence, photographed by Julius Shulman.
(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

Above: Helen and Robson Chambers captured in a domestic scene by Julius Shulman.
(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

THE ROBSON & HELEN CHAMBERS RESIDENCE

Class 1 Historic Resource Nomination

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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 May 2021, the PSPF board of directors assigned the task of writing the Robson and Helen Chambers Residence’s Class 1 Historic Resource nomination to Steve Vaught.

The Owner’s Letter of Support is at Appendix I.



Facia detail, Chambers Residence.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May, 2018)

Prepared by Steve Vaught on behalf of:
Palm Springs Preservation Foundation
1775 East Palm Canyon Drive, Suite 110-195
Palm Springs, CA 92264
760-837-7117
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Executive Summary

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Robson and Helen Chambers Residence (hereinafter referred to as the “Chambers Residence”) is located at 695 South Warm Sands Drive in the Warm Sands Park tract. Completed in 1946 with additions by Chambers in 1950 and 1956, the home was built as the architect’s own personal residence and would remain so throughout his rise to prominence as one of the desert’s “Master” architects. In his design of the home, Chambers applied both the philosophy and aims of what was to become the Desert Modernist movement. The home’s innovative design was recognized on both a regional and national scale and was published multiple times in newspapers and magazines as well as being chosen by *Architectural Record* to appear in its 1954 book, *A Treasury of Contemporary Houses*.

The Chambers Residence is an important example of a custom modernist home, which exhibits numerous stylistic features that place it within the historic context of the period “Post World War II Palm Springs (1945-1969)” as defined in the Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings created by Historic Resources Group. This is a period that has come to be known as the heyday of “Palm Springs Modernism,” when a group of talented architects and designers, of whom Chambers was in the forefront, created “what many consider the largest and finest concentration of mid-20th century Modern architecture in the United States.” The specific period of significance for the Chambers Residence are the years between 1946-1961, the time in which the home was built and occupied by Chambers and his family.

DESIGNATION CRITERIA:

The Chambers Residence is listed as being individually eligible for a Class 1 Historic Resource designation by the *Citywide Historic Resource Inventory*.

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 1 Historic Resource: Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C,1): A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met. Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register Bulletin “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” of potentially historic resources for further information.

FINDING 1: The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:

8.05.070 C.1.a (paragraph ii) - **Persons:** This criterion recognizes properties associated with the lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to national, state or local history. Having been personally designed by and resided in for more than 15 years by Robson Chambers, one of the most prominent architects in Palm Springs during the heyday of Desert Modernism, the Chambers Residence

certainly qualifies under this criterion. Therefore, the Chambers Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 2.

8.05.070 C.1.a (paragraph iii) – **Exemplification of Period:** This criterion recognizes resources that reflect or exemplify a particular period of national, state or local history. The Chambers Residence qualifies under this criterion as a noteworthy example of the type of structure, both in spirit and in style, created during the period after World War II when Palm Springs became renowned for the quality and variety of its modern architecture. The Chambers Residence possesses numerous distinctive characteristics that make up the Modern style. Therefore, the Chambers Residence qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 3.

8.05.070 C.1.a (paragraph iv) - **Construction:** This criterion recognizes resources which embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. The Chambers Residence is eligible under this criterion as a virtual textbook of midcentury modern construction as adapted to a desert environment with frame construction, low-cost materials such as Flexboard, concrete, corrugated aluminum, and extensive use of glass, both in fixed and in sliding forms. Therefore, for its distinctive characteristics and method of construction, the Chambers Residence qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 4.

8.05.070 C.1.a (paragraph v) - **Design:** This criterion recognizes resources that are the work of a master builder, designer, artist or architect whose individual genius influenced his age, or possessed high artistic value. The Chambers Residence exhibits distinctive features associated with Modern architecture in both the materials used and its design, including overall horizontality, lack of ornamentation, extensive use of glass and a design which seeks to blur the line between indoor and outdoor spaces. As a custom residence skillfully designed by Robson Chambers, it rises to the level of work by master architects with high artistic values. Therefore, for its distinctive characteristics, as the work of a Master architect, and for its high artistic values, the Chambers Residence qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 5.

SUMMARY:

This evaluation finds the Chambers Residence eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Resource under 8.05.070 C.1.a paragraphs ii, iii, iv and v of the local ordinance's seven criteria. Additionally, the Chambers Residence retains a "high degree" of integrity (see "Integrity Analysis").



Robson Cole Chambers, AIA (1919-1999)
(Courtesy Robson Chambers Papers, Architecture and Design Collection, UC, Santa Barbara)



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Department of Planning Services

3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Phone 760 323 8245

Fax 760 322 8360

Historic Preservation Officer 760 322 8364 x8786

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION (HRD)

WHEN TO USE THIS APPLICATION:

Use this application if you are seeking Class 1 or Class 2 historic designation for a property or parcel or for historic district applications.

Use the MINOR ARCHITECTURAL APPLICATION FORM (MAA) if you are seeking approval for alterations to Class 1, Class 2, Class 3 or Class 4 historic sites. (Contact the Planning Department if you are unsure of the classification of your property.)

WHO MAY APPLY:

Any individual or organization may apply to the City for consideration of a request for historic resource designation. Applications must be signed and notarized by the owner(s) of record of the site, structure, building or object for which the designation is sought.

PROCEDURE:

1. For proposed historic sites or resources: Refer to Palm Springs Municipal Code ("PSMC") Section 8.05.070 for *Procedures and Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources*. Visit: www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05 "Historic Preservation").
2. For proposed historic districts: Refer to Municipal Code Section 8.05.090 for *Procedures and Criteria for Designation of Historic Districts*. Visit: www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/Title_8/section_8.05 "Historic Preservation".
3. Complete all parts of the application and include related reports, mailing labels and back up information in support of the application. Denote "NA" for any line item that is not applicable.
4. Once the application is complete, contact the Planning Department and schedule a pre-application conference with the City's Historic Preservation Officer ("HPO").
5. Submit the completed application and related materials to the Department of Planning Services. A Planning Department case number will be assigned to the application.
6. Applications for historic site / resource or historic district designation are evaluated by staff in the City Planning Department who will prepare the application for consideration by the City's Historic Site Preservation Board ("HSPB") at a noticed public hearing. Applicants should plan on attending the hearing. City staff will schedule site visits for members of the HSPB to become familiar with the site prior to the public hearing. (Exterior review only, interiors are not subject to HSPB review.)
7. At the public hearing, the HSPB will evaluate the application and make a recommendation for City Council action. The City Council will consider the application and the HSPB's recommendation at a second noticed public hearing. The applicant should again attend that hearing.
8. The final action of the City Council to designate will be recorded on the property title with the County Recorder's office.

FOR HISTORIC SITE / RESOURCE APPLICATIONS, SEE CHECKLIST FOR CLASS 1 AND 2.
FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT APPLICATIONS, SEE CHECKLIST FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS.



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Department of Planning Services
3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262
Tel 760-323-8245 – FAX 760-322-8360

For Staff Use Only

Case Number: _____

In-Take Planner: _____

Date: _____

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION PLANNING / ZONING GENERAL INFORMATION FORM

TO THE APPLICANT: Complete all parts of this application. Denote "NA" for lines that are not applicable.

Project Information:

Applicant's Name: Carlos Serrao and Monica May

Applicant's Address: 695 South Warm Sands Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Site Address: 695 South Warm Sands Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92264 APN: 508-216-002

Phone #: 213-280-9071 Email: carlosserrao@carlosserrao.com

Zone: _____ GP: _____ Section/Township/Range: _____ / _____ / _____

Description of Project:

An important example of early Desert Modern design, the Chambers Residence was designed as the personal residence of Robson Chambers, one of Palm Springs' foremost midcentury architects. It is a classic representation of Desert Modernism in layout, materials employed, and design philosophy. Its innovative design received regional and national attention.

Note: For Historic District applications: on a separate page provide a list of all sites/parcels within the proposed historic district boundaries with the same information listed above.

Is the project located on the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Reservation? Yes/No: No.
(Refer to the Land Status Map under Tribal Resources on the Planning Department home page)

Construction Date: 1946 Estimated Actual (denote source, i.e. building permits)

Architect: Robson Chambers/Clark & Frey

Original Owner: Robson and Helen Chambers

Common/Historic Name of Property: Robson and Helen Chambers Residence; Chambers Residence

Other historic associations: _____

Attach to this application any information, photos, drawings, newspaper articles, reports, studies, or other materials to fully describe the characteristics or conditions that support this application for historic designation.

Architectural Style: Midcentury Modern

Refer to the Architectural Styles chapter of Citywide Historic Context Statement, under Historic Resources on the Planning Department Home Page: www.palmspringsca.gov.

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION APPLICATION (CONT.)

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 1 Historic Resource:

Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C,1): A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met. Refer to the US Department of the Interior National Register Bulletin "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation" of potentially historic resources for further information.

Provide a written description of how the site qualifies as a historic resource per the following Findings. Please provide answers on a separate sheet or report.

FINDING 1: The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:

- a. The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state, or community. 1
- b. The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state or local history.
- c. The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history.
- d. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.
- e. The resource presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age, or that possess high artistic value.
- f. The resource represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, as used in evaluating applications for designation of historic districts, for parcels on which more than one entity exists.

