



Neighborhood House Tour

Modernism Week • 2019

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 fledgling 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 63 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.



991 La Jolla



A 991 La Jolla

I had always wanted to live in an architecturally significant house. What struck me first was the “body” of the butterfly. The soaring space provides a more formal area of my home, allowing me to showcase my art and Broyhill Brasilia furniture. My desire was to make changes to the house that provided for my 21st century needs while honoring the architectural heritage and creativity of William Krisel and the Alexander Company. I also updated the landscape to remove the extensive lawns and plant more desert friendly plants that provide color all year round. Striking a balance between the past and the future works best for me.

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.

1042 Apache



C 1042 Apache

As someone who knew Bill Krisel and had restored other houses in the neighborhood, I welcomed the challenge to fully restore a house that had been heavily modified and fallen into disrepair. I understand Mr. Krisel's vision and wanted to honor his memory with an especially sensitive and complete restoration. He had told me the rock front on this house was one of his favorites. I've always loved what I consider the perfect floor plan for a simple three bedroom house with it's clerestory windows, high wood ceilings and playful facade. These houses were designed for entertaining with an open kitchen and glass wall to the generous back yard and large pool. I especially love the neighborhood feel and spectacular mountain views.

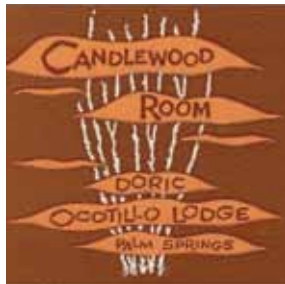
1041 Twin Palms



D 1041 Twin Palms

These Alexander homes designed by William Krisel, with their iconic rooflines and clerstory windows, evoke midcentury sensibility and a perfection of architecture for the common man. We wanted a home befitting of our classic 59'Corvette and Heywood-Wakefield furniture. We searched for the perfect neighborhood with a mixture of butterfly and alpine rooftops, desert landscapes and views of the San Jacinto mountains. We found it here in Palm Springs and we wake up every morning living in a midcentury work of art.

Ocotillo Lodge



A vintage matchbook cover from the Candlewood Room at Ocotillo Lodge.

The construction of Ocotillo Lodge began in 1956 and was completed in 1957. Built on 10 acres in Twin Palms by the Alexanders, designed by William Krisel and Dan Palmer, modernism entered into the Coachella Valley. The landscape architecture was conceived by Garrett Eckbo and the original interior design was done by Tony Dalu of Dalu Designs. Privacy was key to these indoor-outdoor living spaces and the kitchens and furniture were all designed low to take advantage of the view through the windows. The property was purchased by Gene Autry in 1963 and Jerry Buss in 1968. Today the 124 units are individually owned and many are available for vacation rental.

The lodge was named after the Ocotillo plant which can be found throughout the property. The stunning panoramic views of the San Jacinto mountains, landscape and iconic key-hole shaped swimming pool are still the focal points of this historic property.

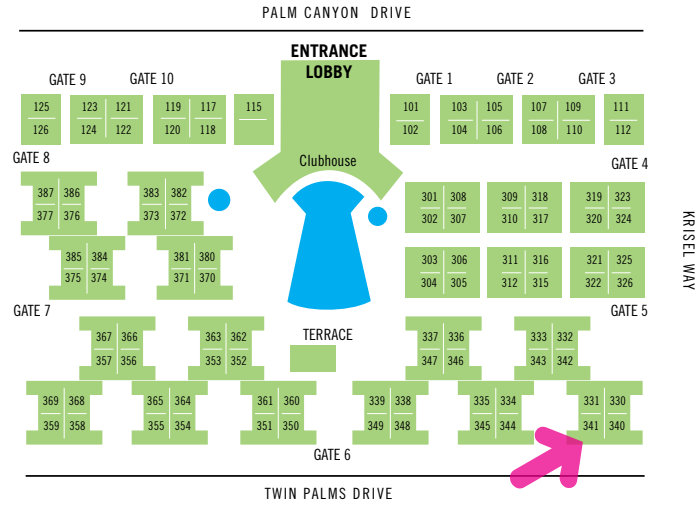
Dining at the Candlewood Room was advertised as “one of the most beautiful rooms in America” and stories of the Hollywood elite booking rooms and tables abound.

Much of the original design and intent of the property is still intact but the interior of the portico, lobby and clubhouse have been altered over the years. The beginnings of restoration plans are now underway (as a result of a donation from William Krisel through the Twin Palms Neighborhood Organization) to return these areas back to their original glory.



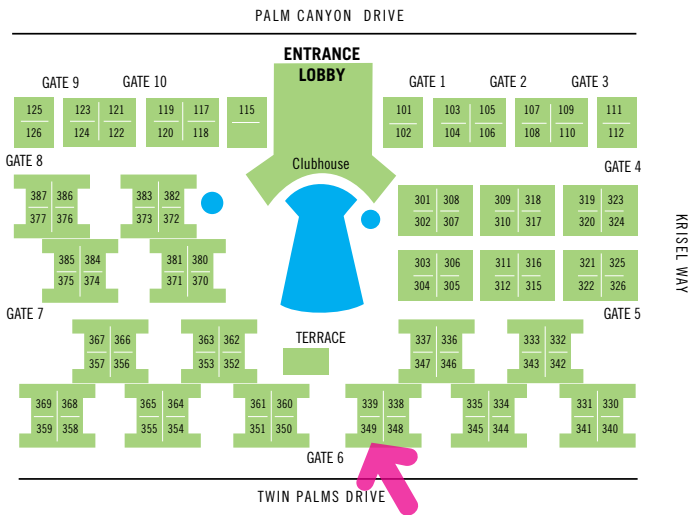
Historic images of Ocotillo Lodge from the late 1950s.





