

PALM SPRINGS' ARCHITECTURAL RENAISSANCE

MIDCENTURY TREASURES GET A 21ST-CENTURY MAKEOVER.

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Photos: Left: Jake Holt Photography; middle: Suzette Lipscomb; right: David A. Lee Photography



Midcentury modern architecture includes the Palm Springs Art Museum (center) and Coachella Valley Savings and Loan No. 1 (right)

While the desert remains the ultimate locale for rest and relaxation with world-class golf courses and swimming pool culture, a renaissance is happening in the heart of town. Designers are reimagining midcentury modern architecture, young entrepreneurs are building hip establishments and, subsequently, a new generation of weekenders and residents—well ahead of retirement age—are emerging in this iconic old city.

MODERN LOVE

The Modern Tour is the official tour of the Art and Architecture Museum and departs from the downtown location seven days a week. The tour guide is none other than Michael Stern, an expert in midcentury modern architecture and the author of Rizzoli's "Julius Shulman: Palm Springs." Stern is also the director and producer of the film "Julius Shulman: Desert Modern." A copy of the film is included with the tour.

An insider secret is that Stern will customize tours for groups, corporations or designers. "The tour is ever-changing and I customize the homes based on my connections," Stern says. "A lot of people request specific houses from the book and, when the owners are not in residence, I can access these very unique homes. As an add-on to the museum tour, we take guests up to the Albert Frey House, which is an incredible hillside residence with amazing views."

GOOD BONES

Palm Springs is renowned for its midcentury modern architecture, designed in the 1950s and 1960s by such prominent figures as Albert Frey and Donald Wexler. Perhaps no building is as famous as Richard Neutra's Kaufmann House (1946), a main attraction to the city's annual Modernism Week event. The city, established in the mid-1800s, is also known for its Spanish colonial architecture, much of which can be found in the historic Uptown Design District.

On this northern side of town, many homes have preserved their authentic aesthetic, while others, such as the popular Workshop Kitchen + Bar (in the building that housed the town's first movie theater) and Ernest Coffee and Bootlegger Tiki (in the old Don the Beachcomber building) have been re-envisioned with a sleek, modern twist imparted by their stylish, modern owners.

MODERN MAKEOVERS

Downtown, other midcentury treasures have also gotten a makeover. One such structure is the Palm Springs Art Museum's new Architecture and Design Center, Edward Harris Pavilion. Formerly the Santa Fe Federal Savings and Loan bank, built in 1961 by E. Stewart Williams, the 13,000-square-foot, steel-and-glass exhibit space boasts views of the San Jacinto Mountains as well as rotating exhibits and parties. Known by locals as "the A+D Center," the museum's satellite branch was created to celebrate both midcentury and contemporary design, says Sidney Williams, daughter-in-law of Williams and the center's curator during the time of the restoration. The goal of the project, she explains, was to restore the bank with modern amenities while still "retaining its original bones."

"MetaModern"—the current exhibit, running through Feb. 27, 2017—challenges the tenets of modernism head on. While you're at the Edward Harris Pavilion, make sure to visit The Bradford W. Bates Vault: The Museum Design Store, which curates a special selection of gifts related to architecture and design. In particular, there is an in-depth architectural book collection in honor of those who built prolifically in the Coachella Valley and elsewhere. For furniture enthusiasts, the vault is now the exclusive representative for the Neutra Furniture Collection by VS in the Inland Empire.

Step into most midcentury-era establishments in Palm Springs these days—from cafes and shops to museums and theaters—and you'll find a perfect mesh of past and present. ●