FINDING 2: The site, structure, building or object retains one or more of the following aspects of integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Provide a written description for each element as listed: Design; Materials; Workmanship; Location; Setting; Feeling; and Association. 2

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 2 Historic Resource:

Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070(C,1): A site, structure, building, or object may be designated as a Class 2 historic resource of a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided the site, structure, building, or object exhibits significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed in Finding 1 above. A Class 2 historic resource is not required to meet the findings for integrity as described in Finding 2.

Criteria and Findings for Designation of Historic Districts:

In addition to the criteria listed in Finding 1, to be considered for designation as a Historic District, a defined area must:

- a. Contain contributing resources on a majority of the sites within the proposed district which individually meet the criteria in Finding 1. The defined area may include other structures, buildings, or archaeological sites which contribute generally to the overall distinctive character of the area and are related historically or visually by plan or physical development. *Provide a separate list by address and Assessor Parcel Number (APN) for each site/parcel that meets the criteria outlined in Finding 1.*
- b. Identify non-contributing properties or vacant parcels to the extent necessary to establish appropriate, logical or convenient boundaries. *Provide a separate list by address and APN number for each site/parcel within the proposed historic district that is considered non-contributing to the overall historic significance of the historic district.*

1 NOTE: Unlike the National Trust criteria, the City's criterion does not consider "patterns of events". For consideration of "patterns of events", use Criterion "C", reflecting a particular period.

2 NOTE: Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior Bulletin for "How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property".

**CITY OF PALM SPRINGS
PLANNING DEPARTMENT APPLICATION
HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION**

CLASS 1 AND CLASS 2

APPLICANT'S REQUIRED MATERIAL CHECKLIST

The following items must be submitted before a **Historic Resource Designation** application will be accepted. Please check off each item to assure completeness. Provide twelve (12) hard copies and one (1) PDF copy of the following materials unless otherwise noted:

	Applicant Only	City Use Only
Application Information:		
• General Information form (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Notarized letter from property owner consenting to Historic Designation (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Ownership and Address History ("Chain of Title") (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historic Resource Report:		
The following items shall be included in a historic resources report describing the site, structure, buildings, or objects eligible and appropriate for designation per PSMC 8.05.070.		
• Photographs of the exterior of the proposed site, structure, buildings or objects.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Aerial photo of the site/resource (from Google Maps or equal).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Information on the architect, designer, and/or developer.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Date and method of construction. Provide copies of building permits.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• A detailed assessment of the character defining features describing materials, architectural details/style, landscape elements, or other relevant descriptors.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Evaluation of the site relative to the Criteria and Findings for Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional Information:		
• Site Plan: 8-12" x 11" or 11" x 17"	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Public Hearing labels per PSZC Section 94.09.00.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Any other documentation or research as may be necessary to determine the qualifications of the site, structure, building, or objects.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

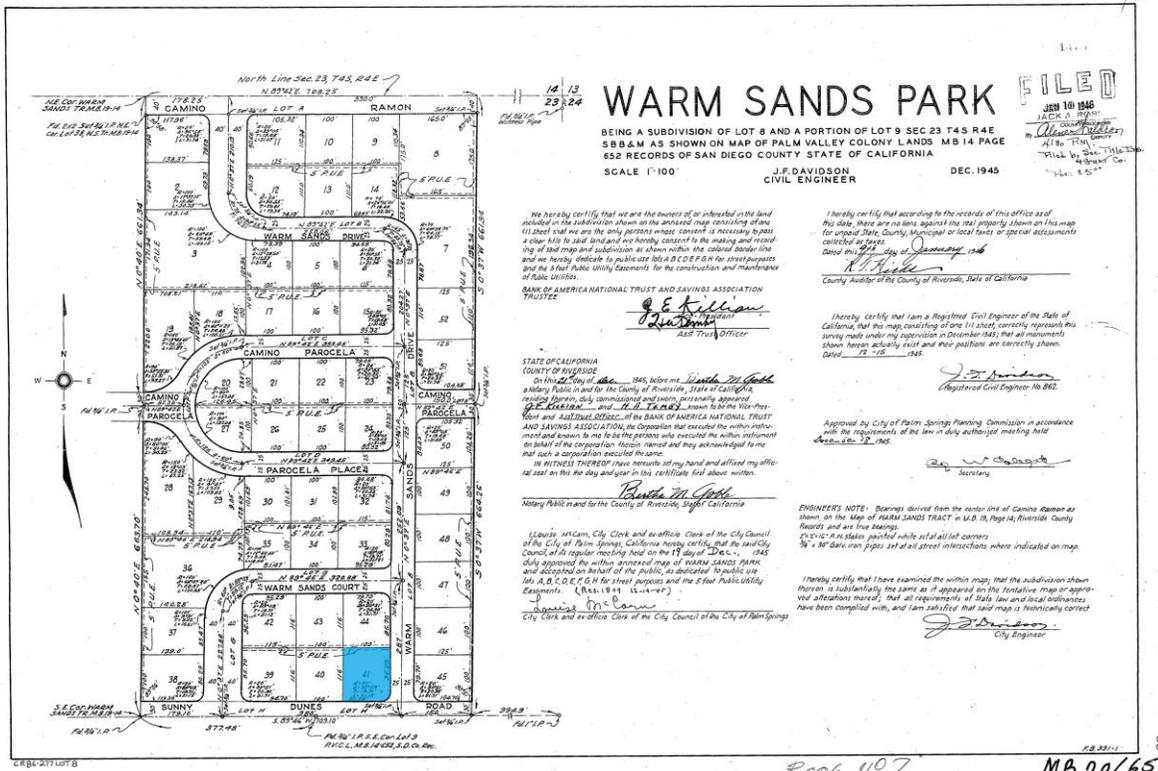
Applicants are encouraged to review the bulletin from the U.S. Department of the Interior titled "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation". (National Register Bulletin 15 (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>)).

Statement of Significance

Summary

Completed in 1946, the Chambers Residence is located at 695 South Warm Sands Drive on Lot 41 of the Warm Sands Park tract of Palm Springs. It should be noted that the Riverside County Assessor gives the address as 695 Warm Sands Court, however, this appears to be an error. Further, the Assessor states the completion date as 1947. Chambers himself gave the date of 1946 as the initial year of completion.

The legal description per the Riverside County Assessor is LOT 41 MB 020/065 WARM SANDS PARK.



Map of the Warm Sands Park tract as shown in the City of Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context and Survey Findings. Lot 41, location of the Chambers Residence, is shown in blue.

Warm Sands Park Tract

As noted in the Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context and Survey Findings, the Warm Sands Park tract was developed in 1945 and consists of a combination of single and multi-family dwellings. The tract is bounded by Ramon Road on the north, Sunny Dunes Road to the South, Warm Sands Drive to the east, and the adjacent Warm Sands tract on the west. While the survey findings note no specific developer, the tract was marketed by John Chaffey of the Harold Hicks office in 1946, both important figures in Palm Springs real estate development. Today, Warm Sands Park is a mix of private residences, small hotels, apartments, and spas.

First Owners, Robson and Helen Chambers

In 1946, Robson Chambers joined the firm of John Porter Clark and Albert Frey, which was gearing up for a new wave of construction activity following the end of World War II. Accepting the position meant a move to Palm Springs but both Chambers and his wife Helen were excited by the idea, believing it was a place of great opportunity in a beautiful, healthful environment.

Although born in Los Angeles, Chambers was no stranger to Palm Springs, having grown into adulthood in neighboring Banning where his father ran the local pharmacy. Chambers was also no stranger to the profession of architecture. His uncle Harold C. Chambers (1885-1971) was one of Southern California's most prominent architect/engineers as part of the venerable firm of (Myron) Hunt & Chambers. By the time of his graduation from Banning High School in 1936, Chambers had decided to follow in his uncle's, rather than father's footsteps and become an architect.

Chambers went to the University of Southern California, which was known for its highly-regarded program in architecture, graduating with honors in 1941. As part of the ceremony, Chambers was singled out for an award by the American Institute of Architects.

Upon graduation, Chambers was offered a position in his uncle's firm. While it is unknown what projects he may have been involved with in these first pre-war months of 1941, it is possible he may have assisted in the planning of the Palm Springs residence of famed Hollywood director/producer Howard Hawks.

The coming of war brought a change in Chambers' career trajectory. Although he remained at Hunt & Chambers, the work shifted from high-end residences, civic and commercial structures to military construction projects. By their very nature, their design and construction needed to be fast, efficient and produced using the simplest, cheapest materials available. This proved to be a great training ground for Chambers later post-war work in designing cost-efficient housing in Palm Springs including that of his own home.

Holding the rank of Technical Sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps, Chambers did architectural and planning work throughout the west including a year in Pearl Harbor.

The bulk of his time was spent heading a small architectural section at Camp Pendleton near Oceanside in San Diego County. It was during this time, Chambers met and fell in love with his future wife Helen Snow (1916-2004), who was described as coming from one of Vista's most prominent families. The pair were married on June 12, 1943.

War's end brought a return to civilian projects, but it was soon clear that Chambers would need to make a change in firms as Myron Hunt, nearing 80 and in poor health, was heading to retirement. It was then that an opportunity rose in the form of Albert Frey who offered him a junior position at the Palm Springs firm of Clark & Frey. Chambers welcomed the chance to work with a fellow modernist and fulfill his long-held wish to design structures in a desert environment.

