



Neighborhood House Tour

Modernism Week • 2018

Welcome to Twin Palms



William Krisel, left, and Dan Palmer in 1957. Their firm designed the Ocotillo Lodge and Twin Palms Estates.

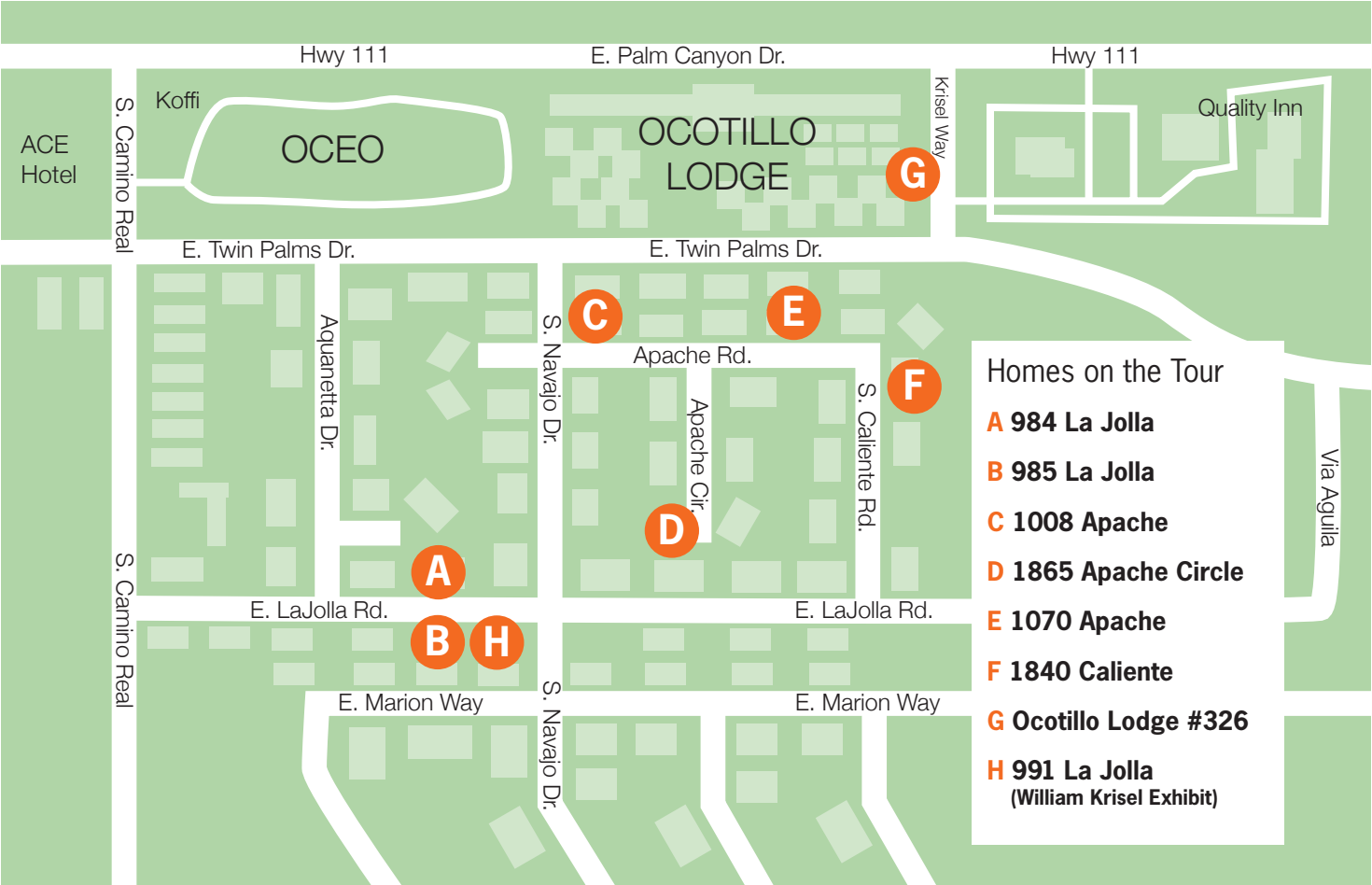
In 1956, developers George and Robert Alexander, working with architect William Krisel completed the Ocotillo Lodge at the southern edge of Palm Springs. The Lodge welcomed home-seekers considering one of their 90 new and distinctive residences. ‘Distinctive’ because this fledging district (referred to then as “Smoke Tree Valley Estates”) introduced to the desert such modernist elements as open carports, clerestory windows, exposed concrete block, breezeways, and butterfly roofs. With little fanfare at the time, the area became both the first mid century modern neighborhood completed by the Alexander Construction Company and the first truly modern housing tract in Palm Springs.

Only two floor plans were available from which prospective Twin Palms homeowners could choose. But a wide variety of available facades, roof-lines, landscaping, color palettes, and home orientations on the property effectively concealed this limitation. The result is that the Alexanders could pass along to buyers the economies of constructing tract housing, and buyers could enjoy a sense of owning a home that was aesthetically unique — at least on the outside.

