



City of Palm Desert Historic Context Statement & Reconnaissance Survey Findings

Prepared for:

City of Palm Desert

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Architectural
Resources Group

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Cover image: Ca. 1965 aerial photograph, Shadow Mountain Collection, Historical Society of Palm Desert

4.6 Context: Palm Desert Diversified Development, 1957-1966

Historical Background

While the foundations for Palm Desert had been laid by the Palm Desert Corporation (PDC) in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the built environment of the following decade saw immense growth and diversification. The PDC had largely created Palm Desert: they laid out its streets and infrastructure, attracted the first homeowners and businesses, and cultivated the community as a refined and seasonal destination. This, of course, emerged within the context of the Coachella Valley's expanding prominence as a region of leisure and affluence, particularly through trendsetting Palm Springs.

In its ambition, however, the PDC had struggled in two respects. The first was that it almost arrived too early to the resort boom that would remake the Coachella Valley. Construction on Palm Desert had begun in 1946 with the nation hardly out of the war (the PDC, in fact, had numerous delays and difficulties with war-related material shortages). While the population and economy of Southern California had already seen its great wartime expansion, the Coachella Valley's postwar epoch would not begin in earnest until the 1950s. Palm Desert was among a number of developments that emerged immediately after the war, but the encompassing and Mid-Century Modern development that the region was noted for (e.g., country clubs or the William Krisel-designed tracts built by the Alexander Construction Company) occurred later into the 1950s. The initial phase of Palm Desert, although it saw its fair share of Modernist development, was an early adopter of the postwar leisure model for which the Coachella Valley would become known. For this reason, the sale and development of Palm Desert's land was never as extraordinary as envisioned despite over a hundred homes being built.

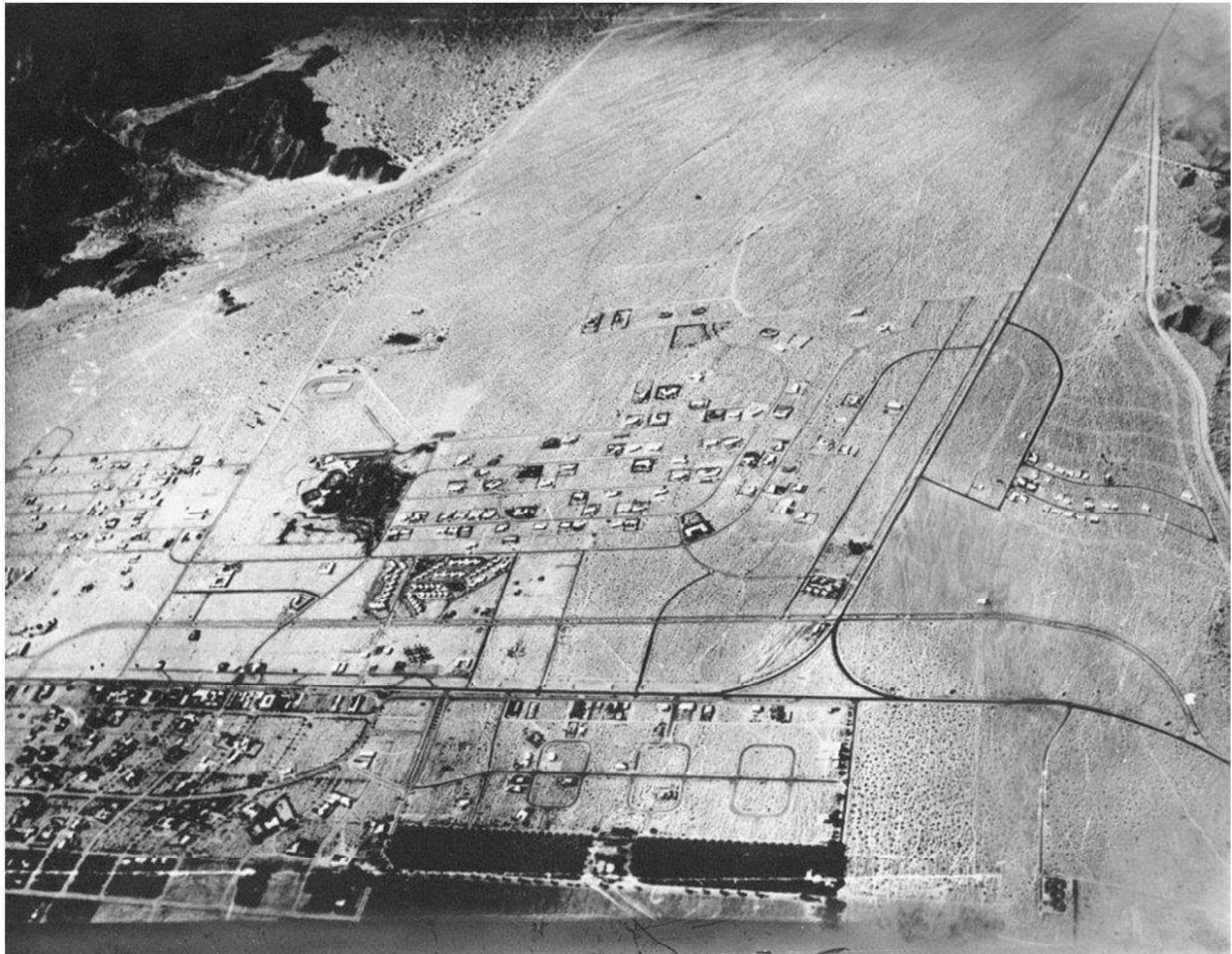
The second struggle that PDC faced was self-inflicted. In its efforts to cultivate a refined resort community, it had imposed a host of explicit and implicit restrictions, whether it be those defining the type and size of architecture, or the race and religious affiliations of its prospective residents. This fared well for attracting the overwhelming White, wealthy, and seasonal population the PDC so desired, but less for the creation of a "complete" community, as Randall Henderson had once posed the issue to his endeavoring brother Cliff.¹⁶⁸ Except for two small units of the PDC's land, almost the entirety of Palm Desert was dedicated to expensive seasonal homes. For this reason, the PDC was limited in who it could sell land to, and middle-class buyers were relegated to either the two affordable units which the PDC developed, or, increasingly, the subdivisions (e.g. Palm Village, Panorama Ranch) which surrounded the city. Once again, this meant that the PDC struggled to sell portions of its property, and it was unsuccessful in attracting a diverse or year-round population.

This all changed in 1956 when the PDC liquidated its landholdings to a consortium that consisted of the Baldwin Hills Sales Company (led by A. Ronald Button, the developer behind Rancho Mirage) and the Home Savings and Loan Association (led by famed Los Angeles developer-banker Howard Ahmanson). The sale included all the PDC's unsold lots and land but did not include the Shadow Mountain Club (which had been sold three years prior) or the properties owned solely by PDC's president Cliff Henderson, which consisted of the Firecliff Lodge, various other buildings, and a selection of lucratively sited parcels.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Luke Leuschner, "Palm Desert: A Sellable Dream on Forsaken Land, Part I," *The Hourglass*, Fall 2021.

¹⁶⁹ "Three Villagers Instrumental in Record Land Sale," *Desert Sun*, September 3, 1956.