Chambers Residence Planning

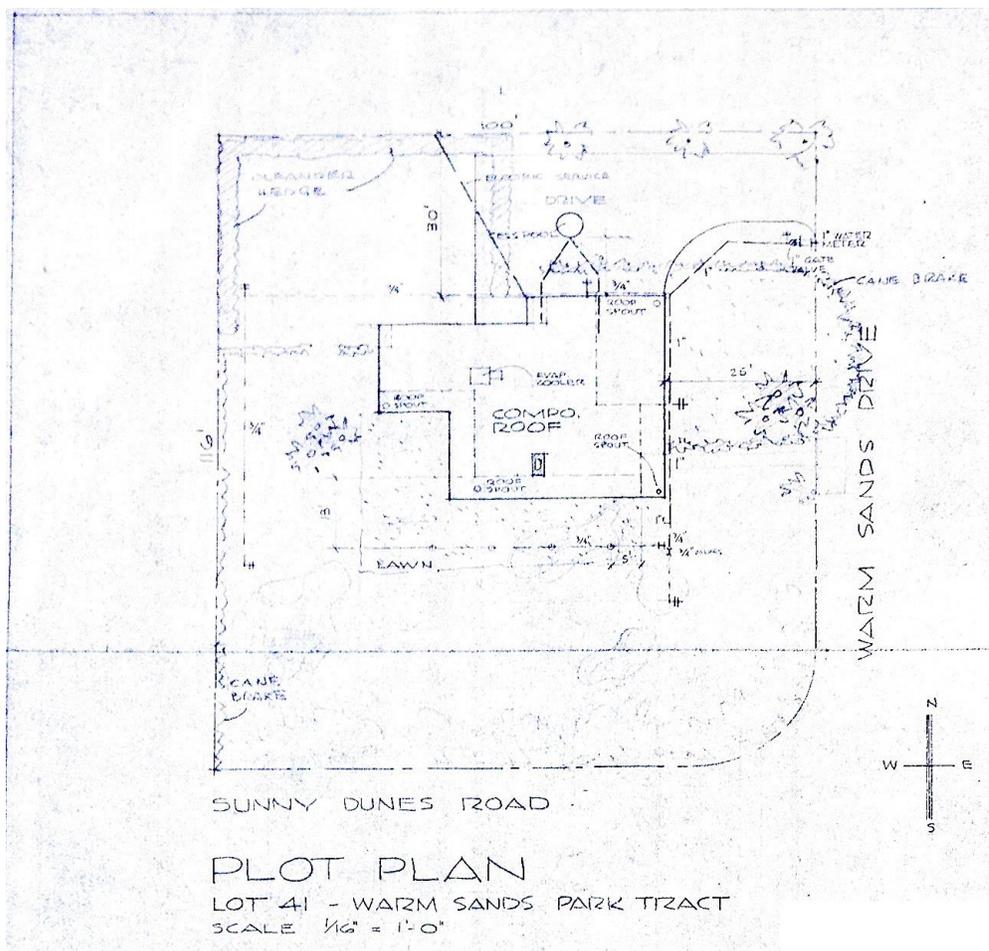


Robson and Helen Chambers Residence as it appears today.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May, 2020)

Chambers' first priority upon relocating to Palm Springs was to secure a home for himself and Helen as well as for the family they planned to start. Chambers was one of the earliest buyers in the newly-subdivided Warm Sands Park tract, securing a corner view lot on the southside of the tract in June 1946. The choice of the lot was critical for Chambers. While any homebuyer would carefully consider the location of their future home, Chambers took exceptional interest, not only in the views, but prevailing winds, duration and direction of sunlight, etc. He wanted his home to serve as a laboratory where he could put his ideas about desert design into practice. Therefore, finding just the right lot was essential.

Once he had found the proper lot, Chambers headed to his drafting table to create the plans for his new home. The architect had two main design goals. First, he wanted it to be usable year-round rather than merely as a seasonal dwelling. While today this is not a major issue owing to central air conditioning, in 1946 it was a challenge and it informed virtually every aspect of the home's planning and construction.

The second issue was future expansion. Both he and Helen were planning on children and he wanted the house to be able to grow along with his family. As such, Chambers geared the layout and positioning of the house to more easily accommodate expansions. In fact, he went as far as to predesign such expansions even though they would not be needed for a period of years. Chambers was thinking ahead, not only for the needs of his own family, but for other potential home buyers as well who would want the same adaptability as he was building into his own design. And he would incorporate this feature into his future plans of low-cost desert dwellings.



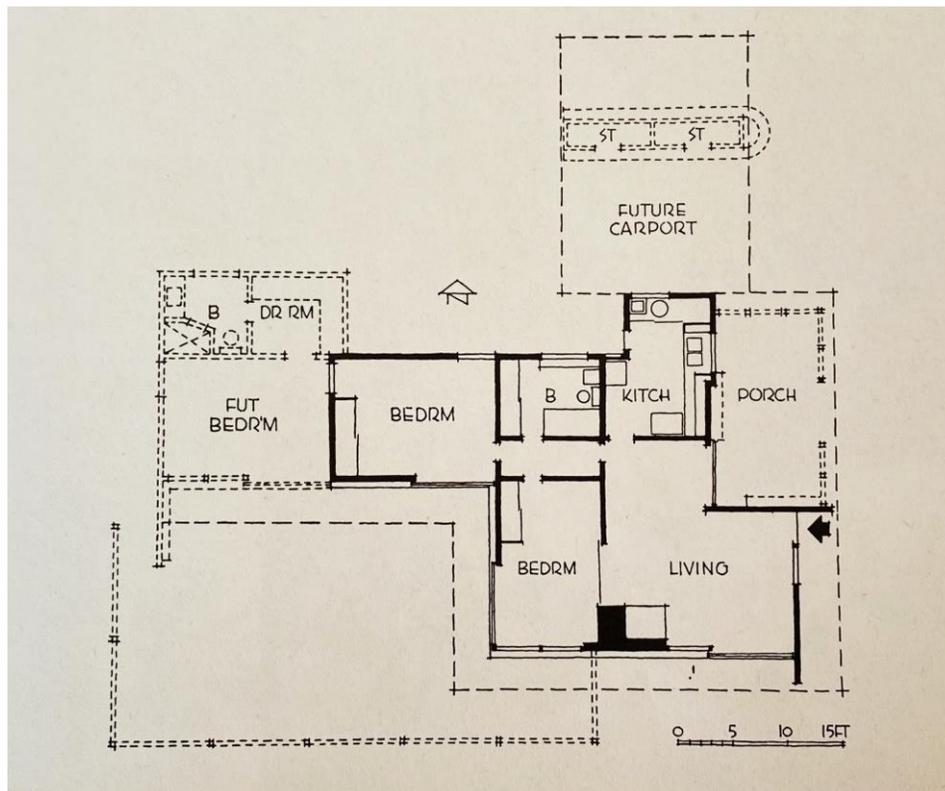
A plot plan taken from Robson Chambers' September 17, 1946 plans for the residence. Note position of house on lot and use of oleander and canebrake to define outdoor spaces. (Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May)

In the design and construction of his new home, Chambers worked within an extremely limited budget. While this may have been out of necessity, it also fit within his desire to find ways to produce inexpensive yet quality dwellings specifically geared to respond to the unique environmental challenges of desert living.

The house was to be built on a good-sized corner lot of 100'x106', which was nearly a square in shape. Chambers positioned the house to be almost, but not quite, in the center of the lot in order to give space options on all four sides for both outdoor activities and future expansion. The northern part was the narrowest, as this was to be where the service portion and future carport were to be located.

Chambers' exterior design showed a strong emphasis on horizontality, highlighted by a flat roof from which projecting eaves served to shade the structure from the desert sun. The outdoor and indoor spaces were connected through generous use of floor-to-ceiling glass panels in fixed and sliding forms, which extended to outdoor "rooms" defined by extended wing walls and/or landscaping.

A study of the interior plans for the Chambers residence shows an outwardly simple and straightforward design yet its simplicity belies the carefully considered thought behind every element from orientation of the rooms, flow, both internally and to the outdoors, light, wind, and future expansion.



**A floor plan of the Chambers Residence showing plans for future expansions as seen in the 1954 book *A Treasury of Contemporary Houses*.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May)**

In its original form, the house lacked a formal dining room. Chambers addressed this issue with the creation of a “dining patio” on the east side of the house. Floored with concrete pavers and sheltered by the overhanging roof eaves, this allowed the family to dine al fresco and enjoy the desert atmosphere and scenery. To keep the space from being too dark under the wide eaves, Chambers included a slatted section to allow light to enter. Chambers also added a 3” diameter pipe column connected from the ground to the eaves for support. Finally, he included a “pass through” window from the kitchen so that food and drink could be accessed without having to go in and out of the house.

Perhaps the most interesting design feature in the original plans was the flexible bifurcated living area, which allowed it to be split into two spaces through a sliding plywood door. The southwestern portion could (and did) serve a variety of functions from a den, guest bedroom, and children’s bedroom, as needs required. Chambers ensured the room had its own separate entrance to the north as well to allow access to the rest of the house without having to go through the living room divider door. And, as did all of the principal rooms, both parts of the living room had access to the outdoor spaces through sliding glass doors.

Chambers and Frey Design Comparisons

Chambers was no neophyte, at least in theory, when he embarked upon the design of his first desert house. He had been interested in the subject from at least as far back as his days at the USC School of Architecture and, through his wartime work, had gained valuable insight into low-cost materials and methods of construction. By the time he began drawing up his plans, Chambers had no doubt developed his own theories and ideas regarding the challenges of building in the desert.

