
Photographs by
Nate Abbott and
Michael Lewis
Illustration by
Justin Metz
Profile Illustrations
by Stuart Funk



Words by
Steven Biller, Derrik
J. Lang, Winston
Gieseke, Miranda
Caudell, Janice
Kleinschmidt,
Steve Siler, and
Greg Archer

Meet 50 people shaping everyday life in the Coachella Valley.

What do you call the people whose everyday work and decision-making impact your quality of life? *Palm Springs Life* editors grappled to answer this question, cringing at the hackneyed “influencers” and eschewing labels such as “powerful” and “elite.” But the 50 individuals we selected for what we call The Big List do, in fact, control different aspects of life in the Coachella Valley. Some of their decisions and actions have a seismic impact, while others persuade, educate, advocate, and otherwise

support initiatives to serve the greater good.

We looked at critical components of desert life, from clean air and water and the environment to healthcare, education, and tourism, the lifeblood of our valley’s economy. We also considered personalities in business, transportation, preservation, arts and culture, and philanthropy as well as leadership in the Native American and LGBTQ communities.

Trimming the list to 50 personalities was no easy task, especially when we had to cut

so many people we know and respect. But we had to draw the line somewhere. Among those we lopped off were elected officials and media personalities.

While you might be familiar with some of the people we’ve selected for this feature, others will be new. Regardless, they share the qualities we were looking for: They are influential and consequential — imagineers and decision-makers who love the Coachella Valley as much as we do.



TRACY DIETLIN

Founder | CV Music Awards

The undisputed champion of the local musician promotes and celebrates the desert scene through her publication, *CV Weekly*, and the CV Music Awards, which she launched to honor talent in 45 categories. — S.B.

PETER MORUZZI

Founder | Palm Springs
Modernism Committee

The architectural historian and author (*Palm Springs Holiday*, *Palm Springs Paradise*) works behind the scenes with city leaders on issues of preservation. He was a key figure in the saving of Kaptur Plaza and remains vocal about the restoration of downtown's Town & Country Center. — S.B.

YAYA ORTIZ AND RUBEN GONZALEZ

Co-founders | Culturas Music & Arts

This duo formed Culturas with friends, enlisted local artists to create a spectacular 1,000-foot mural depicting the history and struggles of the Mexican community in Coachella, and launched the Synergy Music & Arts Festival (Nov. 9), now in its eighth year. They also plan to open an arts center in the city's historic downtown. — S.B.

PAUL TOLLETT

President and CEO | Goldenvoice

The soft-spoken maestro of the Coachella Music and Arts Festival and its country music sibling Stagecoach not only reshaped the modern music fest, he spotted the importance of such acts as the Killers and Diplo long before they were headlining arenas or booking Vegas residencies. Each spring, his events draw almost a quarter-million people to the desert, creating an economic impact of more than \$494 million. Goldenvoice also helps support other local events, including Splash House and Modernism Week. — D.J.L.

TRACY CONRAD

Chief Operating Officer |
Smoke Tree Ranch

A former emergency room physician, Conrad converted a 1920s Mediterranean-style mansion into The Willows, an eight-bedroom

hotel; landed a top executive position at the historic Smoke Tree Ranch; and emerged as a champion of preservation in Palm Springs — a go-to resource and reliable consultant and adviser. She's also a founder of the Aluminaire Foundation's California chapter, formed to preserve and permanently relocate architect Albert Frey's aluminum-clad Aluminaire House — produced in 1931 with the Architectural League of New York for the annual Exposition of Architecture and Allied Arts in New York — to Palm Springs. — S.B.

GARY JOHNS

President | Palm Springs
Preservation Foundation

Known for his annual Modernism Week lec-

ture, "Lost, Saved & Endangered: Modernist Architecture in Palm Springs," this passionate volunteer presides over the foundation charged with identifying, researching, and writing nominations to preserve historic residential and commercial structures. — S.B.

ANDREA ZITTEL

Artist

Based at A-Z West — the Joshua Tree property that encompasses her home, studio, and semi-public art installation, *Planar Pavilions* — the artist (and co-organizer of High Desert Test Sites) garners international acclaim for her architecture- and design-inspired experiments in living that assert freedom through structure. — S.B.



PHILLIP K. SMITH III

Artist

The Palm Desert-based artist's massive and immersive installations for the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and Desert X — with their colorful LEDs and reflective mirrors — draw the eyes of the world to the Coachella Valley. — S.B.