The Palm Desert Sales Company (PDSC) was the entity created by Button and Ahmanson to sell the recently acquired property. Unlike the PDC, the PDSC tolerated greater and more diverse development on its land in its efforts to recoup its initial investment. Whereas the PDC had once turned down a small tract of Mid-Century Modern homes for fears of homogeneity, the PDSC welcomed large-scale condominium developments. (In fact, more than once Cliff Henderson publicly criticized the PDSC's practices, and at one point they sued him over a very public conflict arising from their handling of El Paseo's medians.¹⁷⁰)



An aerial of Palm Desert taken in the early-to-mid 1950s, just prior to the liquidation of the Palm Desert Corporation. (Historical Society of Palm Desert)

Despite the PDSC's leniency, the overall orientation of Palm Desert was still a high-class resort community. The PDC had established it as such and it remained one, even if its population diversified and a larger portion became year-round. Development in the surrounding communities (particularly Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells) was similarly oriented around this model. Integral to the maintenance of this model were two typologies that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s: the condominium and the country

¹⁷⁰ Gene Johnson, "P.D. Meet Brings New Association," *Desert Sun*, March 12, 1962.

club.¹⁷¹ The condominium offered good design by any one of the region’s noted Modernists and convenience at an affordable price. The country club, with its provision of recreational facilities (golf, tennis, etc.) and estate lots, perpetuated and expanded the high-class leisure model. And in numerous cases – particularly in Palm Desert – the combination of the two was even more lucrative.

The PDC had laid the foundations for Palm Desert to grow, but with the combination of PDSC’s looser guidelines and a fruitful economic context, the community achieved its greatest period of development. In 1956, Palm Desert had one church, but by the end of the 1960s, it had nearly ten. Over a dozen subdivisions spawned in the undeveloped land bordering Palm Desert. Dozens of condominium developments and spec-built tracts filled in interior land, the commercial frontage on Highway 111 grew, and for the first time, development began along El Paseo.

New subdivisions included Silver Spur Ranch, Palm Desert Highlands, Shadow Village, and Palm City (Palm Desert Country Club). Moreover, these new subdivisions diversified the types of residents that lived in Palm Desert. Whereas the residents of the PDC era had been wealthier individuals seeking a weekend retreat, a growing proportion of the population consisted of the middle class, retirees, and even families. Palm Desert’s seasonal character did not necessarily change overall, but it was extended to a larger audience. At the same time, it came to acquire a small but decent population of families with such developments as Shadow Village(Palm Desert Dreamhomes) and Palm Desert Country Club.

These new subdivisions also increased the boundaries of Palm Desert, which would not officially incorporate as a city until 1973. The land south of Highway 111 had been mostly developed by the PDC, though new subdivisions like Silver Spur Ranch, Palm Desert Highlands, Highland Palms Estates, Shadow Hills Estates, and Deep Canyon Ranch consumed most of the remaining land that was owned by neither the PDC or the PDSC, and infill development (e.g., Sandpiper) filled out the larger patches of land within the PDC’s former subdivision. Increasingly, with subdivisions like Shadow Village, Halecrest Country Club Village, and Palm City (Palm Desert Country Club), development was also occurring in the vast and undeveloped acreage north of Highway 111, and Palm Desert’s boundaries (still unofficial) grew.

While the PDC and a few of its allied builders (e.g., R.P. Shea) and architects (e.g., Walter S. White) had held a virtual monopoly over community’s construction and design, the field of actors widened during this period. White moved away in the late 1950s, and architects and designers such as John Outcault, Charles W. Doty, Harold Bissner, Robert Pitchford, John P. Moyer, and Robert Ricciardi were residents and practitioners in Palm Desert, designing in a preferred Mid-Century Modern styles. Other developers, like Monte Wenck, Adrian Schwilck, Charles White, Hal Kapp, and Ted Smith entered the scene, developing a range of buildings from individual spec homes to entire subdivisions. And at the same time, as Palm Desert became more established, capital was flowing in from developers across a broader region, many of whom brought in their own architects.

More than some of this growth can be attributed to the context of the Coachella Valley, which was undergoing its greatest phase of postwar development as far as the Salton Sea. This phase, beginning in the mid-1950s and lasting until the late 1960s, was marketed towards the middle and upper-middle class with mass-produced Mid-Century Modern tracts and communities across the Coachella Valley. With its

¹⁷¹ Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*, 154-157.

mid-valley location, Palm Desert was well situated to capitalize on this growth, and it certainly did. Advertisements for the developments and businesses touted Palm Desert's proximity to both ends of the Coachella Valley, and it was quite literally in the center of regional growth. This centrality helps to explain the development of Palm Desert's new businesses and subdivisions, but it was particularly integral to the establishment of civic amenities like the College of the Desert, the Palm Desert Library, additional schools, and any number of its new churches. Palm Desert entered the 1950s as a small but established resort city and left the 1960s as a formidable, mid-valley presence.

Theme: Residential Development, 1957-1966

Perhaps nothing expanded or diversified as much in Palm Desert in the 1950s and 60s than its residential development. Beginning with the liquidation of the Palm Desert Corporation (PDC) in 1956, the new epoch of development was marked with laxer architectural restrictions, which made way for a greater variety of housing typologies. Whereas the vast majority of residential development in the preceding period had primarily been custom-built single-family homes – whether estate-sized or small weekend retreats – this period saw the development of condominiums, large-scale tracts, and increasingly novel housing types at multiple levels of affordability. This new housing facilitated a large increase and socioeconomic diversification of Palm Desert's population, thereby catalyzing development in all other sectors as well.

While the shift in residential development can be partially attributed to the sale of the PDC itself and the resultant managerial shift, perhaps the most significant quantity of residential development occurred on land that was never owned by the PDC. In many instances, these subdivisions were parasitic to those plotted by the PDC, as they were connected to streets and utilities initially laid out by the PDC and benefitted from the image it had produced. During the bulk of PDC's tenure, Panorama Ranch had been the only new subdivision that was realized directly adjacent to their land, while Palm Village and Palm Dell Estates were previously existent or developed at the same time. By the middle of the 1950s, however, Palm Desert had grown enough in size and prominence, and even if it was not as much as the PDC intended, it was able to attract development by outside interests. There was significant land available north of Highway 111, but also various parcels south of Highway 111, particularly those on the southernmost portion of the slope (closer to Deep Canyon) which had never been acquired by the PDC.