Therefore, it is remarkable to note how similar Chambers’ house design was in comparison with that of the home of his new employer Albert Frey (Frey House 1, 1940), and Frey’s recent (1945) design of a home and guest house for former silent screen star Raymond Hatton in Rancho Mirage. In philosophy, physical layout, and construction, these homes bore a kinship so close they appeared to share the same DNA.

Yet, this does not show a lack of inspiration on the part of Chambers but rather the opposite, revealing just how closely the two were in synch when it came to their approaches to low-cost desert dwellings. The Chambers house was no mere copy of a Frey design, and it incorporated the best of both architect’s thinking.

The closeness of the designs may explain why the house has sometimes been misattributed as being a Chambers/Frey collaboration, and while Frey doubtless offered advice on the plans to his new employee, there is no evidence of his being actively involved in the actual design.

Chambers House Construction



The freshly completed Chambers Residence allows a clear view of the simplicity of its construction in Flexboard, glass and aluminum. Julius Shulman photograph.
(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

Construction of the Chambers Residence was done over the fall of 1946 at the modest cost, exclusive of furnishings, of \$7,127. The first step was to create the foundation, which was poured concrete slab. This was selected, as were all construction materials, for its suitability to the desert environment as well as being maintenance free. In choosing materials, Chambers looked for that which could withstand the temperature extremes, the wind and the dryness of the local environment.

The walls were wood framed and then sheathed in 4'x8' sheets of Flexboard, which was composed of a mixture of concrete and Asbestos. These sheets were attached to the framing studs with screws. In this, as was the case with the other materials used in the home's construction, Chambers had a leg up in the form of Albert Frey. He had used these exact same materials in the construction of Frey House 1 (even screwing some of the boards in himself) in 1940. Chambers was able to see how well these materials

had held up over a half-dozen years and was confident they would do the same in his own residence. And here, Chambers went Frey one better when it came to a raw look by leaving the Flexboard siding unpainted. There was also no stucco applied either to the exterior or anywhere else in the home as it did not hold up as well to the desert temperature extremes.



An early view of the south façade. Note the pumice stone fireplace wall and sun patio formed by the crook of the bedroom and living room. Julius Shulman photograph.
(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

As Frey had done with his designs, Chambers employed wing walls which extended from the indoors into the outside, defining outdoor “rooms” for social activities as well as serving as wind screens. The most notable was the one running on an east/west axis which formed part of the northern living room wall inside then continued outside to form the southern wall of the dining patio. Overall, however, Chambers was not as bold in his use of wing walls as Frey had been, preferring instead to use the landscape, most notably oleander hedges and canebrakes to define the boundaries of outdoor rooms.

Chambers not only kept the wing walls shorter, he veered from Frey in their sheathing. Frey had covered similar walls with corrugated aluminum panels, 4'x8', which he placed in such a way so as to emphasize the horizontality of the design. Chambers kept his wing walls raw on the exterior, preferring the look of the exposed Flexboard.

Frey had selected corrugated aluminum as a building element for both his own house and the Hatton House/Guest House. It served as a heat deflector against the harsh desert sun, while having the added benefit of providing some decorative interest in an otherwise unadorned design.

Chambers, too, used corrugated aluminum for the same reasons as Frey, but he did so in an entirely different way. Chambers used the aluminum to serve as the fascia for the overhanging roof, bending the sheets "sombbrero style" so they formed a graceful curve from the underside of the roof.



**A Shulman view of the dining patio looking south across Sunny Dunes Road
and mountains beyond.**

(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

Chambers ensured that no lintels appeared over the glass panels and the underside of the roof/ceiling flowed seamlessly between the indoors and the outside. Chambers had differed from Frey in the choice of interior ceilings. While Frey preferred painted corrugated aluminum, Chambers designed his ceilings to be plywood panels.

The eaves extended outwards from all sides of the roof with the exception of the north and west where, according to Chambers, it could not be made wide enough to counteract the western sun. Therefore, on the west façade, Chambers created a louvered panel blind to cover the west-facing window panel whose blades, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, “could be changed to suit the intensity of the sun.”

The home’s Flexboard exterior was relieved on all sides but the north by extensive use of glass. As Frey had done before him, Chambers used aluminum-framed 8’ floor-to-ceiling glass panels and sliding glass doors to bring the outdoors in. This concept was the very heart of the home’s design, yet, like every other element, it had a practical purpose as well. The glass allowed winter sun into the house (October-April) while airflow could be directed, depending on need, by the opening of various doors and/or windows.

Another relief from the Flexboard was in the fireplace wall, which was made of locally-produced pumice block. This was one of the few areas painted on the exterior, being done in a “creamy mustard.” A 1951 article on the house in the *Los Angeles Times* noted that paint was also used on the exterior trim with teal blue chosen for the purpose “because it fades subtly.”

While aspiring for extreme simplicity, Chambers did not neglect critical infrastructure in his design such as modern bathroom and kitchen plumbing/fixtures, wall insulation, electrical heating, as well as an evaporative air cooler on the roof.

Interior

While the exterior was, by design, intentionally raw and unadorned, the interior spaces were softer and more finished. Here, plywood panels were placed on both walls and ceilings. These were in the same 4’x8’ size as the exterior Flexboard which helped ensure a desired continuity of overall form. However, while the ceiling panels were smooth, the wall panels were a combed plywood which gave off a pleasing texture.

Inside, paint was more extensively used but the colors were chosen to compliment the desert surroundings. Walls and ceiling were “malt chocolate brown” with the interior fireplace wall done in a “citrus” color. The smooth concrete floors were covered with rush matted rugs and furnished with simple pieces the couple had purchased or existing family heirlooms.



**This early Shulman view shows the warmth of the interior filled with light from the numerous glass doors/windows.
(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))**

Original Hardscape and Landscaping

In its first iteration, the Chambers Residence had extremely limited external embellishments. Much of the lot was left in its natural state. Chambers used two principal planting features, oleander hedges and canebrake, which he employed as definers of outdoor rooms as well as helping to provide a modicum of privacy to the largely glass facades along Warm Sands and Sunny Dunes Road. A few other plants, including palms, several of which remain today, were also added. Originally, there was also a small grassy space on the east front and along a section of the south side. Over time, this inched its way outward as budget allowed.

Original images from 1948 show almost no hardscaping other than concrete pavers at the dining patio and around the entrance. This too would change over the course of time. Chambers had created four outdoor courts around the house, which were defined by the wings extending from the façade and/or landscaping. The most notable were the dining patio off the east façade and the sunbathing patio, opening off the master bedroom and guest room/living room. On the north side, which was reserved as the service area, there was a drying yard, wood storage and incinerator. It was also the location of the cesspool.

Chambers House – Design Highlights

Completed by the end of 1946, the Chambers Residence achieved the goals the architect had set out to accomplish, which included:

- Modest cost
- Flexibility of space
- Construction materials adaptable to temperature extremes
- Built for year-round living
- Designed to allow ease of future expansion
- Oriented to the views
- Indoor-outdoor living

Construction Materials Employed

- Concrete slab flooring
- Wood frame
- Flexboard panels, 4'x8' attached to framing with screws
- Corrugated aluminum bent and used as fascia
- Glass, both sliding and fixed form
- Pumice stone for fireplace

Chambers was understandably pleased with his design and sought to use it to draw attention to his work. He was fortunate to engage noted architectural photographer Julius Shulman to do a series of images that beautifully captured the home from both

its earliest stages and a few years after its construction. It may have been these photos that caught the eye of Esther McCoy. McCoy (1904-1989), who would go on to become one of the most important figures in California modern architecture as both a critic and historian, was in the first few years of her legendary career when she became intrigued by the design of Chambers' house. McCoy took a special interest in promoting the house and would write about it on several occasions including major pieces in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Architectural Record*. It was due to her efforts that Chambers' modest desert dwelling gained national and even international attention for its innovative design and use of materials.

1950 Addition

Chambers had designed his home in anticipation of starting a family with Helen and his plans reflected this scenario. By 1950, it had become a reality with a son, Alexander, followed in a few years by another, Douglas. When it came time to expand, Chambers had only to pull out his original plans and complete the designs he had mapped out four years earlier. He did make certain modifications/updates, but the end result was largely as originally envisioned. The work involved a new master bedroom, enclosing the dining patio and a new carport/storage. The cost of the work was \$4,000.

Master Bedroom

A major part of the new work was a new master bedroom added onto the west side of the house. This bedroom would also include an en suite master bath with separate dressing room with built-in wardrobes. In the new addition, Chambers carried over part of the 1946 work, which was a narrow floor-to-ceiling window on the north end of the west wall. Originally, to shield the window from the harsh western afternoon light, he had placed a louvered hanging screen on the outside. In the new addition, he made the louvered screen part of the window itself, allowing it to be adjusted from the inside. He also matched the eaves and their corrugated aluminum fascia as well as adding the same style floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors as found elsewhere. Chambers also followed through on his original design by making the west wall a wing wall which extended outwards 8' to the south. This served the double purpose of helping to define part of the sun patio space as well as providing a partial wind break. This wing extension was a "bookend" of the one found on the east wall of the house.

Dining Room

The original outdoor dining patio was fully enclosed during the 1950 addition, although Chambers sought to keep the outdoor feeling by making the new walls almost entirely out of glass. However, to provide privacy, Chambers made the panels obscure glass. The original pavers were removed and a concrete floor, identical to the rest of the house, was installed. The original 3" diameter pipe column was also retained in the new design.

