

HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN PALM DESERT



ENRICHING OUR CITY THROUGH PRESERVATION

- WHAT IS IT?
- WHAT IT CAN DO FOR YOU?
- HOW YOU CAN LEARN MORE



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The Committee

The Historic Preservation Committee (HPC), established September 23, 2004, has recently changed its name to the “Cultural Resources Preservation Committee” (CRPC) and is coordinated by the Department of Building and Safety and is comprised of seven members appointed by the City Council.

The Committee was created as part of the City's Cultural Resources Ordinance for the purpose of preserving areas and specific buildings within the City that reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political, architectural, and archaeological history. The Committee considers Palm Desert sites that provide a significant link to the City's 30-year+ history, as well as the community's history of some 50 years.

The Committee's regularly scheduled meetings are held on the last Tuesday of each month at 9:00 a.m. in the Administrative Services Conference Room at the Palm Desert City Hall. The Committee's primary function is to serve as an advisory body to the City Council in all matters relating to the identification, protection, restoration and retention of historic sites within the City.

CULTURAL RESOURCES PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Paul F. Clark, Chair
Juan D. Mireles, Vice Chair
Kim Housken
Don Graybill
K. Gary Olesen
Thomas D. Mortensen
David R. Toltzmann

Historic Contexts of the City of Palm Desert

The City of Palm Desert was founded on the south side of Highway 111 in 1945-1946. It was founded by four brothers, Randall, Carl, Clifford, and Phil Henderson, who hoped to follow in the footsteps of neighboring communities, such as La Quinta, Rancho Mirage and Palm Springs, and establish a winter resort for Hollywood celebrities. The Henderson brothers were involved in early development, and organized the Palm Desert Corporation to promote their new desert town, and by 1947, the population was sufficient to establish a post office. Randall donated land for the community's first library on Portola Avenue. Clifford donated the land for the first fire station on El Paseo, which currently (2009) serves as the home of the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Clifford was also the developer of the Shadow Mountain Club on San Luis Rey, which attracted movie stars and tennis pros.



In 1951, Palm Village and Palm Desert merged into a single community, forming the present urban core of the city. Around that time, the community of Cahuilla Hills emerged on the west side of Highway 74, just southwest of Palm Desert. In addition, several tracts of land south of the railroad and in the area between the Little San Bernardino Mountains and the Indio Hills were settled. After four unsuccessful attempts, the City of Palm Desert was incorporated in 1973 and became the 17th incorporated city in Riverside County.

Historic Sites in the Planning Area

Analysis of previous cultural resources studies indicates that, of the 138 archaeological sites recorded in the planning area, 13 are historic-era sites. These are primarily comprised of trash scatters, although structural foundations, a road, and a water conveyance system have also been recorded. Among the historic sites are the Southern Pacific Railroad and other nearby features associated with the railroad. Several sites associated with the construction of the Colorado River Aqueduct in the 1930s have been recorded in the vicinity of the Little San Bernardino Mountains.

From 1981 to 1983, the Riverside County Historical Commission coordinated a countywide historical resources reconnaissance, which led to the recordation of 30 historic sites in the planning area. These include a well site that dates back to 1912, the Cavanagh Adobe building that was built in the 1920s, and single-family residences constructed in the 1930s and 1940s. Most of these sites are located near the city center of Palm Desert, although several are located outside the present day city limits.

The City of Palm Desert currently has three officially recognized or designated local historical landmarks, the Historical Society of Palm Desert has compiled a list of 21 sites of local historical significance. The list includes sites ranging from early homesteads to mid-twentieth century urban development. They are concentrated in the central urban core of the City, and only a few are located in outlying areas. The majority of the sites were recorded on the California Historical Resource Information System during the countywide survey in the 1980s.

Why Preserve?

Communities across the nation have come to realize that preservation of the homes and commercial buildings that make up their built environment is an effective tool for:

- Increasing sustainability and “Going Green” by maintaining established density.
- Enhancing the quality of life for all residents.
- Stabilizing land values.
- Encouraging tourism and thereby creating a flow of new money into the community.
- Increasing community pride.
- Celebrating the heritage and uniqueness of one’s community.



Your Role in Preservation

It is primarily the efforts of individual property owners like you that either enhance or lessen the visual appeal and architectural integrity of the City’s cultural resources. If you are thinking of making exterior changes to your property (either to the building or landscaping) you will protect your investment if you know what style your building is and make only those changes that are sensitive to its historic character. Renovations that clash with a building’s original style not only reduce its resale value, but have the potential to introduce visual disharmony to an entire neighborhood, which also affects your neighbor’s property values.