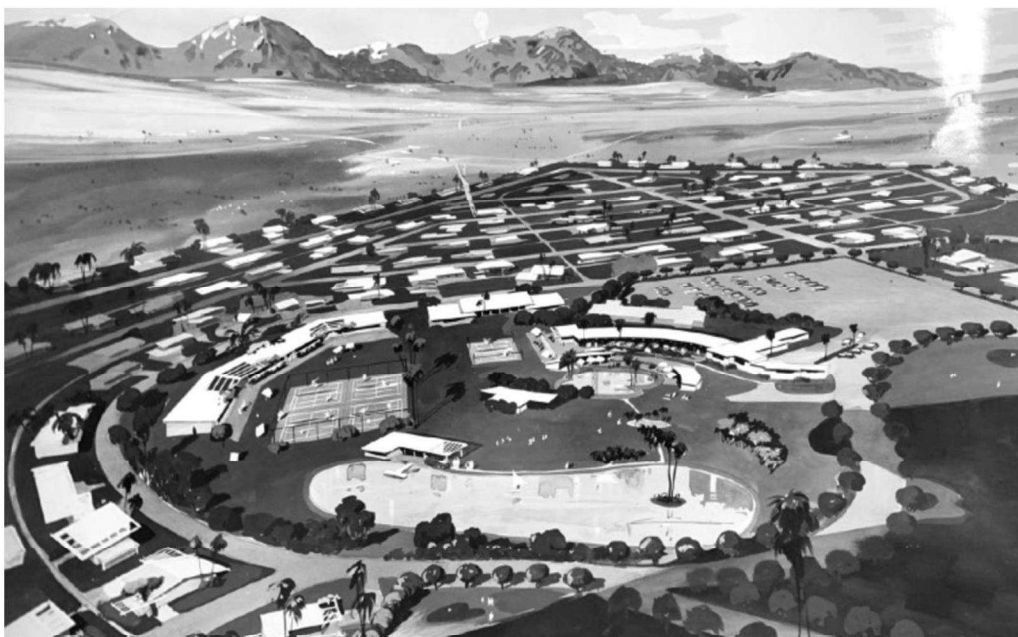
Around the time the PDC was undergoing discussions for the liquidation of their land, work was underway for such subdivisions as Shadow Mountain Park (1954), Palm Vista (1955), Shadow Hills Estates (1956), Silver Spur Ranch (1956), Palm Desert Highlands (1957), and Desert Garden Homesites (1957). Nearly all of these subdivisions were developed by people unaffiliated with the PDC on peripheral land, but many of the developers behind them would become distinct and recurring figures in Palm Desert's development.

The first of these, Shadow Mountain Park, was the result of the sale of the Shadow Mountain Club in 1953 to a consortium of its members.¹⁷² The new owners sought to revamp and redevelop the club, including a small subdivision on a parcel of land north of the club's grounds that faced the Shadow Mountain Lake. Designed by PDC affiliate and landscape architect Tommy Tomson, the Shadow Mountain Park subdivision (which was essentially only two curving streets) largely followed the PDC model. Lots

¹⁷² "Palm Desert Club Sold to Members," *Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1953.

were offered to members of the Shadow Mountain Club and homes were expected to be custom-built and designed in a suggested “modern” Ranch style. Only a handful of homes were built in the first years of the subdivision’s existence, but they were larger Mid Century Modern homes that faced the Shadow Mountain Club grounds. These included the Robert Overpeck residence designed by Warren Frazier Overpeck (1957, CoPD Historic Landmark), the Jack Blair residence (1957) and George Walling residence (1956), both designed by John P. Moyer.¹⁷³

While the PDC had never really developed and sold housing (except for the Sun Lodges), beginning in the 1950s, many developers would also build spec houses as part of their subdivision in addition to offering the sale of individual lots. The Palm Desert Highlands subdivision, founded in 1957 by prominent realtors Ted Smith and Hal Kapp, was one such instance.¹⁷⁴ The subdivision, which was a small set of streets on the southernmost portion of Palm Desert’s slope, was intended to be an upper-class development with commanding views and estate-sized lots. The architect John P. Moyer was brought on to design four houses by an affiliate of Smith and Kapp, which were featured in all the development’s advertising and ultimately sold for a profit.¹⁷⁵



Tommy Tomson’s rendering of the Shadow Mountain Park neighborhood. (Clifford Henderson Collection, HSPD)

In the immediate vicinity of Palm Desert Highlands was Silver Spur Ranch, another subdivision which exemplified the new era of development. Founded by the couple Adrian and Mercedes Schwilck in 1956, Silver Spur Ranch was a large project (landholdings totaled around 600 acres at one point) on the southernmost slope, offering lots priced and sized at multiple levels. The Schwilcks (and successive developers) developed dozens of houses and duplexes on the property in multiple phases, beginning in 1957 and continuing into the 1960s. These homes consisted of a few models designed in a Mid-Century

¹⁷³ Luke Leuschner, *Landmark Nomination for the Robert K. Overpeck Residence*, January 22, 2022.

¹⁷⁴ “Palm Desert Highlands Proves Slogan of Palm Desert,” *Desert Sun*, March 15, 1958.

¹⁷⁵ [Advertisement for Palm Desert Highlands], *Desert Sun*, April 19, 1958.

Modern and Ranch style, and were sold to a variety of retirees, seasonal residents, and even families. In the early 1960s, after a period of absence which involved re-purchasing their stake in Silver Spur Ranch, the Schwilcks developed dozens of Mid-Century Modern homes and duplexes designed by architect Richard Harrison, particularly on the street Feather Trail.¹⁷⁶

The development of Silver Spur Ranch and other subdivisions of the period was a combination of development initiated by the primary developer(s), affiliated spec builders, and individual homeowners. Other investors and affiliates of Silver Spur Ranch developed their own sets of spec homes, including a selection of Ranch homes designed by architect Earl Kaltenbach in 1957, a set of Mid-Century Modern homes designed by architect William Krisel between 1960 and 1961, and even a pair of Donald Wexler-designed homes also built in 1960. At the same time, individual lots (of which there were many) were sold to prospective homeowners, resulting in such notable homes as the Paulette Johnson house designed by Walter S. White (1958) and the Thomas Hearn house designed by Cliff May (1962). Similarly, the singer Bing Crosby was sold a parcel of land on the uppermost portion of Silver Spur Ranch's landholdings (which were only partially developed) where he built a Mid-Century Modern Ranch house by architect Howard Lapham (1958, extensively altered), which was later noted for hosting John F. Kennedy multiple times during his presidency.¹⁷⁷



A view of the sales office and entrance to Silver Spur Ranch, including the pink Jeep in which sales agents drove prospective buyers around the development. (Historical Society of Palm Desert)

¹⁷⁶ Tracy Conrad, "A Twisty, Unlikely Tale of Three Palm Desert Characters Who Changed the City Forever," *Desert Sun*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.desertsun.com/story/life/2021/01/24/history-twisty-tale-three-palm-desert-men-who-changed-city-forever/6689483002/>.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Hartmann, "Red Tide Wanes, Kennedy Asserts," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1962.

Another small subdivision of the period, owned and immediately developed by Eugene Roberts of Roberts Construction Inc, was the Desert Garden Homesites. Located on land that was originally part of the Desert Magazine’s landholdings, the subdivision consisted of a single roundabout street on which Roberts developed ten Mid-Century Modern homes designed by local architect John Outcault.¹⁷⁸ Outcault also designed and built his family home on the subdivision in which he lived for a decade.¹⁷⁹

Being developed at the same time was the adjacent Shadow Hills Estates (1956), a subdivision developed by Monte Wenck through the 1950s and 60s.¹⁸⁰ Wenck and his associates laid out the subdivision directly adjacent to the former Panorama Ranch (which had also been revamped and expanded during the period into the Palm Desert Estates), and built well over a hundred Mid-Century Modern houses, duplexes, and apartment buildings. Many of these homes and units (existing in varying states of alteration) are attributed to Charles W. Doty, a local architect who had his start in the offices of Walter S. White.¹⁸¹ Because they were produced at a larger scale and in varying sizes, and proximate to schools, these homes attracted a variety of homeowners, not just the wealthy seasonal residents that had been typical of the PDC era.