Carport

On the north side of the house, Chambers added a carport with two covered spaces. He cleverly divided the two spaces by a storage wall 3'x18' with built-in cabinets. The addition of the carport was not only a convenience, it helped to shelter the north portion of the lot from the street, providing additional privacy.



A major part of Chambers' 1950 additions was to enclose the dining patio using floor-to-ceiling glass panels. Note the steel pipe and fin wall still in situ. Also, an unidentified boy and girl may be spotted. Compare with image on page 18.

(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

Additional work

During the 1950 additions, Chambers also added certain exterior elements, most notably a 6' high redwood and aluminum fence at the southern side to provide privacy for the sun patio and bedrooms.



Children play happily out on the newly-enclosed and expanded sun patio. View is looking west from living room. Note the palm trees, which still remain but have grown to great heights.

Julius Shulman photograph.

(J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004 R.10))

1956 Additions

In 1956, Chambers made one further addition to the house, adding a patio and new laundry room on the north side. At the same time, he also remodeled the kitchen with new cabinets/wall & ceiling finishes at a reported cost of \$1,000.

Later Alterations/Additions Post-Chambers

In 1961, after some 15 years in residence, Robson and Helen Chambers sold 695 Warm Sands and relocated to a new house the architect had designed for the family at 275 Camino Buena Vista (destroyed by fire in 1981).

In the decades following the Chambers' departure from 695 Warm Sands up to today, certain additions and alterations have been made to the house by subsequent owners.

Fortunately, very little has been done to diminish the home's integrity with most work involving systems upgrades and interior remodeling.

The Chambers Residence has sustained only one major exterior change – a 192 sq. ft. addition to the living room, which was done in 1973. This addition, which was originally described as a “recreation room” extended the living room out southwards. It follows the width of the original living room space and subsumes, on the eastern side, the original wing wall. An attempt to integrate the addition to the original work was made by matching the aluminum eaves and walls of sliding glass doors. The latter are not exact, but are similar in style.

One other major addition was done on the exterior when a pool and surrounding hardscape was added in 1966.

The current owners are passionately dedicated to restoring the house to as much of its original appearance and spirit as possible. Most notably, they replaced a 32-ft section of fascia which a previous owner installed, which was both in the wrong gauge and made of fiberglass rather than aluminum. They also repaired rotted wood on the exterior wing walls. Further, they have constructed a new block perimeter wall surrounding the property and are replacing non-original flagstone patio hardscaping with more period appropriate concrete blocks similar in style to original Chambers versions. Most recently, they have replaced the front door with a glass door approximating the 1946 Chambers original. The kitchen door was also replaced with a more period appropriate design.

Current Landscaping and Grounds

From 1946 to today, the landscaping and hardscaping surrounding the Chambers Residence has changed considerably. Originally, only small grassy pads on the east and south sides with canebrake and oleander hedging, the surrounding grounds evolved over the long tenure of Robson & Helen Chambers until it contained patios, pathways and a 6-ft privacy wall on the south side shielding the sun patio and bedrooms from the street. After the 1966 pool addition, much of the original Chambers features disappeared and today, much of the grass has now been replaced by desert landscaping. The original canebrake and oleanders have been replaced by the new perimeter wall. However, a major original element still remains – the *Washingtonia robusta* palms, now grown to great heights – three next to the southwestern corner of the house (master bedroom) – and 2 others at the southeastern corner of Sunny Dunes and Warm Sands.

Character Defining Features of the Chambers Residence

The Chambers Residence is an exceptional example of a custom-designed midcentury Modern house and one of the earliest of the type in Palm Springs. It exhibits numerous character-defining features including:

- Flat roof
- Distinctive deep overhanging eaves highlighted by corrugated aluminum sheets bent to form the fascia.
- Blending of indoor and outdoor spaces
- Extensive use of glass in both fixed and sliding forms
- Integrated carport
- Use of low-cost desert-adaptable materials including aluminum, plywood, concrete, Flexboard, and locally-produced pumice blocks

Contributing Elements

- Residence and attached carport
- Five *Washingtonia robusta* (Mexican Fan) Palm Trees

Non-Contributing Elements

- 1966 Swimming pool
- Hardscaping
- Perimeter walls

Local Architectural Context

The Chambers Residence should be viewed within the context of the period Post World War II (1945-1969), a boom period that left Palm Springs with what many consider the largest and finest concentration of mid-20th century modern architecture in the United States. As noted in the Historic Resource Group's [Palm Springs] *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*, "by 1951 the city's winter population swelled to almost 30,000 from a permanent population of 7,660 - coincided with the peak of Modernism's popularity. The population growth accelerated in the 1950s, bringing a demand for civic necessities such as schools, libraries, museums, a city hall and police headquarters, as well as offices, stores, and housing. Though Palm Springs was a smaller municipality, this economic climate provided many opportunities for locally-based architects, as well as several Los Angeles architects, to explore and develop a wide range of architectural types and ideas, sometimes influenced by sophisticated global design trends. These conditions and the architects' talents led to the development of an exceptional group of Modern buildings which later came to be identified as 'Palm Springs Modernism' or 'The Palm Springs School.' The Chambers Residence is one of the earliest surviving examples of Desert Modernism. It was created by Chambers, not only for his own home, but as a prototype of how year-round homes could be produced in Palm Springs at low cost. The Chambers Residence bears

numerous stylistic and philosophical similarities attributed to Albert Frey's pioneering Frey House 1 and his 1945 house and guest house for Raymond Hatton in Rancho Mirage. Frey House 1 has been demolished and the Hatton house has been altered beyond recognition, leaving the Chambers Residence as the only one remaining largely as originally designed.

Site Description

Location. The Chambers Residence is located on a prominent corner in the Warm Springs Park tract, one of the desert's most historic and exclusive residential districts. The topography of the square-shaped lot is flat and borders on the east with Warm Sands Drive and on the south with Sunny Dunes Road. Desert sustainable landscaping has recently replaced much of the older grass and non-native plantings. Five *Washingtonia robusta* palms, a feature from the days of Robson Chambers, remain. A swimming pool, added in 1966, is also a feature of the property.

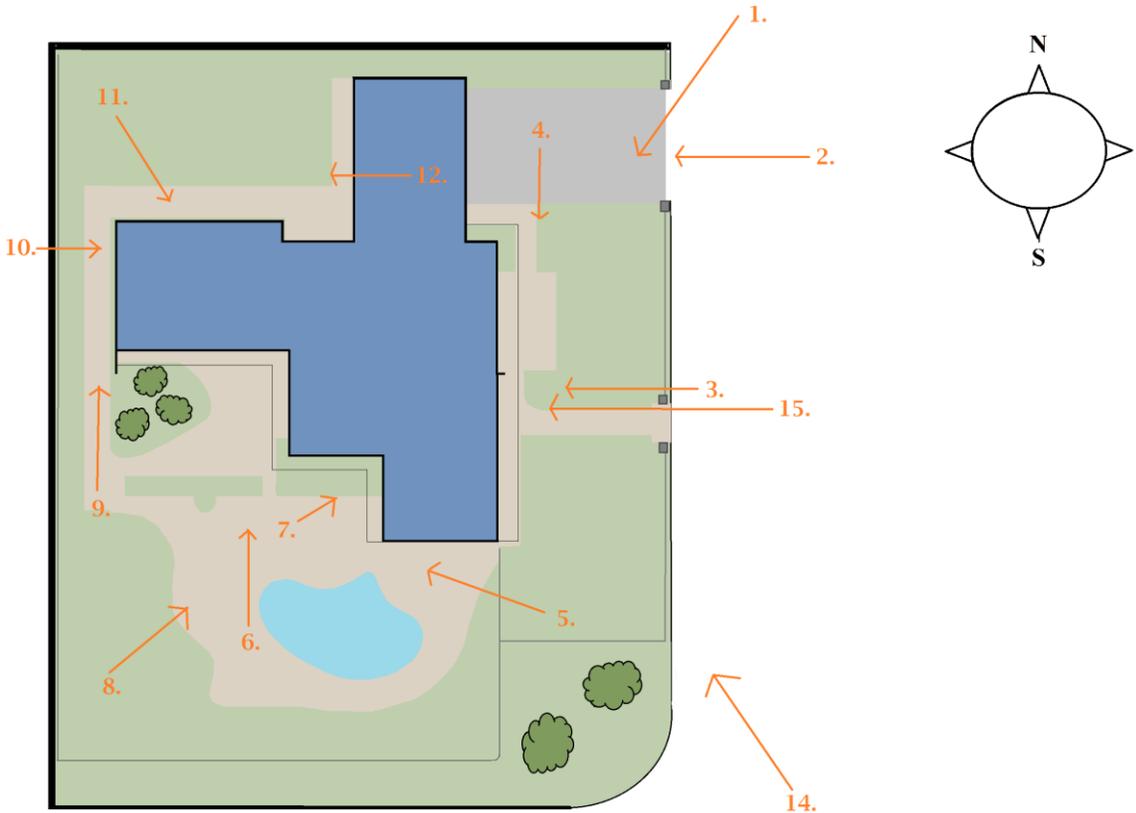


Photo Key
**Robson & Helen Chambers
 Residence**



Photo 1: East elevation showing 1950 dining room addition including the recent (2020) concrete block perimeter wall.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 2: Facing west showing 1950 carport and portion of glass-walled dining room.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 3: East elevation. Note 1946 wing wall extending to the door's right and 1946 steel pillar at far right. Non-original front door has since been replaced. See Photo 15.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 4: East elevation. Looking south. Note recent hardscape and landscape.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 5: View looking northwest showing southern elevation.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 6: View showing southern elevation.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 7: South elevation looking east into living room. Note 1973 addition on right.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 8: Looking to the northeast showing 1966 swimming pool in relation to the house.
(Author photo. June 2021)