For this reason, all property owners of designated historic properties within the City of Palm Desert are required by law to apply for a “Certificate of Appropriateness” (COA) from the CRPC before making any changes to the exterior of their properties.

The Preservation Ethic

Preserving historic properties depends upon timely maintenance—*repair* NOT *replacement*. The good news is that repair is normally affordable and results in long-term savings. Also, repairing historic building materials, rather than replacing them, avoids losing original surface textures and historic character. If deterioration requires that portions of a building be replaced, “in kind” materials should be used. This means the new materials should match the original in type and quality. For example, you should replace rotted hardwood porch floors only with the same or similar hardwood, not with soft pine boards. Follow this sequence for planning alterations to a building:

Repair. Obtain bids from qualified contractors to undertake the repair work you are not undertaking, or do not have the skill to undertake, yourself.

Replacement with like materials. If repair of deteriorated materials is impossible (after obtaining complete information about that option) get an estimate for materials and labor to replace irreparable building parts.

Replacement with alternative materials. If either of the above steps won't work, gather samples of various alternative materials and get estimates for the materials and labor to undertake your proposed change.

Please note! If you propose to replace rather than to repair parts of your building, you must show that you have looked into the costs of the first two steps when you go before the CRPC.

Cost Versus Value

Too often people assume that preservation is too costly, but this idea usually means people are confusing *preservation* with *restoration*. Restoration, which involves reconstructing historic features of a building that have been lost over time, is *not* required. On the other hand, *preservation* simply means taking care of the historic features and qualities that remain. The long-term value of a building will be higher where time and money have been invested in maintaining its original architectural features and materials rather than replacing them with cheaper and less durable components. Researching all the alternatives, such as salvaging specific elements or replacing only what is actually broken, is time well spent and can avoid inappropriate alterations that lessen the value of a historic building.



Financial Incentives

Some cities around the country offer a package of incentives to encourage historic preservation. The City of Palm Desert in the future may participate in the Mills Act which is a local property tax incentive to encourage restoration, rehabilitation and preservation of privately owned historic resources:

Mills Act Pros

- Mills Act contract goes with title -a selling point.
- Program permissive, city can craft to its needs.
- Contracts don't have to be renewed if city/owner needs change.
- Fees can offset program costs.
- Can encourage owners to seek historic designation.
- Can be used with other commercial property preservation incentives.
- Tax incentive especially helpful to recent buyers.
- Can help revitalize, maintain historic civic cores.
- Helps keep up historic neighborhoods.
- Boosts civic pride.
- Helps retain civic history, character.

Mills Act Quirks

- The loss of tax revenue.
- Program costs.
- Lost revenue to other agencies.
- Perception issues.
- If you bought your home before 1978 (Prop 13), then you're not paying much property tax in the first place.



NOTE! THERE ARE MORE PROS THAN CONS!

The ABC's for researching a historic property

Thank you for your interest in the City of Palm Desert's cultural resources designation program. Cultural resources include buildings, structures, sites, signs, objects, and streets that are of historic or archaeological significance and help interpret the city's rich history. To help preserve this past for the future, we encourage property owners to participate in the City's stewardship efforts as led by the Cultural Resources Preservation Committee.

The CRPC has developed a packet that is designed to assist you in completing the cultural resources designation application. The CRPC and the Administrator are available to help you. If you have any questions, please contact the City of Palm Desert at (760) 776-6420.

Research will not only help you develop a narrative history of your property, but will also place the property within the appropriate historic context. In addition to completing building specific research, you should also read some general histories of the Palm Desert area to determine where your property fits into the city's history. Visit the Historical Society of Palm Desert's website @ http://www.hspd.org/history_pd.html and "Bibliography of Resources" for additional information. At the completion of your research, you should be able to answer the following questions:

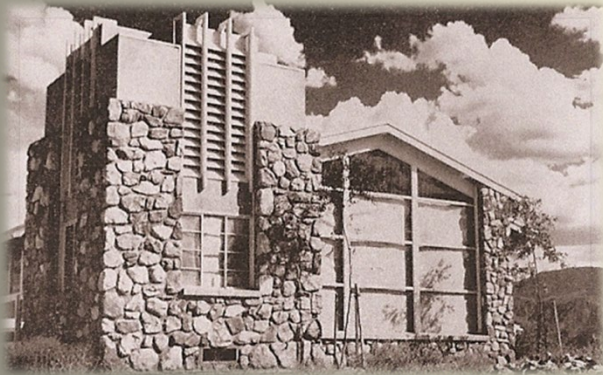
- What is the historic name of the property?
- When was the property constructed (circa date is acceptable)?
- Who designed the property? Who built it? Are they well known for their skill or expertise?
- How many buildings, structures, and other resources make up the property?
- What changes have been made over time and when? How have these affected its integrity?
- How large is the property, where is it located, or what are its boundaries?
- Was a landscape architect associated with the property?
- What is the current condition of the property, including the exterior, grounds, setting, and interior?
- How was the property used during its period of significance, and how is it used today?
- Who occupied or used the property historically? Did they individually make any important contributions to history?
- How does the property relate to Palm Desert's history?
- Were there any important events that occurred at the property?
- Was there a community function or group associated with the property?
- Is it a rare building or architectural type, or is it representative of many other properties in its vicinity? Is it a fine example of style, craftsmanship or details?

Got Style

Palm Desert has unique requirements of desert living that envelop light, heat, and wind, which lends to some of the finest examples of *Mid-Century Modern*, *California Ranch*, and *Pueblo Revival* architecture. If you are thinking of making exterior changes to your property (either to the building or landscaping) you will protect your investment if you know what style your building is and make only those changes that are sensitive to its historic character. Renovations that clash with a building's original style not only reduce its resale value, but have the potential to introduce visual disharmony to an entire neighborhood, which also affects your neighbor's property values.

Mid-Century Desert Modern

Mid-Century architecture was frequently employed in residential structures with the goal of bringing modernism into America's post-war suburbs. This style emphasized creating structures with ample windows and open floor-plans with the intention of opening up interior spaces and bringing the outdoors in. Many Mid-century homes utilized then groundbreaking post and beam architectural design that eliminated bulky support walls in favor of walls seemingly made of glass. Function was as important as form in Mid-Century designs with an emphasis placed specifically on targeting the needs of the average American family.



California Ranch

The ranch house is noted for its long, close-to-the-ground profile, and minimal use of exterior and interior decoration. The houses fuse modernist ideas and styles with notions of the American Western period working ranches to create a very informal and casual living style. Their popularity waned in the late 20th century as neo-eclectic house styles, a return to using historical and traditional decoration, became popular. However, in recent years the ranch house has been undergoing a revitalization of interest. The following features are Considered key elements of the original ranch house style, although not all ranch houses have all them.



- Single story
- Long, low roofline
- Asymmetrical rectangular, L-shaped, or U-shaped design
- Simple floor plans
- Open floor plans
- Attached garage
- Sliding glass doors opening onto a patio
- Large windows
- Vaulted ceilings with exposed beams
- Windows often decorated with shutters
- Exteriors of stucco, brick and wood
- Large overhanging eaves
- Cross-gabled, side-gabled or hip roof
- Simple and/or rustic interior and exterior trim