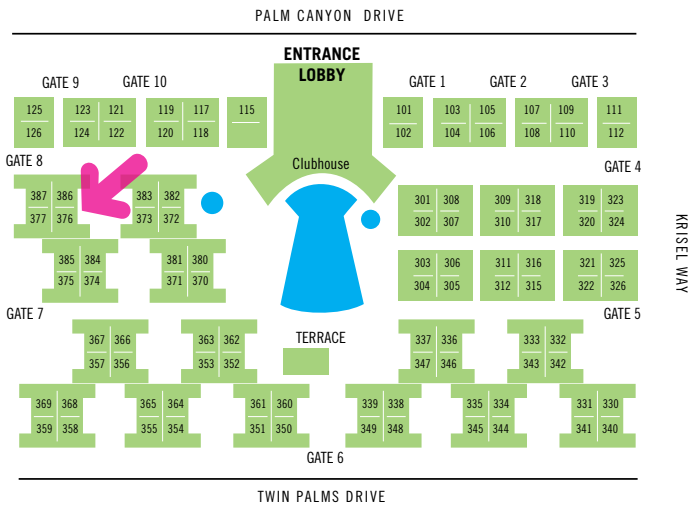
E Ocotillo Lodge #341

The Ocotillo Lodge was the first luxury hotel for father and son George and Robert Alexander. This incredible Mid-century gem has tongue and groove ceilings, cinder-block walls, and the famous champagne cork-shape pool. This was a big factor in buying my unit at the Ocotillo Lodge. I kept the original tongue and groove ceilings and updated the entire unit to bring it up to the current day standards. All new kitchen, bathroom, appliances, flooring and patio including mid-century furniture. I'm so happy to be part of the Ocotillo Lodge family and helping keep this part of the history alive.



F Ocotillo Lodge #349

Growing up in Southern California, Palm Springs was always just a quick drive to amazing dry weather. I once stayed at The Ocotillo for spring break and fell in love with mid-century architecture. As the owner of three boutiques hotels, two which are MCM, I needed a little place of my own. I found out The Peggy Lee suite at The Ocotillo was for sale and snagged it! I love the lines and the history. I hired Interior designer Laura Slipak. It was a Santa Fe disaster she “brought it back to life” as she called it. What’s old is new! I’m excited to say my wife and I own a Krisel Home and we absolutely love our home away from home!



G Ocotillo Lodge #376

Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, the winters were cold and wet (mostly wet). I used to watch events on TV, like the Rose Bowl parade. I was amazed to see the sunny days and people in t-shirts. As well, movies and TV shows were produced with the backdrop of (then) contemporary housing....which became known as mid-century modern. I was fascinated with the open-concept and especially the floor-to-ceiling glass walls. This is why, when I was first renting at the Ocotillo, I knew I wanted one of the units...and wanted it to be close to period correct.

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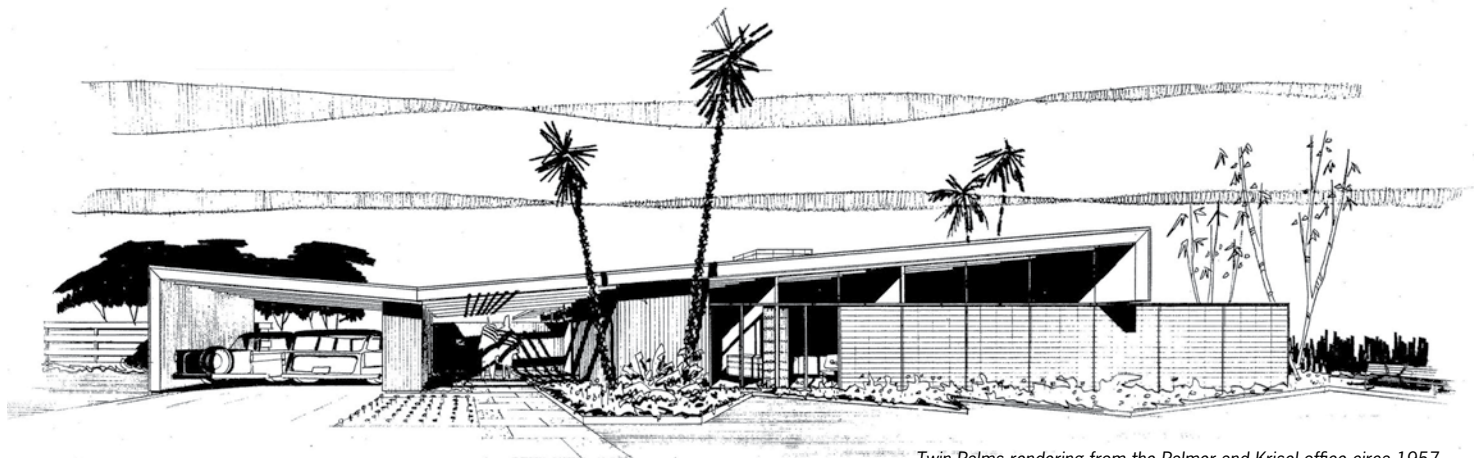
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and to our Twin Palms Volunteers



Twin Palms rendering from the Palmer and Krisel office circa 1957