While numerous small subdivisions (including those mentioned above) emerged on land within or immediately adjacent to the boundaries of Palm Desert as established by the PDC, other subdivisions were much larger in size and developed beyond the initial boundaries of the community. These were mass-produced tracts, typically in a basic Mid-Century Modern style, and more importantly, they catered to entirely different demographics. The first of these was Shadow Village, a large-scale development conceived by the national housing developer Sproul Homes Inc on a parcel north of Palm Desert that was formerly agricultural.¹⁸² Previously, the only subdivision that had been built in the area was a small, later unit of Palm Village.

A series of sweeping streets, Sproul built around sixty homes (of a planned 400) that were targeted to a demographic of nuclear families. Prices for a brand-new house began at just \$16,750 and could be financed by affordable FHA loans, and open houses featured free balloons and ice cream for the children of potential buyers. Shadow Village was ultimately sold halfway through its development, at which point it was built out in the late 1950s and early 1960s with another series of affordable homes known as the California Dream Homes.¹⁸³ Most consequentially, Shadow Village introduced a larger year-round

¹⁷⁸ “Desert Gardens Set to Open,” *Desert Sun*, February 6, 1959.

¹⁷⁹ “John Outcault – Leading the Way,” *Palm Desert Post*, July 15, 1965.

¹⁸⁰ [Advertisement for Shadow Hills Estates], *Palm Springs Life Annual Pictorial*, 1959; Helen Anderson, “Palm Desert,” *Desert Sun*, September 27, 1954.

¹⁸¹ [Advertisement for Shadow Hills Estates model home], *Desert Sun*, March 16, 1956. Doty designed an initial model home at the corner of Deep Canyon Road and Peppertree Drive that was built in 1956. Although his involvement in future homes is not documented, the homes that Wenck and others built in Shadow Hills are typical of his work, and many of them follow the same design/floor plan as the model home Doty is known to have designed. He also partnered with Wenck on a variety of other projects in Palm Desert. Further documentation is needed to understand the full scope of his involvement, as it appears that architect Richard Dorman may have also been involved, but it is clear that Doty was associated with Wenck.

¹⁸² “Shadow Village Project Starts,” *Desert Sun*, May 2, 1959.

¹⁸³ “Dream Homes Buys Shadow Village Lots,” *Desert Sun*, May 31, 1960; “California Dream Homes Starts P.D. Development,” *Desert Sun* August 19, 1960. Because the California Dream Homes developer had a concurrent

population to Palm Desert, and many of the homes were in fact occupied by young families. The provision of families also aided in the establishment of public schools (Palm Desert Middle School and Abraham Lincoln Elementary School) on adjacent land.

Much more dramatic than Shadow Village was the development originally conceived as Palm City (1960) by developers Nel Severin and H. Marshall Secrest, who purchased over 550 acres of empty desert land far to the east of Palm Desert, straddling the border of La Quinta along Washington Avenue. Palm City was envisioned to be a self-sufficient community unassociated with another community, much like what the PDC had done with Palm Desert. Plans called for a development of upwards of 1,800 homes and apartments to accommodate a population of 4,000, complete with a shopping and health center, recreational facilities, and a golf course.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, Palm City was intended to be a retirement community, upheld by an age requirement. While retirees had previously accounted for some of Palm Desert's population, many of them were diffused throughout a larger seasonal community and hadn't previously been concentrated in a purpose-built neighborhood like Palm City.

Palm City homes were designed in nineteen models, many of which had Ranch, Polynesian, and other exotic influences, and a complex of apartment buildings was also developed.¹⁸⁵ The developers succeeded in building the first unit of 450 homes, a portion of the second unit of another 450+ homes, a shopping center, various recreation buildings, and a cooperative apartment complex before the endeavor failed in 1963, at which point it was sold to another set of investors.¹⁸⁶ The new owners renamed the development Palm Desert Country Club (formally associating it with Palm Desert), laid the streets for the third unit, dropped the minimum age requirements, and made general improvements. While the majority of the neighborhood's residents were still retirees, an increasing number of families moved into the affordable homes. While Palm Desert had always been a seasonal community, neighborhoods like Shadow Village (Palm Desert Dream Homes) and Palm City (Palm Desert Country Club) diversified its population, attracting a more middle-class and year-round clientele of families and retirees alike.

California Dream Homes development in Palm Springs, the two were commonly referred to as Palm Desert Dream Homes and Palm Springs Dream Homes, respectively.

¹⁸⁴ Jack Davis, "City of 4,000 Due in Year," *Desert Sun*, February 28, 1961.

¹⁸⁵ Brochures for Palm City and Palm City Cooperative Apartments, ca. 1961, Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives.

¹⁸⁶ "Palm City to Change Image," *Palm Desert Post*, January 6, 1964.



An aerial of Palm City [Palm Desert Country Club] shortly after the first phases of its development. (Shadow Mountain Collection, Historical Society of Palm Desert)

Similar in ambition and scope to Palm City was the development Halecrest Country Club Village. Initially conceptualized in 1959 as a \$60 million retirement development containing hundreds of homes, a shopping center, hotel, eighteen-hole golf course, and even a landing strip, the project's ambitions were reduced even before ground was broken in 1960.¹⁸⁷ The developers, a partnership between Los Angeles developers Golconda Development Company and Hale Company, ultimately consisted of nine groupings of around a dozen homes, each with a shared pool area. The homes were small single-family homes designed in a simplified Mid-Century Modern style typical of tract development and were primarily sold to young families. Halecrest Country Club Village was located slightly further north of Shadow Village alongside Cook Street, in an area covered in sand dunes and date farms. A testament to the immense development happening in the postwar period, in 1962, a photograph of Halecrest emerging from a foreground of sand dunes was featured on the cover of Life Magazine for a story on "Opening Up the Desert for Living."

Residential development within the historic boundaries of Palm Desert – PDC-owned land and Palm Village – also continued apace. The Palm Desert Sales Company (PDSC) initiated their own sales campaign to liquidate the PDC's residual land, selling individual lots but also larger parcels. Whereas the PDC had emphasized the construction of custom-built homes by individual homeowners (whether estate-sized or not), the new wave of infill development was led by spec builders who purchased lots and developed a series of houses, often of the same model or designed by the same architect.

¹⁸⁷ "Officials Reveal Plans for Senior Citizens Project," *Desert Sun*, July 28, 1959.



A view of Palm Village from the 1960s, showing some of the smaller, more affordable single-family homes for which it became known. (Historical Society of Palm Desert)

Monte Wenck, who had developed Shadow Hills Estates, and his associate M.L. Beard built not only Shadow Hills Estates, but also purchased nearly all the residual lots within the former Panorama Ranch and built many of the same models that had built in Shadow Hills Estates. Similarly, the Palm Springs-based developer J.C. Dunas built what he labeled the “Purple Hills Estates.” Although named as if they were their own subdivision, Dunas built dozens of homes designed by the notable architect Charles DuBois on lots he had purchased from the PDSC in the early- and mid-1960s.¹⁸⁸ They were not separated from surrounding houses like most “estates” might have been but were mixed in with numerous custom homes built under PDC’s tenure. Most of them, however, can be found on the streets of Salt Cedar, Goldflower, Tamarisk, and Bursera, which were streets plotted but not developed by the PDC.

Residential infill development was also prevalent in the former Palm Village during this time. With the construction of surrounding family-oriented neighborhoods and the College of the Desert, these homes were typically single-family, designed in a simplified Mid-Century Modern style, and built by a wide selection of speculative builder-developer types. One such example was Walter White’s design for Charles Gibbs of low-cost single-family housing, of which only two were built (significantly altered). Small apartment complexes and duplexes were also prevalent infill developments in Palm Village.

