



Palm Springs sunny, *sexy*, spectacular



From midcentury Hollywood haven to modernist architectural muse, Phoenix's trendy California neighbor continues to inspire. We take a look at the places, people and styles that make this desert oasis an enchanting escape any time of the year.

MID-MOD MECCA

"The architectural IQ in Palm Springs is high," notes Ron Marshall, board member of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. "A lot of people move here just for the architecture. Talk to them, and they'll rattle off the names of architects, homes and building complexes." Ask them where to find the best midcentury modern design, and chances are their answer will be their hometown.

The tiny desert destination, located about 100 miles south of Los Angeles, has the largest concentration of midcentury modern architecture in the country, according to the National Register of Historic Places. Phoenix comes in at No. 2. Both cities have attracted visionary architects who created sleek residences and innovative commercial structures that embraced the sunny environment.

In the 1950s and '60s, Palm Springs became the capital of cool, as Hollywood celebrities, seeking respite from the public eye, turned its stylish dwellings and lush landscapes into their private playground. Frank Sinatra was one of the first to purchase property in Palm Springs. In 1948, Ol' Blue Eyes commissioned E. Stewart Williams to craft an estate, complete with a piano-shaped pool.

A veritable who's-who of stars followed suit, including fellow Rat Pack members Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr., Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Kirk Douglas, Elizabeth Taylor, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, Clark Gable and Dinah Shore, among others.

Ordinary folk came, too, settling into neighborhoods designed by Joseph Eichler, Dan Palmer and William Krisel, Donald Wexler and Hugh Kaptur.

In 2006, sensing a growing interest in these unique abodes of yesteryear, landscape architect William Kopelk co-founded a three-day event, known then as Modernism Weekend. "We had just six activities and about 300 attendees," he recalls. "It started with some home tours, because that was the easiest thing to coordinate."

Over the years, the event quickly grew into an 11-day international celebration jam-packed with tours, seminars, films, car shows and cocktail parties. Now called Modernism Week, the February festival brings in more than 100,000 guests each year who visit many of the aforementioned celebrity homes and get rare glimpses inside some architectural masterpieces. Phoenix follows with its own event, Modern Phoenix, in March.

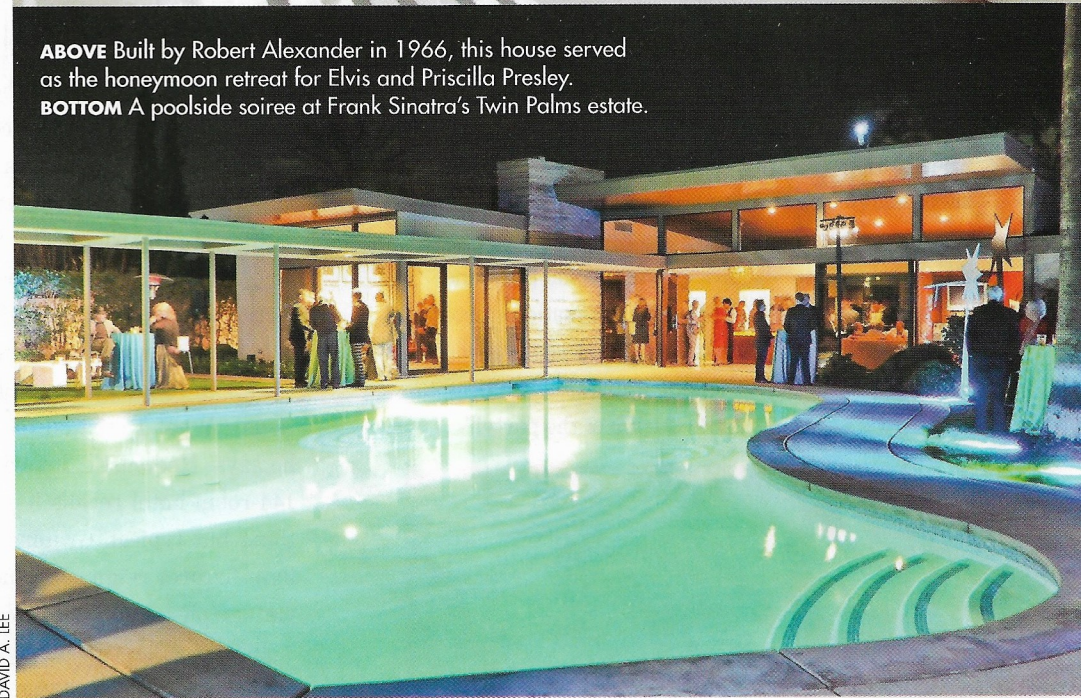
Two mainstays of Modernism Week are the Double Decker Architectural Bus Tour and the Retro Martini Party. "The bus tour offers an interesting overview of Palm Springs' architecture," says Kopelk. "You're able to see homes from a vantage point that you normally don't get to have." During its first few years, between six and 10 bus tours were offered; this past year, 84 were scheduled.

The Retro Martini Party is the signature event for the Preservation Foundation. Held at a home with a strong conservation story and often with a Hollywood name attached to it, it's an opportunity to break out your mid-century finery and socialize with like-minded aficionados. Tickets to this fashionable fete sell out within hours.

Also popular are the Signature Home Tour, a curated collection of seven exceptional houses, and the neighborhood tours,



ABOVE Built by Robert Alexander in 1966, this house served as the honeymoon retreat for Elvis and Priscilla Presley.
BOTTOM A poolside soiree at Frank Sinatra's Twin Palms estate.



DAVID A. LEE

where groups of neighbors come together and open their homes for viewing.

To keep up with the growing demand, Modernism Week recently began offering a Fall Preview weekend in October. "We like to let people know what we're working on and remind them to start thinking about planning their spring travel," explains Kopelk.

More than just house tours, Modernism Week is an opportunity to learn about the

designs and people who shaped and continue to shape the American landscape. "We really attempt to make it an educational experience," says Marshall. "It's like anything else. The more you understand something, the more you appreciate it. Then you start to recognize the differences between mediocre architecture and good architecture. And Palm Springs is full of really great examples." (modernismweek.com)