As a design and marketing strategy, this proved quite sound. Considered for decades to be a second hometown for the wealthy, Palm Springs suddenly came within grasp of a much larger population of home buyers. The 90 original residences sold briskly and led to the development of equally popular tracts elsewhere in the area. In this way, the success of Twin Palms initiated the City’s first major housing boom and forever changed its architectural landscape.

Today, exactly 62 years later, Twin Palms enjoys a population mix that reflects the diversity and spirit of Palm Springs. The legacy of William Krisel and the Alexanders is a neighborhood alive with history, rich with character, and fully engaged in its affairs both social and civic.

Photo courtesy the Huntington Library



The Legacy of William Krisel, A.I.A.



William Krisel, A.I.A.

Photo: James Schnepf / PALM SPRINGS
MODERN LIVING

William (Bill) Krisel, AIA, was born in Shanghai in 1924 where his father was an attorney and a distributor for United Artists motion pictures. Krisel's affinity for architecture came early. At age 13, he critiqued the plans published in Time magazine for Franklin D. Roosevelt's home in Hyde Park by sending a letter along with his plans, which were subsequently published by the magazine.

The family moved back to Southern California as the gathering storm of World War II was forming. After the war, Krisel continued his studies at USC, which had one of the foremost architectural departments dedicated to modernism in the country. He graduated there with honors in 1949 and formed a partnership with Dan Palmer whom he had met while working part time during school with architect Victor Gruen.

While at USC, Krisel met Robert (Bob) Alexander who was a classmate. At the time, Bob's father, George, was building traditional style tract homes in the San Fernando Valley. George Alexander gave Krisel and Palmer 10 lots to try and presumed they would not be very successful. But Krisel's homes sold so well that the Alexander's company went on to do hundreds more using Krisel for many of the projects, including the Ocotillo Lodge and the Twin Palms tract of homes adjacent to it. Krisel went on to design one of the first condominium developments in Palm Desert, Sandpiper, which went on to win

awards for architecture, landscape design and site planning. Other jobs soon followed and at one time the firm was the largest designer of homes in the country with over 40,000 living units built. In the 1950's seven of the ten largest national tract builders were his clients.

During his career, Krisel designed a stunning variety of buildings including tract houses, over 50 custom homes, condominium developments, stores, office buildings, restaurants, 35 high-rise towers, and warehouses. Working in what he called the language of modernism, he specified everything down to the last detail, including the landscaping, which, as a landscape architect, he often designed as well.

The rediscovery of his work in Palm Springs brought his name to the fore again as people sought his advice in restoring their homes.

Krisel was honored with a sidewalk star in front of the Architecture and Design museum in Palm Springs in 2009 and there was a museum exhibition of his work in both Los Angeles and Denver in 2010. The Getty museum accepted his archive in 2012 and a book about the architect and his work was published in 2016. In Palm Springs, a street has been named William Krisel Way. — CHRIS MENRAD, President of Palm Springs Modern Committee



Various Twin Palms Homes by Palmer and Krisel.



984 La Jolla



A 984 La Jolla

Built in 1957 our home is a Model B2, the 'Ponderosa'. Embodying Architect William Krisel's blending of inside and out, it features the most glass of all models. We love the light provided by walls of glass and clerestory windows that highlight the wonderful views of the San Jacinto Mountains and pool. Inside, the house features a rare original atrium. We have enhanced our outdoor experience with the addition of two pergolas, and a statement fountain.

985 La Jolla



B 985 La Jolla

We are so grateful to be part of a community where William Krisel brought mid-century modern to the desert. When we first entered our home we both thought this could be a beautiful place. The house had many years of neglect and we decided to dive into an extensive renovation. With many careful considerations we have the home of our dreams that call back to a much simpler time. These homes are truly a work of art that will give future generations a look into the past while embracing the future.



1008 Apache



C 1008 Apache

Welcome to our home! We love this neighborhood and our house – it transports us back in time, every time. Jeff and I hold much respect for the architecture, the architect, the history, and we're grateful the past owners masterfully restored it while adding the magnificent trees to the backyard and creating a tropical oasis. There couldn't be a better time capsule of life and love for Jeff and me (and his beloved classic cars). For this, we are eternally grateful to the great William Krisel and his timeless, impactful presence in Twin Palms.

1865 Apache Circle



D 1865 Apache Circle

With its iconic butterfly roofline, post and beam construction and original Tectum exterior panels, this home is emblematic of William Krisel's simple yet sophisticated mid-century desert architecture.

The current owners have brought their interior design expertise to update the house for contemporary living, while staying true to the spirit of the period. Teak cabinetry and paneling, terrazzo tile floors, custom furniture and vintage lighting lend to this light-filled house a warmth and gracious ease.