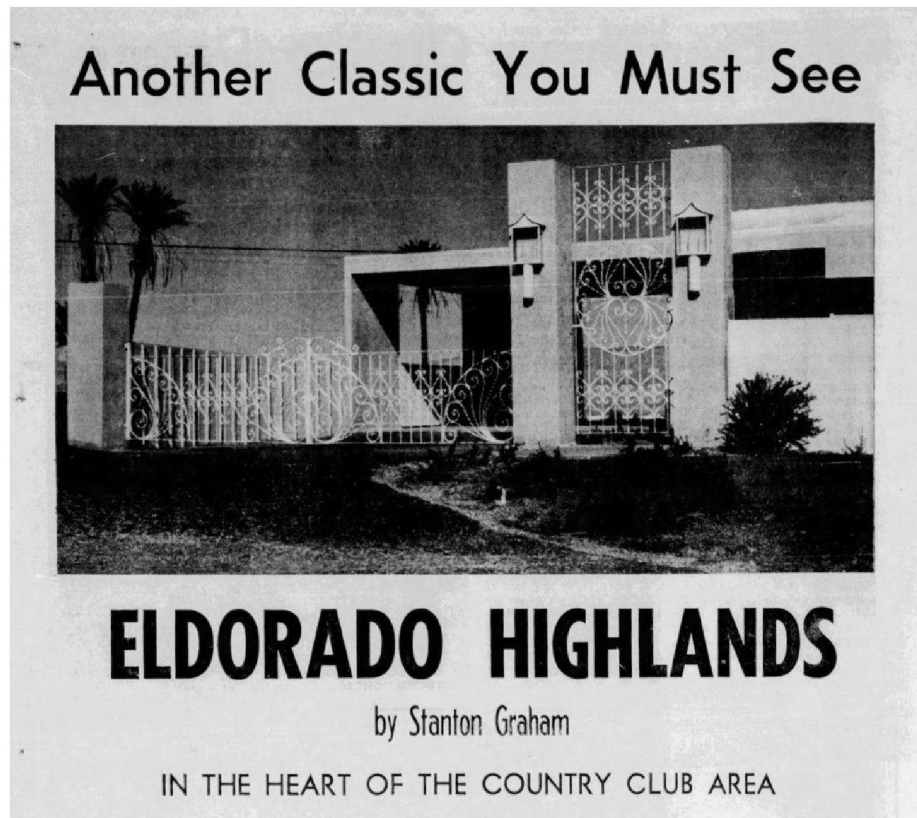
¹⁸⁸ [Illustration of Purple Hills Estates home], *Desert Sun*, October 1, 1965.

The design of the Purple Hills Estates homes by Charles DuBois also embodied a general shift that residential architecture in the Coachella Valley underwent in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although mostly still classified under the large umbrella of Mid-Century Modern, the architecture of the period began to move away from the design of the 1940s and early 1950s which was either a refined and cleaner Modernism, or a Modernism that was hybridized with the Ranch style (as was the case with the PDC’s “modern ranch” requirements). Instead, this next period of Mid-Century Modernism was noted for its integration of exotic or historicized elements, with themes that ranged from Polynesian to Grecian. DuBois, for example, designed a “Parthenon” model for the Purple Hills Estates, as well as other designs that were ambiguously French and Italian. Whereas the first phase of Mid-Century Modernism was noted for its clean lines and spans of glass, the late 1950s and 1960s was the era of breezeblock, swag lights, and otherwise fantastical theming.

Similar to the design of Purple Hills Estates were three contemporary tracts, Desert Stars (1961), Eldorado Highlands (1963), and Highland Palms Estates (1964). All three tracts were built on or directly adjacent to Palm Desert Highlands (1957), which had hardly any further development since the handful of spec homes built at its inception. In 1963, the developer Stanton Graham purchased an entire empty street, Homestead Rd., within the former Palm Desert Highlands and built twenty homes. The homes were marketed as luxury single-family homes and designed by Graham in a variety of eclectic styles that included “Greek, Roman, Mediterranean, Oriental, or Spanish” models, in addition to typical Mid-Century Modern designs.¹⁸⁹ On a small tract next to Eldorado Highlands, the developer Charles White had built Desert Stars (1961), which consisted of twenty-two homes designed by architect Charles W. Doty in a basic Mid-Century Modern style. With another developer, White expanded the subdivision with sixteen more homes in 1964 (following the eclectic designs of Eldorado Highlands), this time known as Highland Palms Estates.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ “Subdivision Departs from Usual Palm Grove,” *Desert Sun*, December 14, 1963.

¹⁹⁰ Desert Stars brochure, ca. 1961, Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives; “Highland Palms Estates Presents Unique Desert Dwellings with Preview Opening and Party Today,” *Desert Sun*, July 24, 1964.



An advertisement for Stanton Graham's Eldorado Highlands. (Desert Sun)

In some cases, the architects themselves acted as spec builders, designing sets of homes or scattered homes which were then sold for a profit. One such local architect-developer was John P. Moyer, who created the El Toro Development Company under which he bought lots across Palm Desert and developed numerous homes in a Mid-Century Modern style. The design-build firm Patten & Wild was led by Ross Patten (who acted as the designer) and Duke Wild (who acted as the builder), and developed dozens of homes across Palm Desert, often for small-time developers, but also to sell for their own profit. The Desert Lily Estates (1965), which was a small subdivision begun on land purchased from the PDSC in the Purple Hills Estates area, consisted of estate-sized homes that each had the appearance of a custom design and were designed/built by Patten & Wild.¹⁹¹ They, along with around a dozen homes built on Willow Street, were financed by a small developer named L. W. Thompson, who had joined in with others in filling out empty lots in Palm Desert with attractive, sellable homes.

Equally successful as single-family infill development was the massive development of condominiums. While the condominium was almost ubiquitous by the end of the 1960s, only ten years prior it was a completely novel and untested concept. The earliest versions were marketed as "co-operative apartments," and some of the first and most popular of these were in Palm Desert. As the mid-century progressed, the condominium proposed an enticing model for the Coachella Valley's developers: they were ideal for seasonal residents who did not want the upkeep of a single-family house, they were

¹⁹¹ Historic building permits for Willow Street, Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives.

cheaper to build and could be marketed to a larger demographic, and with a talented architect, they could be sold as impressive works of architecture without the commanding price tag.

The Sun Lodges (no longer existent) developed by the PDC were essentially condominiums with shared amenities and individual ownership, but it was the Sandpiper that began this epoch of residential development in earnest. In 1958, the developer George Holstein purchased a fifty-acre parcel of formerly PDC-owned land at the base of Highway 74 along El Paseo and hired the iconic firm Palmer & Krisel (led by William Krisel) to conceive of a condominium development.¹⁹² Krisel designed “circles” of condominiums, in which triplex (and duplex) structures encircled a common area with a pool, barbeque area, lawn, and landscaping. The condominiums themselves were of utmost Mid-Century Modern design, featuring clerestory windows, private atriums, and a diverse selection of breezeblock and shadowblock. The site planning was tiered to preserve mountain views, and all the units faced towards the interior of their respective circle.