Photo 9: South elevation looking to west elevation. Note the three original palm trees and the extending wing wall of the west elevation, a 1950 addition.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 10: West elevation detail of Flexboard attached with screws and portion of louvered bedroom window.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 11: North elevation showing Flexboard sheathing.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 12: View to west from carport overlooking northern portion of lot.
(Author photo. June 2021)



Photo 13: View to north showing view from Sunny Dunes Road.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



Photo 14: Looking north showing 2020 perimeter wall along Warm Sands Drive.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May. June 2021)



**Photo 15: October 2021 view showing newly-installed front door created to approximate the 1946 original. See photo on page 22 for comparison.
(Courtesy Carlos Serrao + Monica May, October 2021)**

BACKGROUND / HISTORIC CONTEXT

The relatively short history of Palm Springs can be organized into several distinct periods, as defined by the Historic Resources Group's *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*. These include the following:

- Native American Settlement to 1969
- Early Development (1884-1918)
- Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)
- Palm Springs during World War II (1939-1945)
- Post-World War II Palm Springs (1945-1969)

It is within the context of the period “**Post-World War II Palm Springs**” that the Chambers Residence will be evaluated. Specifically, the Chambers Residence's period of significance are the years 1946-1961 when it was home to the architect and his family.

EVALUATION:

Criterion 2: Significant Persons. Criterion 2 recognizes properties associated with the lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to the national, state or local history. Robson Chambers, AIA, both individually and through his long-time partnership with Albert Frey and John Porter Clark, was one of the most prominent architects in Palm Springs during the heyday of Desert Modernism. The work of this partnership is included among the finest, most important and influential architecture built in the desert during the Mid-century era. Hence, the Chambers Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource 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 Chambers Residence, completed in 1946, with additions by Chambers in 1950 and 1956, exhibits many stylistic markers which place it directly in the historic context of Post-World War II Palm Springs. The private residence is one of the earliest surviving examples of Desert Modernism and represents a prime and largely intact example of the midcentury modern style, for which Palm Springs has gained a worldwide reputation. As such, the Chambers Residence may be viewed as an important component of the historic trends that have come to define Palm Springs' image as a center of important Modern architecture, i.e., an historic trend that exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history. The Chambers Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource on the local registry under Criterion 3.

Criterion 4: *(That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or) Type, Period, and 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 Chambers Residence is eligible under the theme of Modern architecture because it possesses distinctive characteristics that embody the midcentury modern style such as overall horizontality, expression of structure, expansive amounts of glass, a blend between indoor and outdoor spaces, etc. Further, its construction was the result of an attempt by Chambers to create a low-cost dwelling that could be used on a year-round basis. Chambers built the house entirely of materials such as Flexboard, corrugated aluminum, extensive amounts of glass, plywood and concrete, which had proven their ability to handle desert temperature extremes. The Chambers Residence is one of the earliest surviving examples of Desert Modern architecture and an extraordinary link to the origins of the Palm Springs School of Architecture. As such, the Chambers Residence is eligible under this criterion because it represents an important example of building practices in Palm Springs during the post-World War II period. *The Chambers Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource on the local registry under Criterion 4.*

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: In the case of the Chambers Residence, the work of Robson Chambers, AIA, can certainly be described as the "work of a master" in view of his history of architectural excellence throughout a career that spanned from the 1940s into the 1980s (see appendix VI).

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. As an exceptional example of midcentury modern architecture, the Chambers Residence certainly articulates the best of what has made Modern architecture so popular throughout the Coachella Valley to a level of excellence and confidence that, in total, could easily be considered an aesthetic ideal. *For its high artistic values, the Chambers Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource 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 and as such it does not apply to this nomination. *Hence, the residence 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 Chambers Residence is not likely to yield information important to the national, state or local history or prehistory. Hence, the residence does not qualify under Criterion 7.

FINDING 2: The site, structure, building or object retains one or more of the following aspects of integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Provide a written description for each element as listed: Design; Materials; Workmanship; Location; Setting; Feeling; and Association.

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 following sections define the seven aspects and explain how they combine to produce integrity.

LOCATION

Location is the place where an historic property was constructed or the place where an historic event occurred. The relationship between the property and its location is often important to understanding why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons. Except in rare cases, the relationship between a property and its historic associations is destroyed if the property is moved. ***The Chambers Residence remains in its original location and therefore qualifies under this aspect.***

DESIGN

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. It results from conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning of a property and applies to activities as diverse as community planning, engineering, architecture, and landscape architecture. Design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, ornamentation, and materials. A property's design reflects historic functions and technologies as well as aesthetics. It includes such considerations as the structural system; massing;

arrangement of spaces; pattern of fenestration; textures and colors of surface materials; type, amount, and style of ornamental detailing. ***The Chambers Residence's essential characteristics of form, plan, space, structure, and style have survived largely intact. Similarly, the structural system; massing; arrangement of spaces; pattern of fenestration; and the type, amount, and style of detailing have survived largely intact.***

SETTING

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the *character* of the place in which the property played its historical role. It involves *how*, not just *where*, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space. Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a property was built and the functions it was intended to serve. In addition, the way in which a property is positioned in its environment can reflect the designer's concept of nature and aesthetic preferences. ***The setting of the Chambers Residence continues to reflect the architect's original design relationship of site and structure.***

MATERIALS

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The choice and combination of materials reveals the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of particular types of materials and technologies. ***The Chambers Residence's exterior surface materials, which consist primarily of Flexboard, pumice block, corrugated aluminum and glass, both windows and doors, have remained essentially intact and continue to express the physical elements as designed during the building's period of significance; the pattern and configuration that today forms the residence and contributing structures survives intact.***

WORKMANSHIP

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. It is the evidence of artisans' labor and skill in constructing or altering a building, structure, object, or site. Workmanship can apply to the property as a whole or to its individual components. It can be expressed in vernacular methods of construction and plain finishes or in highly sophisticated configurations and ornamental detailing. It can be based on common traditions or innovative period techniques. Workmanship is important because it can furnish evidence of the technology of a craft, illustrate the aesthetic principles of a historic or prehistoric period, and reveal individual, local, regional, or national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles. Examples of workmanship in historic buildings include tooling, carving, painting, graining, turning, and joinery. ***The workmanship of the Chambers Residence is evidenced by the visible hand of its architect/builder with many of the original screws used to attach the Flexboard***

siding to the framing still intact. The Chambers Residence is a testament to the far-sighted thinking of its architect who wanted to create a house of low cost that could be lived in year-round and, thanks to the type of materials of construction, one that required virtually no maintenance. These original materials including Flexboard, corrugated aluminum, poured concrete slab, pumice block, and extensive glass in both fixed and sliding forms, are all in situ and performing their original functions. The Chambers Residence continues to express a high degree of contemporary period workmanship.

FEELING

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character. For example, a rural historic district retaining original design, materials, workmanship, and setting will relate the feeling of agricultural life in the 19th century. ***The Chambers Residence is sited on a prominent corner lot which takes advantage of panoramic views of the surrounding desert and mountain ranges just as it did when completed in 1946. Accordingly, the residence retains its original integrity of feeling.***

ASSOCIATION

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character. For example, a Revolutionary War battlefield whose natural and man-made elements have remained intact since the 18th century will retain its quality of association with the battle. Because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register. ***The Chambers Residence is an important example of a custom-designed midcentury modern private residence in Palm Springs. Accordingly, it continues its association with a pattern of events that have made a meaningful contribution to the community.***

INTEGRITY SUMMARY: The Chambers Residence appears to be in excellent condition partially due to the use of construction materials suitable for the harsh desert environment. This integrity analysis confirms that the building and site of the Chambers Residence still possesses all seven aspects of integrity. ***In summary, the Chambers Residence possesses a high degree of integrity sufficient to qualify for designation as a Class 1 Historic Resource.***

Bibliography

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

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Riverside County Assessor's Office

Appendix I

Owner's Notarized Letter of Support

November 12th, 2021

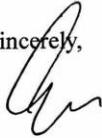
City of Palm Springs
Historic Site Preservation Board
3200 Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Dear Honorable Board,

As the current owners of the Robson & Helen Chambers Residence located at 695 South Warm Sands Drive in Palm Springs, California, we enthusiastically support the Class 1 Historic Resource designation of our property by the city of Palm Springs. We have asked the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation to assist us in the preparation of the required nomination paperwork.

If you have any questions, please contact us at carlosserrao@carlosserrao.com and monica@monicamayphotography.com.

Sincerely,



Carlos Serrao



Monica May

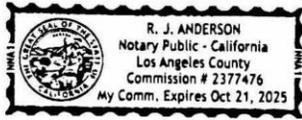
CALIFORNIA ALL-PURPOSE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A Notary Public or other officer completing this certificate verifies only the identity of the individual who signed the document to which this certificate is attached, and not the truthfulness, accuracy, or validity of that document.

