

# The 'Desert Magazine' that covered deserts around the world

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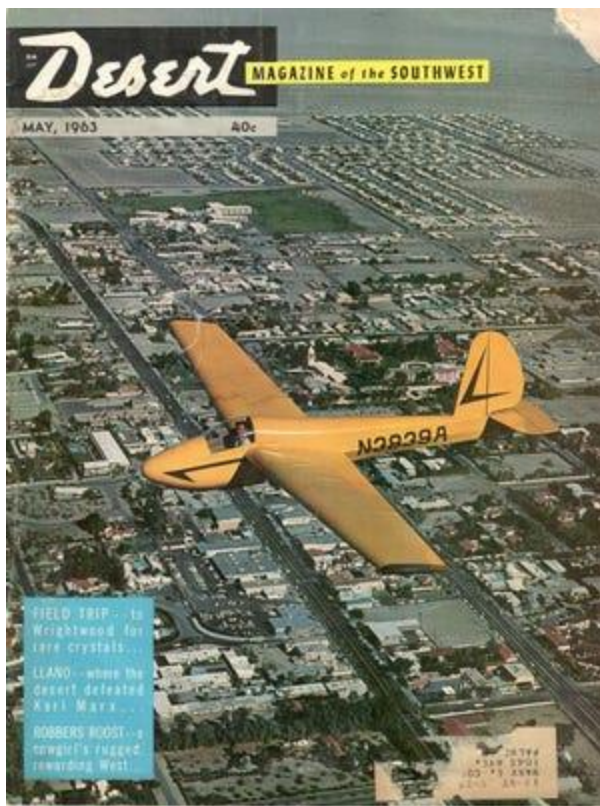
Desert Magazine building postcard. Historical Society of Palm Desert/Special to The Desert Sun

The first “Desert Magazine” was published from 1937 to 1985 and is not to be confused with those of the same name that came later. It was a regional publication that covered the deserts of the Southwestern United States and Northwest Mexico.

It reported on a myriad of desert-related subjects. It was aimed at the “Desert Rat” but appealed to anyone interested in the desert. It featured stories about desert destinations that usually required a four-wheel drive vehicle, and desert activities like gold prospecting and rock hounding. “Desert Magazine’s” classifieds included ads for metal detectors, desert gear of all types and land.

“Desert Magazine” was published monthly and usually had fewer than fifty pages. In the first year, only two issues were published, November and December. Several years had combined monthly issues, with ten or eleven

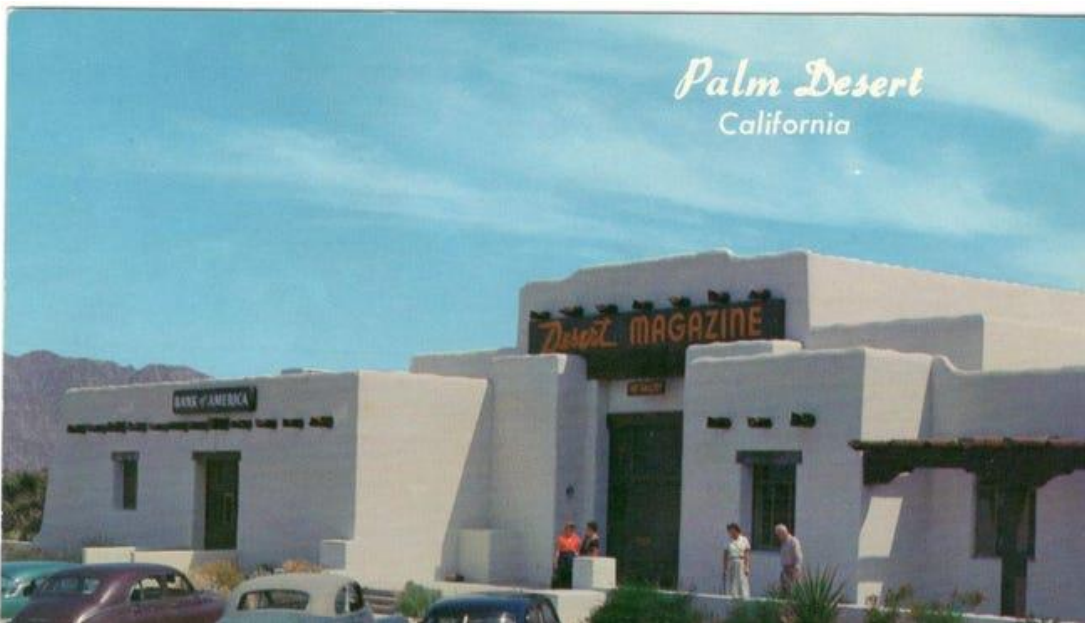
making it to subscribers. From 1982 to 1985, the magazine wound down with five or fewer issues each year. After the 1985 run, the magazine ceased publication and went into bankruptcy. Several attempts were made to resurrect the venerable publication but none succeeded for long. An index and back issues are available online. The provider states that the magazine is an “orphan” publication and making digital copies available is not a copyright violation. Back issues are available to read or purchase at the Historical Society of Palm Desert and you can find more information at <http://www.hspd.org/>. They can also be found on eBay.