Sandpiper was a massive success for Holstein and ultimately developed in multiple phases between 1958 and 1969, eventually consisting of eighteen circles (multiple circles have been locally designated). It was immediately seen as a new precedent for resort community development, especially within the Coachella Valley, and imitations of its design – well-designed circles of condominiums encircling a pool – became countless. Upon the completion of the first circles in 1958 and 1959, Sandpiper was photographed by famed photographer Julius Shulman and featured in numerous national architecture publications. Whereas the previous era of Palm Desert had been defined by the well-designed single-family house, this phase was particularly noted for the well-designed condominium.



Julius Shulman’s photographs of Sandpiper taken at various stages in its development. (Julius Shulman Collection, Getty Research Institute)

¹⁹² Lydia Kremer, “Sandpiper Condominiums Are a Reminder of Modernism’s Influence in Palm Desert,” *Palm Springs Life*, February 20, 2015, <https://www.palmspringslife.com/sandpiper-condominiums-are-reminder-of-modernisms-influence-in-palm-desert/>.

Following almost immediately in the footsteps of Sandpiper were a series of condominium developments designed (and in some cases developed) by the architect Harold Bissner. Shortly after the opening of the first Sandpiper units, Bissner designed the Sands and Shadows condominiums (1959) located on a parcel neighboring Sandpiper on Highway 74, for the Pasadena-based developer Neill Davis.¹⁹³ Like Sandpiper, one-story Mid-Century Modern condominiums encircled a central pool area, and marketing for the units emphasized the high design and lack of maintenance that accompanied ownership. Once again successful, a second unit of Sands of Shadows was built in 1963, this time designed by Bissner in partnership with a younger designer named Robert Pitchford. Bissner & Pitchford, established in 1959, went on to design around half a dozen condominium and apartment developments in Palm Desert, all located within existing neighborhoods on formerly undeveloped parcels, including the Village Green (1961) and Mountain Shadows (1963).¹⁹⁴

Condominium developments proliferated across the board. The former president of the PDC, Cliff Henderson, even joined in on the growing trend with his Firecliff Colony, which was to be a large set of duplex condominiums designed in a Mid-Century Modern style by Los Angeles architect Warren Frazier Overpeck. Although only one duplex was ultimately built, Henderson repurposed the land for the Shadowcliff Apartments in 1965, which were a set of six low-slung apartments (later turned into condominiums) designed by architect John Outcalt and landscaped by Tommy Tomson.¹⁹⁵



The Shadowcliff Apartments designed by John Outcalt and landscaped by Tommy Tomson. (Clifford Henderson Collection, Historical Society of Palm Desert)

¹⁹³ "Sand and Shadow Work Under Way," *Desert Sun*, September 11, 1959.

¹⁹⁴ "Mountain Shadows," *Desert Sun*, December 13, 1963; [Advertisement for Village Green], *Desert Sun*, March 16, 1961.

¹⁹⁵ Blueprints and sales brochures for Shadowcliff and Firecliff Colony, 1950s-60s, Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives.

Similarly formative during this period as the condominium was the introduction of the country club typology to the Coachella Valley. The first of its sort was the Thunderbird Country Club, which opened in 1956 to great success and was quickly emulated. Although the institution of the country club had existed for some time (e.g., Shadow Mountain Club, Palm Springs Tennis Club, etc.), it had never been combined with an integrated residential component.¹⁹⁶ In Thunderbird, estate-sized homesites were placed directly on golf fairways, which quickly filled up with custom-built homes by the area's greatest architects. In the years immediately following, developers (including those behind Thunderbird) rushed to build country clubs in the Coachella Valley including Eldorado Country Club, Tamarisk Country Club, and La Quinta Country Club. They combined the amenity, recreation, and society of the club with the high-class residential model that the Coachella Valley was known for.

The first country club of the sort to be developed in Palm Desert was the Shadow Mountain Golf Course which opened in 1959 on a parcel of land directly adjacent to the namesake club. The golf course itself was designed in consultation with celebrity golfer Gene Sarazen, and a series of lots were sited to face it. One set of these lots was the Shadow Mountain Golf Estates, which were larger lots tailored to custom-built homes. Only a handful of homes were built in the Estates, including three Mid-Century Modern homes built in 1964-65 by Patten & Wild, designed in consultation with architect Christer Barlund.¹⁹⁷

The greatest and most profitable success, however, was the combination of the two prevailing models of the period: the condominium *and* the country club. In 1961, the developer Adrian Schwilck (from Silver Spur Ranch) purchased a large quantity of the residential lots facing the Shadow Mountain Golf Club and developed the Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages, which consisted of over fifty condominium units designed by modern architect Richard Harrison of Wexler & Harrison.¹⁹⁸ Initially drawing the ire of the residents of the surrounding Shadow Mountain Estates neighborhood, where the best and most expensive single-family houses had been built, the cottages quickly sold out and were expanded in multiple phases over the following years.

On another corner of the Shadow Mountain Golf Course, the developer Monte Wenck built his own set of condominiums (frequently confused with the Fairway Cottages) named the Fairview Cottages and designed by Los Angeles architect Richard Dorman in 1963.¹⁹⁹ (Wenck initially had much grander plans to develop out the Shadow Mountain Club which he had purchased in 1965 and these condominiums were to be one part of a greater expansion.) And on the opposite side of the golf course, on one of the remaining parcels, a developer built the Bissner & Pitchford-designed Mountain Shadows.

In new residential developments across Palm Desert, golf courses and condominiums were major sellers. When the developer of the Shadow Mountain Fairway cottages, Adrian Schwilck, repurchased his stake in Silver Spur Ranch with the proceeds from the cottages, he filled out entire portions of the neighborhood with more condominiums facing a small golf course.²⁰⁰ Similarly, new residential developments like Palm

¹⁹⁶ Stanley Fonseca, "Whiteness on the Green: Golf, the Coachella Valley, and the Leisure-Industrial Complex," *Pacific Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (2021): 448-474.

¹⁹⁷ [Advertisement for Patten & Wild-built homes], *Desert Sun*, August 4, 1965.