1070 Apache



E 1070 Apache

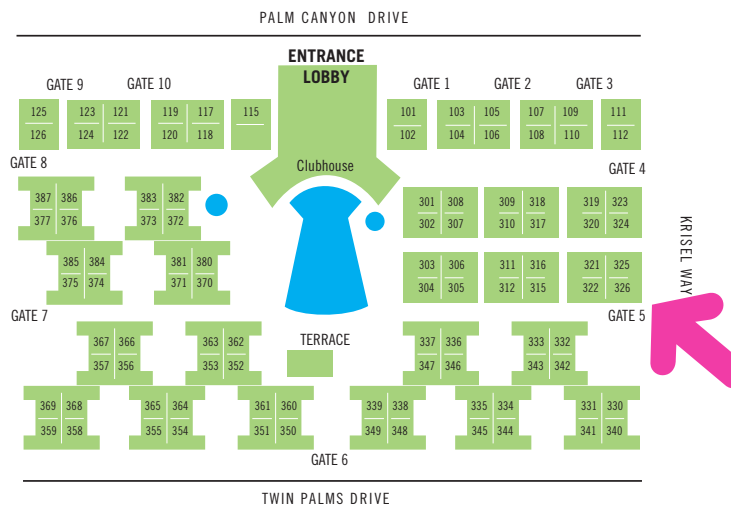
I fell in love with this home the minute I saw it in 1999. It just had a feeling of exuberance and happiness with those outstretched wings of the roofline. It is bright and airy inside and offers just the right glimpses of the sky, mountains and palms. You are always connected to the outdoors here. In 2006 I worked with the original architect, William Krisel, to restore and renovate the home. My goal was to restore authentically and as close to the original look as possible. I wanted it to look as it was presented to the buying public in 1957 when it was first finished. In addition, Mr. Krisel designed a landscape plan for me that works so well with the feeling of the house.

1840 Caliente



F 1840 Caliente

My brother and I remodeled our architectural William Krisel and builder Robert Alexander butterfly home in Twin Palms. We endeavored to keep the 50's vibe while living in the 21st century. We chose an original vintage palette for the home exterior: white stucco, turquoise trim and an orange front door. We love the new bright white rock and cactus landscape. The house is so welcoming and colorful. We hope you will smile as much as we do on your visit!



G Ocotillo Lodge #326

I had just purchased a unit at the Ocotillo Lodge - initially built as a hotel but now a condominium. After discussions with Mr. Krisel (who was very hospitable and congenial) I was inspired to restore the unit back to the way it originally was in 1957. I worked from original photographs and made only minimal contemporary alterations to satisfy the change in use from a short stay hotel to a long stay condo. Accordion wall, original kitchen cabinets, and period furniture are some of the unique features of this unit.

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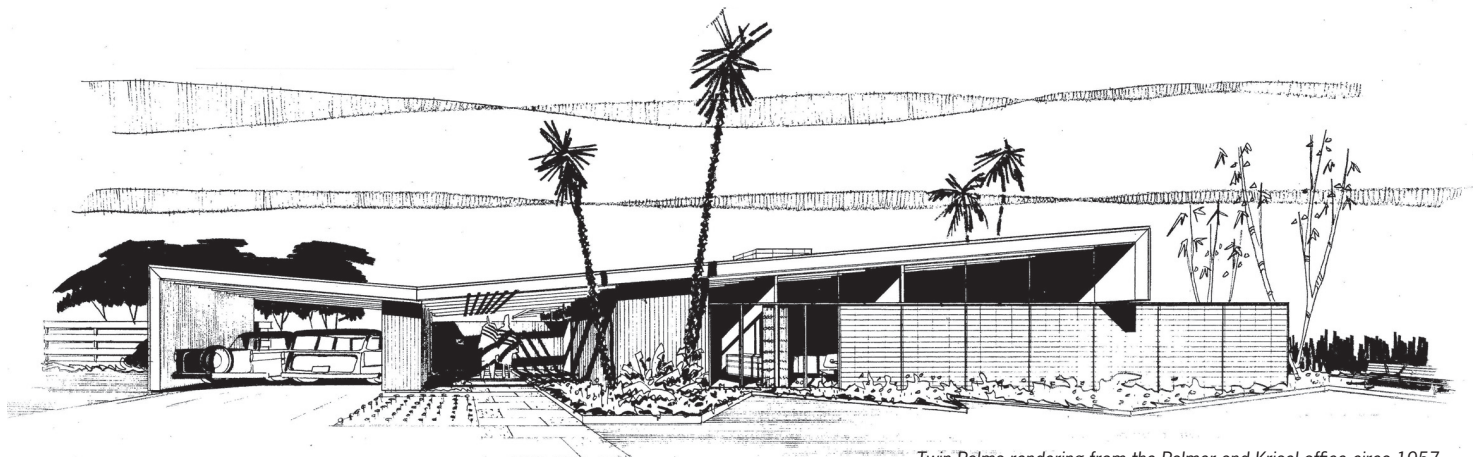
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and to our Twin Palms Volunteers



Twin Palms rendering from the Palmer and Krisel office circa 1957