

# YESTERDAY'S Dream

Conceived as a respite from Los Angeles, Palm Springs remains an oasis of mid-century design. BY MICHAEL HARRIS



Designer Jonathan Adler's makeover of the Parker Hotel has helped reboot interest in both mid-century and Hollywood regency design.

**C**an a city make you happy? Tens of thousands descend on Palm Springs each year during Modernism Week to see for themselves. Because it's here, in the haunts of Sinatra's rat pack, that an architectural dream—a legacy of the 20th century's optimistic middle years—has been preserved beneath the desert sun.

The modernists had their heyday here—Richard Neutra, Albert Frey, and William Krisel are the ambassadors of the grand experiment of Palm Springs. The city's pavement even has stars for architects alongside those for Hollywood darlings like Sophia Loren and Bob Hope, who made this place their fresh-air respite from Los Angeles.

Those glorious houses were often second homes, filled with brave, giddy furniture choices. (Many of these collections are being redistributed today in a dozen vintage shops in the Uptown district.) The experiment extends to fashion, cars and food—even to the blameless, big-smile personalities you encounter here. It's an inheritance of optimism. Something to do with the sunlight, no doubt, as much as with the boundless future that mid-century Americans saw stretching before them.



# SCOUT

## THE FREY HOUSE II

Small and brilliant, Albert Frey's cliffside home is worth touring if you can get yourself on the list. Boulders literally break through into the house's interior, and you won't easily beat the view of town from the intimate pool deck.



## KAUFMANN HOUSE

This paradigmatic International Style residence is a Richard Neutra masterpiece. A five-bedroom beauty with sliding glass walls, it sits perfectly in its desert landscape.

## STEEL HOUSES

The great Donald Wexler's prefab steel houses are gems of modernist design. Rising steel prices, though, meant that only seven were ever built. Try to spot which one belongs to the editor of *GQ*.



OPPOSITE PAGE: TOP LEFT, GREGG FELSEN. OTHER IMAGES: PALM SPRINGS BUREAU OF TOURISM

# STAY

## THE RIVIERA

**THE FEEL** Since opening in 1959, the Riviera has been known as a playground of the Hollywood elite. Elvis and Sinatra have both lounged by its pool. It's now a decadent, '60s-influenced take on modern. It can feel vaguely corporate (and, indeed, hosts many conventions) but its glamour—and lemon-tree scented air—is undeniable.

**THE FOOD** It's disconcerting when you do the math on your room-service dinner and realize each of the five ravioli on the plate costs \$8. But the kitchen redeems itself with crispy fish tacos, taken poolside.

**THE MOMENT** Book a



Poolside at the Parker

Watsu massage, which takes place inside the lounge's waterfall pool. Fair warning: the lounge is open to others, who sip lemon water and pretend not to watch.

## THE PARKER

**THE FEEL** A design-savvy crowd of 35-and-ups drifts through 13 acres of lush garden. These are folks uninterested in show. This is the only hotel designed by the decorating guru Jonathan Adler and his trademark whimsy is found throughout. The tone is elegant yet relaxed (meaning nobody balks if a woman takes her top off). Book a villa—each comes with an enclosed patio.

**THE FOOD** Norma's is a sorbet-coloured five-star diner, but at night, ensconce yourself in a dark corner of Mister Parker's, the hotel's romantic on-site bistro.

**THE MOMENT** A Parker lemonade, made from the estate's own lemon trees and procured

from the lemon shack in the gardens.

## THE VICEROY

**THE FEEL** A well-travelled set that arrives full of big-job stresses and ends up playing Twister with Miley Cyrus by the pool (yes, it actually happened). It's not an accident that Fashion Week cronies and several magazines choose the Viceroy's grounds for their photo shoots. The Kelly Wearstler design is clean and minimalist, yet utterly at ease. Spend the evening stationed on one of its lawns, monitoring the purpling of the mountains during sunset.

**THE FOOD** Do hit the California-eclectic menu at Citron whether you're in residence or not. This 75-person room bends over backward, whether you're Martha Stewart—who arrived with five friends and no reservation—or not. Post-meal, take your

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digestif (plus a cigar purchased at the bar) poolside.

**THE MOMENT** The beignet at Citron. It takes 15 minutes to prepare and each plateful is made only when ordered. If it weren't for the weight of the icing sugar, these beignets would hover over the plate. Eaten with coconut ice cream and banana curd = bliss.

## THE ACE

**THE FEEL** A hipster clientele, mostly on leave from creative jobs in L.A., makes this very much the party house of local hotels. Each room feels like your slightly cooler friends' bachelor apartment.

**THE FOOD** The modernist King's Highway diner is what a truck stop would be if taken over by art-school drop-outs. Ironic Abast and black-bean veggie burgers. Great Stumptown coffee in the morning. **THE MOMENT** Swimming with the cool kids until 2 a.m. *wl*

# SHOP

You see some of these pieces and automatically envision a coiffed woman setting her Hans Wegner dining table for supper, or a bespectacled screenwriter working at that green-keyed Olivetti Praxis typewriter. Or, best of all, the cantankerous star fixing an old fashioned at the futuristic curve of a lacquered Pierre Cardin bar. Some furniture has fingerprint marks that never come off.

There are more than 30 furniture shops packed into a few short blocks in the Uptown district. Try these for starters:

**MODERN WAY** The granddaddy of modernist furniture stores. Consider a pilgrimage to Modern Way as important as a trip to any architectural gem. 745 N. Palm Canyon Dr., 760-320-5455, [psmodernway.com](http://psmodernway.com).

**20 FIRST VINTAGE AND MODERN** These Guys are always at the forefront of discovery. While the rest of the world has woken up to '50s and '60s decor, 20 First has begun stocking forgotten pastel treasures from the '70s. 1117 N. Palm Canyon Dr., 760-327-5400.