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Ms. Katherine Hough
Chair, Historic Site Preservation Board
City of Palm Springs
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

re: Villa Roma nomination

Dear Ms. Hough:

I would like to express my support for the Villa Roma historic district nomination.

Of all the information we have learned about midcentury Palm Springs, the diversity of its designs and concepts remains a major theme. While its purist Modern designs first caught the attention of historians, we have since discovered the broad variety and innovations of its building types and architecture.

Villa Roma exemplifies two of these facets. First, the low-slung “garden apartment” type, interspersed with landscaped areas and highlighting indoor-outdoor living in open-air courts, community pools, and clubhouses, though not exclusive to the Palm Springs area, became a distinctive residential type with many examples and a range of evolving expressions and plans.

Second, midcentury Palm Springs embraced a version of Modern architecture that blended historic and Modern styles. While many Modernist theoreticians in Europe and the east coast rejected all historicist references, many California Modern architects, from Bernard Maybeck to John Elgin Woolf on, did not. They saw the history of architecture as a continuum. This approach is seen in Palm Springs in examples combining Polynesian, Spanish, Southwestern, Moroccan, and Roman elements and symbolism with the flat roofs, rectilinear geometries, and simplified forms of Modern architecture.

This is the context in which Villa Roma deserves to be assessed.

In addition, as the nomination discusses, Villa Roma reflects a larger cultural interest in the Classical era, as seen in the popular novels and movies of the midcentury. Architecture is a popular medium, and as the success of the Western influenced the appeal of the Ranch House, Hollywood's "sword and sandal" movies influenced the interest in Roman architecture as seen in Villa Roma. This is an aspect of architectural history that can be weighed in determining historic significance of a building such as this.

The variations, examples, and evolution of these Palm Springs garden apartment condominiums deserve more study. Along with Palm Springs' country club/golf course developments, they are a reflection of the recreational lifestyle, economy, and development of the midcentury.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alan Hess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alan Hess