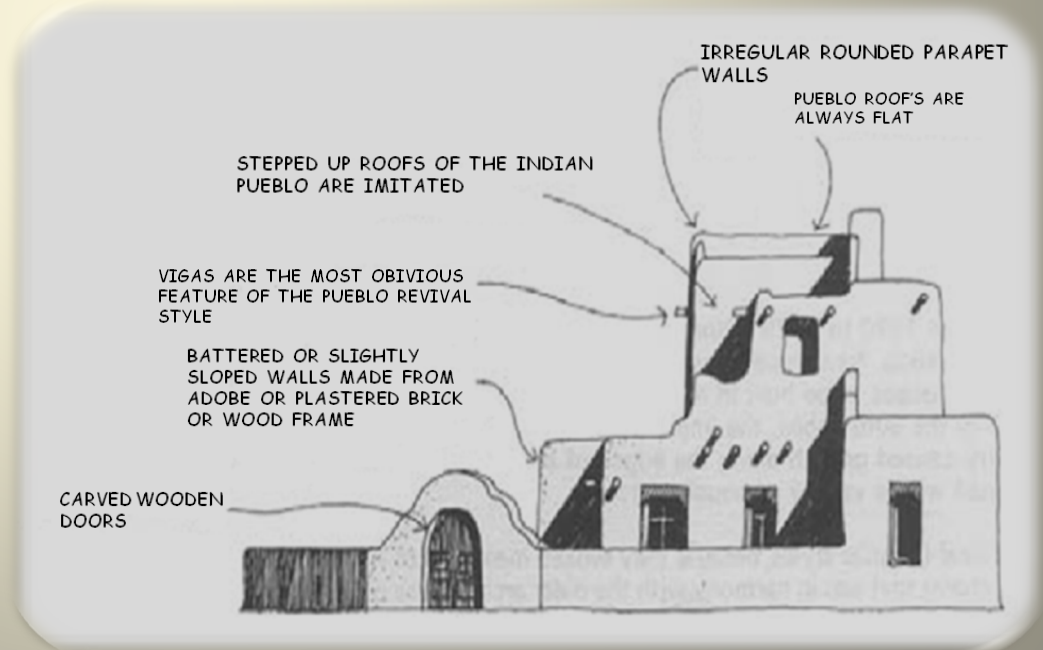


Pueblo Revival

Pueblo style architecture seeks to imitate the appearance of traditional adobe construction, though more modern materials such as brick or concrete are often substituted. If adobe is not used, rounded corners, irregular parapets, and thick, battered walls are used to simulate it. Walls are usually stuccoed and painted in earth tones. Multistory buildings usually employ stepped massing similar to that seen at Taos Pueblo. Roofs are always flat. A common feature is the use of projecting wooden roof beams (*vigas*), which often serve no structural purpose. The following features are considered common key elements of the pueblo style architecture:



- Flat roof
- Projecting roof rafters
- Battered walls
- Stepping or terracing
- Windows were typically individual casement, or single-hung windows with wood frames. On some occasions, metal frames were used to replicate the iron-work used on other details in the house.
- Doors were typically simple wood doors. Doors were also stained.
- Homes were typically painted white with a second trim color. Sometime a third color was used on the window frames.



Architecture in Palm Desert



1. Palm Desert Visitor Center – 2005
2. Sandpiper Condominiums – 1958
3. House on Pitahaya Street – 1963
4. Fire Station – 1950
5. Walter White House – 1950s
6. Cahuilla Hills Homesteads – 1940
7. Palm Desert Community Presbyterian Church – 1968
8. Harry Cannon House – 1950s
9. Maui Palms – 1960s
10. Walter White Designated House – 1950s
11. Outcault House – 1968
12. Leonard Firestone Estate – 1950s
13. Pelletier House – 1951
14. Walter White Designated House – 1950s
15. House on Grapevine – 1964
16. Olsen House – 1948-1949
17. Crosby House – 1958
18. Marrakesh Country Club and Condominiums – 1970
19. Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages – 1960s
20. Ritter House – 1972
21. Monrad C. Wallgren House – 1950
22. William Boyd House – 1950s
23. Shadow Mountain Resort – 1948
24. Mojave – 1940s
25. Shadowcliff Condominiums – 1960
26. J. Russell Salon – 1966
27. Keedy's Fountain and Grill – 1957
28. Bank of America – 1977
29. Christian Science Church – 1959
30. Palm Desert Community Church – 1948-50
31. Palm Desert Library Building – 1962-63
32. Randall Henderson Apartments – 1948
33. Desert Magazine Building – 1948
34. Pomona First Federal Bank – 1974
35. Pitchford House – 1963
36. Maryon Toole House – 1946-48
37. Abraham Lincoln Elementary School – 1963
38. Miles Bates House – 1950s
39. Palm Desert Multi-Agency Library – 1996
40. Odell Ranch House – 1948
41. College of the Desert – 1961
42. McCallum Theatre – 1988

Process for Obtaining a Certificate Of Appropriateness for your Exterior Changes

1. Contact the Department of Building and Safety located in City Hall at 73-510 Fred Waring Drive ; telephone (760) 776-6420 to get an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). The application may be also downloaded from the City's website:

<http://www.cityofpalmdesert.org/Index.aspx?page=490>

2. Review the application requirements for submitting a completed application.
3. For simple projects, such as repainting or repairing a building with "in kind" materials, the request can generally be added to the end of the agenda up until a few days ahead of the meeting.
4. For projects involving new construction, additions, porch alterations, and door or window replacements, a public hearing is required and a complete COA application must be submitted to the Department of Building and Safety 3 to 4 weeks ahead of a scheduled CRPC meeting date to be placed on the agenda. This allows for required publication of the request, notification letters, and duplication of materials to be sent to CRPC members.
5. Once a COA is issued the applicant may proceed to a full plan review by the Department of Building and Safety for the necessary permits to perform approved work.



PLEASE NOTE: Incomplete applications will not be accepted or placed on the agenda for review by the CRPC. **REMINDER:** Property owners undertaking any exterior changes to their buildings must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) prior to initiating work. **Failure to do so may result in daily fines.**