State of California }
County of Los Angeles }

On 11/12/2021, before me, R. J. Anderson, Notary Public,
personally appeared Monica Marie May and Carlos Pablo Serrao
who proved to me on the basis of satisfactory evidence to be the person(s) whose name(s) is/are
subscribed to the within instrument and acknowledged to me that he/she/they executed the same
in his/her/their authorized capacity(ies), and that by his/her/their signature(s) on the instrument
the person(s), or the entity upon behalf of which the person(s) acted, executed the instrument.

I certify under PENALTY OF PERJURY under the laws of State of California that the foregoing
paragraph is true and correct.



WITNESS my hand and official seal.

SIGNATURE [Signature]

PLACE NOTARY SEAL ABOVE

Though the information below is not required by law, it may prove valuable to persons relying on the document
and could prevent fraudulent removal and reattachment of this form to another document.

Description of attached document

Title or type of document: Authorization Letter

Document Date: 11/12/2021 Number of Pages: _____

Signer(s) Other than Named Above: _____

Appendix II

Grant Deed

Branch :O25,User :DESL

Comment:

Station Id :C47E

RECORDING REQUESTED BY:
WFG National Title Company of California

MAIL TAX STATEMENTS AND
WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO:
Carlos Serrao and Monica May
530 Molino Street #201
Los Angeles, CA 90013
Escrow No.: 18-161166
Order No.:

DOC # 2018-0285688
07/16/2018 11:38 AM Fees: \$20.00
Page 1 of 3
Recorded in Official Records
County of Riverside
Peter Aldana
Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder

**This document was electronically submitted
to the County of Riverside for recording**
Received by: MARY #420

APN: 508-216-002-0

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

TRA 011-003

GRANT DEED

THE UNDERSIGNED GRANTOR(S) DECLARE(S):

DOCUMENTARY TRANSFER TAX is \$880.00 CITY TAX \$0.00
 computed on full value of property conveyed, or
 computed on full value less liens and encumbrances remaining at time of sale,
 Unincorporated area City of Palm Springs, and

FOR A VALUABLE CONSIDERATION, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged,

Martin I Lieberman, a single man and Peter Cohen, a single man, as Joint Tenants

hereby GRANT(S) to **Carlos Serrao, a single man and Monica May, an unmarried woman, as joint tenants,**

the following described real property in the City of Palm Springs, County of Riverside, State of California:

SEE ATTACHED EXHIBIT "A"

The property more commonly known as: 695 South Warm Sands Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92264

Dated: 7.9.18

Martin Lieberman
Martin I Lieberman

Peter Cohen
Peter Cohen

A notary public or other officer completing this certificate verifies only the identity of the individual who signed the document to which this certificate is attached, and not the truthfulness, accuracy or validity of that document.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

) SS.

COUNTY OF Riverside

On July 9, 2018, before me, Claudia Solorzano, a Notary Public, personally appeared MARTIN F. Lieberman and Peter Cohen

who proved to me on the basis of satisfactory evidence to be the person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the within instrument and acknowledged to me that he/she/they executed the same in his/her/their authorized capacity(ies), and that by his/her/their signature(s) on the instrument the person(s) or the entity upon behalf of which the person(s) acted, executed the instrument.

I certify under PENALTY OF PERJURY under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing paragraph is true and correct.

WITNESS my hand and official seal.

Signature Claudia Solorzano



MAIL TAX STATEMENTS AS DIRECTED ABOVE

Branch :O25,User :DESL

Comment:

Station Id :C47E

DOC #2018-0285688 Page 3 of 3

EXHIBIT "A"

LOT 41 OF WARM SANDS PARK, IN THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AS SHOWN BY MAP ON FILE IN BOOK 20, PAGE(S) 65, OF MAPS, IN THE OFFICE OF THE COUNTY RECORDER OF SAID COUNTY.

APN: 508-216-002-0

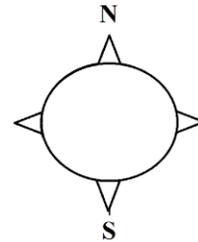
RIVERSIDE,CA
Document: DD 2018.285688

Page 3 of 3

Printed on 7/16/2021 3:01:02 PM

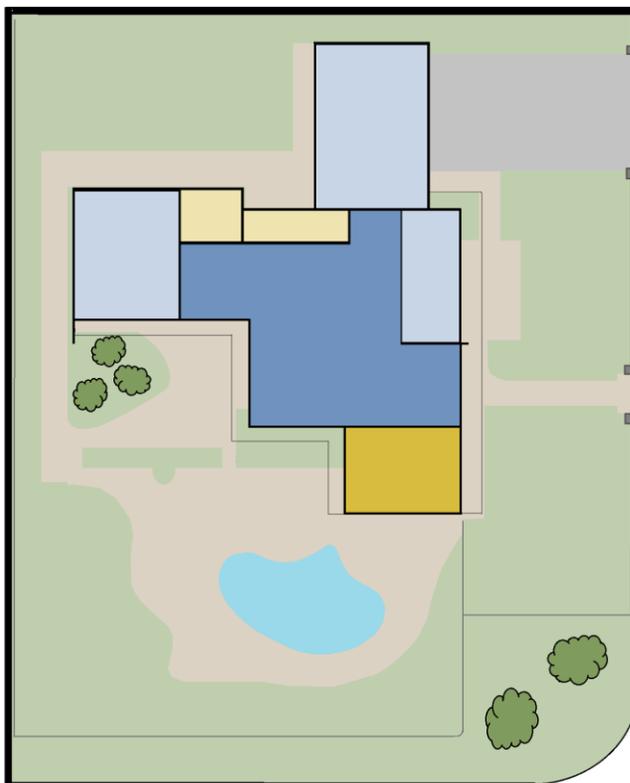
Appendix IV

Site Plan



Site Plan Robson & Helen Chambers Residence

Robson Cole Chambers
Clark & Frey
1946
With additions by the architect in 1950 and 1956.



- 1946 - Original Structure
- 1950 - Master Bedroom/Dining Addition
- 1956 - Laundry Room/Patio Extension
- 1973- Recreation Room/Living Room Extension (Non- Chambers)
- Landscape (Non-Contributing)^{***}Excluding original palms which are contributing resources.
- Hardscape (Non-Contributing)
- Driveway (Non-Contributing)
- Perimeter Walls (Non-Contributing)
- Washingtonia robusta Palm Trees (5) (Contributing)

Appendix V

Google Earth Image



Appendix VI

Chain of Ownership/Permit History

July 11, 1946

Bank of America National Trust and Savings Association to Robson C. Chambers and Helen S. Chambers

March 20, 1961

Robson C. Chambers and Helen S. Chambers to Alice Sachs Jacobsen

August 3, 1966

Alice Sachs Jacobsen to Ruth H. Lambek, as joint tenants

December 21, 1966

Ruth H. Lambek to Alice Sachs Jacobsen

October 8, 1968

Alice Sachs Jacobsen to Ruth H. Lambek

October 14, 1968

Settlement of Estate of Alice Sachs Jacobsen, Deceased

Ownership divided in equal ½ parts to Jurgen G. Jacobsen and Ruth H. Lambek

July 14, 1969

Jurgen G. Jacobsen and Ruth H. Lambek to Thomas F. Reniewich, Jr. & Joy Ana Reniewich, as joint tenants

August 27, 1969

Ruth H. Lambek to Thomas F. Reniewich, Jr. & Joy Ana Reniewich

April 25, 1972

Thomas F. Reniewich, Jr. & Joy Ana Reniewich to Vincent J. Pastere

February 20, 1973

Vincent J. Pastere to George J. Janis

July 21, 1975

George J. Janis to Robert O. Pflieger & Martha E. Pflieger, as joint tenants

December 7, 1988

Robert O. Pflieger & Martha E. Pflieger, as joint tenants to Ronald Jesser

August 31, 1990

Ronald W. Jesser to Ronald W. Jesser and Mitchell Samuels as joint tenants

May 28, 1991

Ronald W. Jesser and Mitchell Samuels as joint tenants to Donald Michael Samuels and Sally Florence Samuels, husband and wife, as joint tenants

October 17, 1991

Donald Michael Samuels and Sally Florence Samuels, husband and wife, as joint tenants to Paul Timothy Hood

December 26, 1991

Deed of Trust made between Paul Timothy Hood, a single man and Countrywide Title Corporation (Note: This document was not included as part of the COT. Its existence was referenced in the subsequent document of May 14, 1997. It appears the property went into foreclosure with Paul Timothy Hood's rights in the property transferred to CTC Foreclosure Services Corporation, formerly known as Countrywide Title Corporation.)

May 14, 1997

Trustee's Deed Upon Sale CTC Foreclosure Services Corporation to Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation

July 23, 1997

Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation to David W. Bradshaw, a single man

July 1, 1999

David Bradshaw, a single man, to David Bradshaw and Gary J. Lacy, as joint tenants

March 25, 2002

David Bradshaw and Gary J. Lacy, as joint tenants to Lionel D. Cunningham and Garin L. Bakel, as joint tenants

June 24, 2010

Lionel D. Cunningham and Garin L. Bakel, as joint tenants to Sam A. Cardella, a single man

November 16, 2011

Sam A. Cardella, a single man to Martin I. Lieberman and Peter Cohen as joint tenants

July 9, 2018

Martin I. Lieberman and Peter Cohen as joint tenants to Carlos Serrao and Monica May

Permit History

The following is a digest of permits provided by the Palm Springs Department of Building & Safety related to 695 South Warm Sands Drive. It may not be complete but represents all available permits located at the time of this nomination:

August 23, 1946 – Permit No. 7817 (Residence) – Owner: Robson and Helen Chambers. Contractor: Illegible. Cost: \$7,157.00.

