

OUR CIVIC LEADERS MUST ACT TO PROTECT OUR SENSE OF PLACE

What is a sense of place?

It could be defined as a combination of characteristics that makes a place special and unique. Sense of place involves the human experience in a landscape, the local knowledge and folklore. Sense of place also grows from identifying oneself in relation to a particular piece of land on the surface of planet Earth.

My grandparents, Frank and Nancy Sinatra, chose Palm Springs as their place over 70 years ago. They came to the valley in 1939 just after they got married. My grandmother, now 98 years old, still owns a home here that she treasures. Of all the places on the planet Earth, my grandfather decided that this valley would be the place he called home for over 50 years.

In 1947, a young architect by the name of E. Stewart Williams persuaded my grandfather to build what is now considered one of the



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most iconic homes built in Southern California, Twin Palms. My grandfather became a convert to midcentury modern design, and all of his subsequent homes were designed and built in the same timeless style. If he were alive today, he would still be living here in the desert. He would be 100 years old by now, and I know he would be on the phone to every City Council member urging them to put a stop to a series of events that could be remembered as the beginning of the end of our sense of place.

Another way of looking at sense of place is contrast: places like strip malls have little sense of place because they more or less all look very similar, often have no name and no one who wants to spend any time there or write anything about them. Whereas places that exhibit a strong sense of place have an identity and character recognized immediately by a visitor and valued deeply by residents. I didn't come up with this theory, but to me it defines exactly why Palm Springs is an international destination, and once experienced, indeed becomes a place that people dream of living out their days.

Those who live in the Coachella Valley, have been forced to watch as structures we grew up with, structures that we considered to be works of art or as close to us as a friend be reduced to rubble. What is even more tragic is that the people who designed and built these

wonderful buildings and spaces have had to stand by and watch as pieces of their life's work are destroyed before their eyes.

This is why I implore the city councils across the valley to listen to those people who have come before you—citizens and visitors alike. Those people who have written letters and emails to you and to the local paper to speak their minds and to impart to you their heartfelt sentiments explaining why we are in grave danger of losing precisely what has taken years to build and cultivate—our unique and vital sense of place.

What has taken decades to build only takes minutes to destroy. We have seen this happen too many times presently, and I fear we will see it continue on into the future if we do not do something now to stop it.

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