“Desert Magazine” began in El Centro, California, in 1937. Its founding publisher, Randall Henderson, used his knowledge and love of the desert to change the mindset of many about it. When Henderson came back from the war, he began looking around for a new home for the magazine. He needed a site large enough that he could do all of his printing work in-house and provide housing for his employees.

He had some enticing offers from interests in Tucson but settled on a stretch of the California Desert he and business partner, J. Wilson McKenney, had originally selected for the magazine. It was a desert cove protected by the Santa Rosa Mountains. He purchased twenty acres for the magazine and two parcels for himself. His brother — Cliff Henderson, who was still in the service — had asked him to look around for possible locations for a post-war community that he wanted to build. Randall recommended the area where his building was. Cliff came out to take a look and went on to become the founding father of Palm Desert.

Henderson felt strongly about the “Desert Magazine” building. He wanted it built in the Pueblo Revival Style. In the 1947 issue of “Desert Magazine”, he stated that, “Pueblo design is one of the desert’s most important contributions to the cultural life of the Southwest.” He felt that the Pueblo style was the only type of architecture that was purely North American and not subject to European influence. Pueblo architecture features projecting roof beams (vigas), rounded corners and irregular parapets. He built just such a building in 1948 as designed by noted Palm Springs architects Williams, William & Williams.



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The building was 17,000 square-feet and housed not only the “Desert Magazine” but several other publishing and artistic enterprises, including the Smoketree School of Desert Art. The building was the site of many art shows and other community activities. The “Desert Magazine” site would be the home to many Palm Desert “firsts.” It was the first commercial building constructed on the first developed block of Palm Desert. It housed the city’s first printing company, bank, art gallery and post office.

The magazine ceased publishing in 1985, but the building survived relatively unchanged for years. It was eventually re-purposed to accommodate restaurants. The restaurants moved on to other sites and the “Desert Magazine” building sat empty. In 2012, the building’s then owner, Sam Rasmussen, a San Diego developer, applied to the city for permits to make architectural changes he felt would make the building more “leasable.” As reported by The Desert Sun, “Rasmussen wants to add a second patio dining area, stone-clad columns and stairs, and handrails to the front and east entrances, as well as add some windows and replace the wooden front doors with glass. The design also removes the dark wood post, or vigas, adorning the front of the building.”

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation protested the proposed changes. The Foundation argued that the “Desert Magazine” building was “the most historically important commercial building in all of Palm Desert” and would soon qualify as a historically significant building, protecting it from any architectural changes like those proposed by Rasmussen. The Mayor of Palm Desert delayed the vote to consider the Foundation’s recommendations, but the city council sided with the owner. The plans were approved and the changes were made. Today, the historic building once again houses restaurants.