September 24, 1946 – Permit No. 8726 (Plumbing) – Owner: Robson Chambers. Contractor: Arthur J. Coffey.

August 9, 1950 – Permit No.4430 (Addition. Bedroom, Bath, Carport and Enclose Porch) – Owner: Robson Chambers. Contractor: Arthur J. Coffey. Cost: \$4,000.00.

August 11, 1950 – Permit No. 4013 (Plumbing) – Owner: Robson Chambers. Contractor: Wayne Stringer.

(Month obscured), 25, 1950 – Permit No. 3560 (Electrical) – Owner: Robson Chambers. Contractor: McLaughlin Electric.

February 8, 1954 – Permit No. 6616 (Furnace) – Owner: Robson Chambers. Contractor: Ray Greene. Cost: \$500.00.

September 18, 1956 – Permit No. 8949 (Addition. Laundry Room.) – Owner: Robson Chambers. Contractor: Arthur J. Coffey. Cost: \$1,000.00.

October 31, 1961 – Permit No. B-2477 (Gas Outlet) – Owner: Alice Sachs Jacobsen. Contractor: Otto Gelson.

May 16, 1966 – Permit No. B-09125 (Swimming Pool, 15'x30' gunite pool) – Owner: Alice Sachs Jacobsen Contractor: Owner/Builder. Cost: \$3,000.

September 14, 1966 – Permit No. B-09434 (Air-Conditioning Unit) – Owner: Alice Sachs Jacobsen. Contractor: Lake Air Conditioning. Cost: \$1,354.00.

June 27, 1973 – Permit No. B-6392 (Addition. Recreation Room. 192 sq. ft. addition to living room) – Owner: George Janis. Contractor: Prince. Cost: \$1,000.00.

July 17, 1973 – Permit No. A-6683 (Electrical) – Owner: George Janis. Contractor: Palm Springs Electric.

July 23, 1973 – Permit No. M-2675 (Air Conditioning Work) – Owner: George Janis. Contractor: Professional Air Conditioning.

November 8, 1975 – Permit No. A-3854 (Sewer) – Owner: (Illegible) Young. *** Contractor: Owner. Cost: \$105.00. ***Note: As George Janis was owner at the time, this may actually be the name of person doing the work.

January 28, 2019 – Permit No. 2019-364 (Perimeter Wall, Front Yard) – Owner: Carlos Serrao. Contractor: Lucas McQueen. Cost \$8,000.

April 30, 2019 – Permit No. 2019-1662 (Re-Roofing) Owner: Carlos Serrao. Contractor: Western Pacific Roofing. Cost: \$11,765.00.

Appendix VII

Robson Chambers, AIA



Robson Chambers in his office at UC Santa Barbara.

(Courtesy Robson Chambers Collection,
Architecture & Design Collection, University Art Museum, University of California Santa Barbara)

In 2015, architectural historian and educator Robert Imber wrote an article on Robson Chambers for *Palm Springs Life*, which he entitled, “The Third Man.” The title perfectly captured the position Chambers has held in relation to Albert Frey and John Porter Clark, his much better-known architectural collaborators. Although he worked alongside Frey (1946-1966) and Clark (1946-1956) for decades, helping to design some of Palm Springs’ most iconic landmarks, Chambers’ contributions often do not receive the same attention as his partners. Chambers, however, appears to have been happy being the “Third Man,” content with the work itself and not showing much interest in self-promotion. And while Frey justifiably deserves the lion’s share for the collective oeuvre of the trio with Clark a respectable second, Chambers too deserves to receive more attention and exploration of his contributions in a career that spanned four decades.

Chambers was born on March 4, 1919 in Los Angeles, California, however, he was to grow into adulthood in the community of Banning in Riverside County where his father

ran the local pharmacy. Chambers was no stranger to Palm Springs, having ventured through the San Geronio Pass on numerous visits and was evidently intrigued by what he saw. Graduating from Banning High School in 1936, Chambers enrolled at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles (USC), where he planned to study architecture. Chambers was no stranger to the profession. His uncle Harold C. Chambers (1885-1971) was one of Southern California's most prominent architect/engineers as part of the venerable firm of Myron Hunt and H.C. Chambers.

The University of Southern California was known for its highly-regarded program in architecture and Chambers excelled at the curriculum, graduating with honors in 1941. As part of the ceremony, Chambers was singled out for an award by the American Institute of Architects for his scholarship.

Upon graduation, Chambers was offered a position in his uncle's firm. While it is unknown what specific projects he may have been involved with in these first pre-war months of 1941, it appears he was already working on some of the firm's construction projects for the U.S. military, which only continued in greater intensity once war was declared in December. Between 1941-1942, Chambers served as an architect-planner on Army cantonments and hospitals in Medford, Oregon; Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii; Marysville, California; Fort Huachuca, Arizona; and at Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, California.

By its very nature, military design and construction needed to be fast, efficient and produced using the simplest, cheapest materials available. This proved to be a great training ground for Chambers' later post-war work in designing cost-efficient housing in Palm Springs including that of his own home.

In 1942, Chambers left the direct employ of Hunt and Chambers and joined the United States Marine Corps where he attained the rank of Technical Sergeant. The bulk of his time was spent heading a small architectural section at Camp Pendleton near Oceanside in San Diego County. It was during this time, Chambers met and fell in love with his future wife Helen Snow (1916-2004), a graduate of Wells College in New York, who was described in the *Escondido Times-Advocate* as coming from one of Vista's most prominent families. The pair were married on June 12, 1943.

War's end brought a return to civilian projects, but it was soon clear that Chambers would need to make a change in firms as Myron Hunt, nearing 80 and in poor health, was heading to retirement. It was then that an opportunity rose in the form of Albert Frey who offered him a junior position at the Palm Springs firm of Clark & Frey. Chambers welcomed the chance to work with a fellow modernist and fulfill his long-held wish to design structures in a desert environment.

In 1946, the year he joined Clark & Frey and built his own desert home, Chambers was officially licensed as an architect (C-709) by the state of California. He began as an employee of the firm, but within a few years had distinguished himself to such a degree that in January 1948 he was elevated to full partnership under the newly-created firm of Clark, Frey & Chambers. This would last until Clark's departure at the end of 1956 when

the firm would be renamed Frey and Chambers. This would mark a period of great creative output which would produce some of the firm's most important work. As Joseph Rosa wrote in his book on Frey, "During the partnership of Frey and Chambers, their larger buildings developed a greater fluidity, with each project expressive of its function."

Because of the collaborative nature of partnerships, it is not always easy to determine the degree of each contribution. However, in 1973, Chambers sketched out some of the major projects where he was a principal:

Schools in Palm Springs, Needles and Banning; three buildings for a new junior college in Palm Desert (College of the Desert); and Social Science and Humanities Building at UC Riverside. Palm Springs City Hall, Desert Hospital; Desert Museum; Palm Springs Aerial Tramway terminal buildings; fire stations, etc.

He also listed unspecified "commercial buildings. Hotels, apartments, shopping centers, banks, restaurants," as well as the Red Cross building in Riverside, U.S. Post Office in Blythe, and the Banning Public Library. His accounting focused on commercial and civic projects and neglected to mention the firm's extensive residential commissions which included such important designs as the Cree House II (1955-1956), the Carey Residence (1956); and Frey's own Frey House II (1964), among others.

While he did not list them, Chambers was also involved with a number of other important commissions with Frey including the North Shore Yacht Club (1958), St. Michael's-by-the-Sea Church in Carlsbad (1959), the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Valley Station (1963), and the Tramway Gas Station (1965).

In 1966, Frey and Chambers amicably dissolved their 20-year partnership, a remarkable association that gave Palm Springs some of its most notable Mid-century landmarks.

For Chambers, it meant opening a new chapter, leaving his beloved Palm Springs and starting a new phase of his career as a campus architect for the University of California, Santa Barbara. It was an exciting period for the development and expansion of the campus in which Chambers played a major role. From 1966-1973, he served as Assistant Campus Architect, however, over this time, his responsibilities continued to expand until he became Acting Campus Architect. In 1973, he was officially named to the post and would serve with distinction for the next decade.

While the position of Campus Architect was managerial in scope, Chambers was nonetheless actively involved in the design process of a number of new structures built during the school's late 1960s-1970s construction "boom." He also served as project architect, along with Jay Anderson, on several campus projects including Kerr Hall (Marquis & Stoller, executive architects. 1975) and the Santa Ynez Apartments (A. Quincy Jones & Associates, executive architects. 1981)

In 1982, Chambers began another phase of his long and varied career. Desiring to return to active practice, he and Helen moved to the desert community of Borrego

Springs. Between 1982 and 1995, Chambers found ready work in the burgeoning community with a steady flow of commissions that ranged from residences to commercial projects. His most notable later work was the St. Barnabas Episcopal Church (1986).

Chambers returned to Santa Barbara in 1998 and it was there he passed away at the age of 80 on June 18, 1999. His obituary in the *Desert Sun* read in part, "The homes (Chambers) designed, unique and timeless, are a testimony to his love of the desert environment and his grace and vision as an architect."



Night at 695 Warm Sands Drive late 1940s. Robson Chambers tends to the barbeque.
(© J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10) and Robson Chambers papers, Architecture and Design Collection. Art, Design & Architecture Museum; University of California, Santa Barbara.)