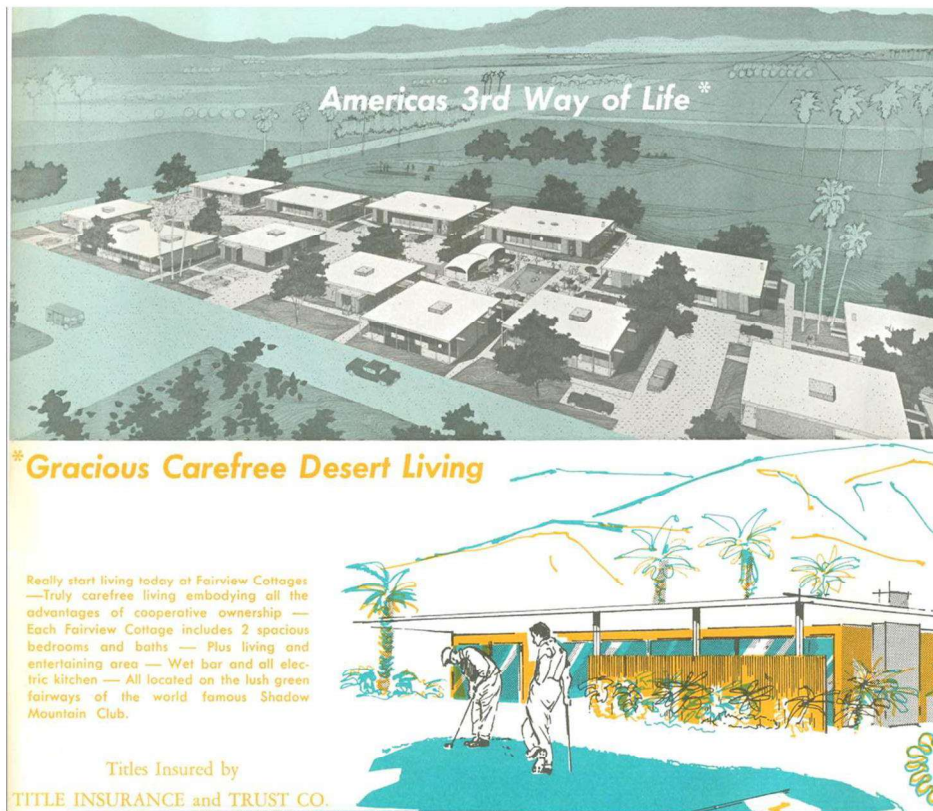
¹⁹⁸ Conrad, "A Twisty, Unlikely Tale," January 24, 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Brochure for Fairview Cottages developed by Monte Wenck, 1963, Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives.

²⁰⁰ Conrad, "A Twisty, Unlikely Tale," January 24, 2021.

City (Palm Desert Country Club) were planned around a golf course, and numerous plans were conceptualized but never realized for condominium-laden golf courses and country clubs.

Even if the condominium succeeded in perpetuating the seasonal residential model, it diversified the housing types – and the affordability – of residences in Palm Desert. Similarly, the 1950s and 1960s also saw a great expansion in apartment development throughout Palm Desert’s existing neighborhoods. As before, new apartment buildings were concentrated on Ocotillo Drive, the lower portion of Shadow Mountain Drive, Palm Village, and the former PDC Unit 4 and Panorama Ranch. Also like their predecessors, these new apartments were typically Mid-Century Modern designs and sited around a pool and were suited to both seasonal and year-round residents. Many of these new apartments, however, featured more of the exotic elements and theming increasingly prominent in the architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. Harold Bissner designed and developed a few of these, including the Halekulani Apartments (1958) and the Maui Palms Apartments (1964, with Robert Pitchford), which combined Polynesian, Hawaiian, and Japanese motifs into an ambiguously exotic theme.²⁰¹



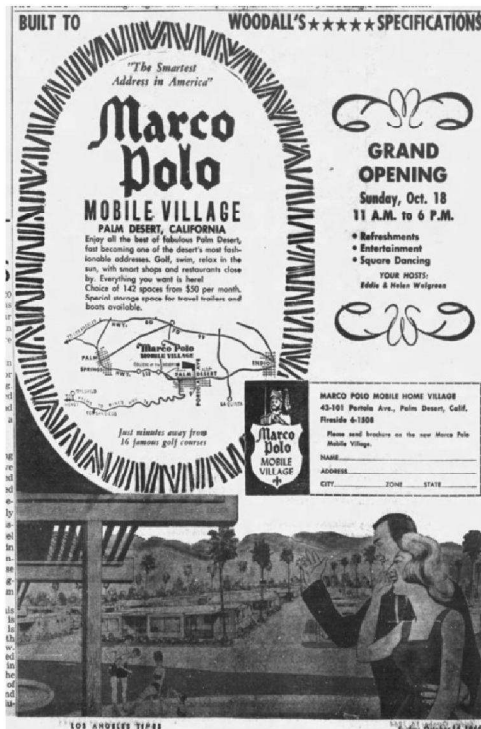
An original brochure for the Fairview Cottages designed by modern architect Richard Dorman for Monte Wenck at the height of the condominium craze. (Historical Society of Palm Desert)

On Shadow Mountain Drive, another noteworthy project was the Continental Six designed by architect Charles W. Doty, a six-unit apartment building with a prominent façade featuring yellow diamonds that lit up at night, recalling the Gogie sub-style of Mid-Century Modern architecture. Another prominent

²⁰¹ "New Apartment Project Slated," *Desert Sun*, September 5, 1965.

project of Doty's was the Tripalong Apartments (1958, extensively altered) in the Palm Village neighborhood, which were developed by prominent Palm Desert resident and actor William Boyd (a.k.a. Hopalong Cassidy).²⁰² Nearby to the Tripalong, one of architect Walter S. White's final projects was a set of bungalow apartments for Richard Deman (partially demolished) in 1957. Likewise, John Outcault was busy with apartment designs, including buildings for Holger Hathern (1959), Charles White (1961-64), and the Candlewood Inn (1959). Charles Doty also designed the Fairline Apartments (1959) and Shadow Hills Apartments (1960) which, once again, were Mid-Century Modern in style.

More affordable than even apartments or condominiums, the 1950s and 1960s saw the arrival of the first mobile home and trailer parks in Palm Desert. The first of these was the Silver Spur Mobile Home Trailer Park (1961), sited along Highway 74 on the upper slope of Palm Desert, followed a few years later by the Marco Polo Mobile Home Park (1964).²⁰³ Even if they were markedly more affordable than other residential developments of the era, they sought to contribute to the cultivated image of Palm Desert. These mobile home parks attempted to recreate the amenities typical of other resort developments, and featured pools, clubhouses of Mid-Century Modern design, and recreation facilities. Marco Polo's clubhouse featured an inventive folded-plate roof design fronting a pool. Mobile home parks also contributed to the demographic growth of a retiree population, which grew significantly during this era.



An original advertisement and postcard for the Marco Polo Mobile Village along Portola Avenue. (Los Angeles Times; Historical Society of Palm Desert)

²⁰² "Palm Desert's 'Tripalong' Apartments Completed, Newest Project in Palm Desert," *Desert Sun*, November 1, 1958.

²⁰³ "New Park Under Way, Project at Silver Spur On," *Desert Sun*, January 13, 1961; "Marco Polo Village Plans Open House," *Desert Sun*, October 16, 1964.

While the previous era of development had largely arrived through the efforts of individual homebuilders (incentivized and guided by entities like the PDC), the 1950s and 1960s was the era of builders and developers who built spec houses, tracts, condominiums, and apartments which homeowners bought into. While it was no longer the norm that it was during the tenure of the PDC, several architecturally significant homes were built on lots purchased by individuals within existing subdivisions. Empty lots were still widely available from either the Palm Desert Sales Company or individuals. Although developers mostly developed homes themselves or sold lots to other builders, all the aforementioned subdivisions and sales companies did not refrain from selling lots to individuals. In fact, many of the same architects working on tract and spec homes were also designing custom homes.

While the designs of Walter White had dominated much of the custom-built home market in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the architect John Outcalt was particularly prolific during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Outcalt, who was based in Palm Desert, specialized in a Mid-Century Modern style that was not as minimal as White's and incorporated such popular elements as breezeblock. Many of his custom homes were built in the Shadow Mountain Estates area, the central neighborhood created by the PDC. Some of Outcalt's most prominent designs included his Mid-Century Modern residences for Virgil Pinkley (1959), Ralph Hale (1958), Ed Welcome (1959), Paul Moller (1962), J.R. Cummings (1963), Gordon Bain (1961, demolished), and even Randall Henderson (1962, significantly altered).



The Virgil Pinkley residence designed by architect John Outcalt in 1959. (Maynard Parker Collection, Huntington Library)

Although not as common, some developers and builders did build one-off spec homes that were estate sized and custom-built. The most notable of these was a 1963 house built by the developer William Kemp (a developer who had completed later circles of Sandpiper) designed by the architect William Krisel, later known as the “Lost Krisel” for its late rediscovery.²⁰⁴ Though not as custom as the 1963 house, Holstein also built two spec homes in 1957 designed by Krisel on Tamarisk Street, just prior to his development of Sandpiper. These houses fit well into the existing character of the neighborhoods where they were built, most of which consisted of custom-built, architect-designed homes. Unlike the preceding decade of residential development, however, they had become less of a norm.

Across the board, development in Palm Desert in the early- to mid-1960s was robust to the point where it could be considered a building glut. Unlike previous decades, developers built large quantities of homes and condominiums at once, which changed the relationship between the homeowner and the home, and increasingly attracted investment from broader sources. A selection of developments either never came to fruition or went bankrupt in the face of this, including Silver Spur Ranch, which had initiated a massive expansion campaign only to be forced into foreclosure in 1965, and Palm City, which abandoned many of its plans and was rebranded as the Palm Desert Country Club. Amidst this glut, development slowed in Palm Desert in the mid- to late-1960s.

Evaluation Guidelines: Residential Development, 1957-1966

Summary

Resources evaluated under this theme are significant for conveying patterns of residential development in Palm Desert between 1957 and 1966. The replacement of the Palm Desert Corporation with the Palm Desert Sales Company and many other developers led to the community’s greatest period of growth, as the single-family residential idiom was transformed into a diverse set of both single- and multi-family residential options. As such, there are numerous examples of resources associated with this theme, both modest dwellings for seasonal and year-round residents, and larger, more architecturally distinctive custom homes designed by local and regional architects. Resources that are significant under this theme likely consist of both individual properties and concentrations of dwellings that are not individually distinctive but collectively convey patterns and trends associated with postwar suburbanization. Some are in planned developments beyond the classic residential tract, in contexts including country clubs, mobile home parks, condominium complexes, and combinations.

Associated Property Types

Residential

- Single-family residence or complex
- Multi-family residence or complex
- Residential community building/clubhouse/amenity
- Subdivision/planned community planning feature
- Historic district

Property Type Summary

Residential development in Palm Desert 1957-1966 consisted of single-family and multi-family dwellings on a wide variety of scales and

²⁰⁴ Greg Archer, “The Lost Krisel,” *Palm Springs Life*, February 1, 2012, <https://www.palmspringslife.com/the-lost-krisel/>.

settings. Some were tract houses built in subdivisions, both existing and (mostly) new; others were planned complexes of condominiums or other dwelling types, and still others were part of country clubs or mobile home parks. Significant resources associated with this theme are likely expressed both as individual properties and in the form of historic districts. There may also be features related to subdivision and planned community development, including entrance markers, signage, shared amenities, and landscaping.

Geographic Location Citywide. Residential development from this period occurred throughout the entire city, with particular but not exclusive concentration south of Highway 111.

Period of Significance The period of significance for this context begins in 1957, with the rise of new developers following liquidation of the Palm Desert Corporation, and ends in 1966, when the community experienced a lull in development activity.

Integrity Considerations A resource that is significant must also retain certain aspects of integrity in order to express its historic significance. Determining which aspects are most important to a particular property type requires an understanding of its significance and essential physical characteristics. The rarity of a property type should also be considered when assessing integrity. As resources associated with this theme are very common, the integrity of eligible properties should be quite high. A slightly greater degree of alterations may not preclude a resource from being eligible, though a building must still retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance, using the guide below.

Criteria	Significance	Integrity Considerations	Registration Requirements
A/1/A, F ²⁰⁵	An individual property eligible under this theme may be significant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For its association with residential development in Palm Desert during this period; or 	A resource that is significant for its association with historic patterns of events or as the site of a significant historic event is eligible if it retains the essential physical features that comprised its character or appearance during the period of its association. ²⁰⁶ A residential property from this period should retain integrity of location, feeling, and association,	To be eligible under this theme, a resource should, at a minimum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date to the period of significance (1957-1966), and Retain the essential aspects of integrity, and Retain enough of its essential physical features

²⁰⁵ Eligibility criteria are listed in the following order: federal (National Register), state (California Register), local (Palm Desert).

²⁰⁶ National Register Bulletin 15.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As the site of a significant historic event from this period. 	<p>at a minimum, in order to convey the important association with the city’s development during this period. A resource that has lost integrity of setting may still be eligible. A property that has lost some historic materials or details may still be eligible if it retains the majority of the features that illustrate its original style and appearance in terms of the massing, spatial relationships, proportion, and fenestration pattern. A resource is generally not eligible if it retains some basic features conveying form and massing, but has lost the majority of features that characterized its appearance during its historical period.</p>	<p>to sufficiently convey its association with the historic context.</p>
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<p>A/1/A, E, F</p>	<p>A historic district eligible under this theme may be significant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For its association with patterns of residential development in Palm Desert 	<p>In order for a historic district to be eligible for designation, the majority (51%) of the components within the district boundaries must possess integrity, as must the district as a whole. Integrity of design, setting, and feeling must be strongly present in the district overall, and it should convey a strong sense of time and place.</p> <p>A contributing building must retain integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, and association to adequately convey the significance of the historic district. In general, minor or reversible alterations or in-kind replacement of original features and finishes are acceptable within historic districts. Significant alterations that change the massing, form, roofline, or fenestration patterns of an individual building, alter the original design intent, or that are</p>	<p>To be eligible under this theme, a historic district should, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date to the period of significance (1957-1966), and Retain the majority (51% or more) of the contributors dating to the period of significance.
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		not reversible may result in non-contributing status for an individual building. In order for a historic district to retain integrity, the majority (51% or more) of its component parts should contribute to its historic significance.	
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B/2/B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For its association with a person (or persons) significant in the history of Palm Desert 	A resource that is significant for its association with a significant person should retain integrity of location, design, feeling, and association, at a minimum, in order to convey its historic association with a significant individual.	<p>To be eligible under this theme, a resource should, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Date to the period of significance (1957-1966), and Retain the essential aspects of integrity, and Retain enough of its essential physical features to sufficiently convey its association with the historic context, and Be directly associated with the notable person’s productive period – the time during which she or he attained significance.
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Theme: Commercial Development, 1957-1966

In the 1940s and 1950s, a selection of stores and restaurants had been established in Palm Desert and provided basic commercial needs but little else. The exception to this were businesses related to the community’s seasonal needs, particularly those dealing with construction, property sales, architectural design, and maintenance. The development of lodges and seasonal accommodations was also prolific, and such businesses as the Firecliff Lodge (demolished), Palm Desert Adobe (demolished), and Sun and Shadows Hotel Apartments (significantly altered) were built. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, residential development, freed from the constraints of the PDC, increased and diversified Palm Desert’s population, thereby providing the demographic and economic support for increased commercial development. The growth was also regional – neighboring cities like Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells were similarly growing but lacked commercial downtowns – and Palm Desert was able leverage its central location to attract businesses. It was during this period, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, that commercial development immensely grew and diversified along with everything else.