

EL SUEÑO

THE

BENNETT ~ REED RESIDENCE

1184 Camino Mirasol
Palm Springs, California 92262



Charles O. Matcham, FAIA
Office of Heitschmidt & Matcham
1934

Nomination Application for **City of Palm Springs** Class 1 Historic Resource
Prepared by Steve Vaught for the **Palm Springs Preservation Foundation**
April 2026, Final Revised

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Ladies of the “Classic Dinner Ladies” fundraising event collecting RSVPs
from Melba Bennett’s mailbox. 1962**
(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society. *Palm Springs Life* collection)

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RESIDENCE

Class 1 Historic Resource Nomination

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INTRODUCTION

The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation (PSPF) is a non-profit organization whose mission is “to educate and promote public awareness of the importance of preserving the historical resources and architecture of the city of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley area.”

In December 2024, the PSPF board of directors engaged Steve Vaught to prepare El Sueño’s Class 1 Historic Resource nomination.

The Owner’s Letter of Support is at Appendix I.



**“You start out to get a story about a house and wind up enjoying a drink and a dip in the swimming pool.” – George Ringwald writing about El Sueño for the *Palm Springs Villager* in 1958.
(Author photo. August 2025)**

Prepared by Steve Vaught on behalf of:
The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation
1775 East Palm Canyon Drive, Suite 110-195
Palm Springs, CA 92264
760-837-7117
info@pspreservationfoundation.org

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SIGNIFICANCE:

Located in the Las Palmas Estates tract, El Sueño (Spanish: “The Dream”) is a 1934 custom-designed residence holding considerable historical significance. It was designed by master architect Charles O. Matcham (1903-1980) as a rare Palm Springs example of the Monterey Colonial Revival style. Matcham remains one of the most important traditional architects to have practiced in Palm Springs, leaving a lasting legacy of fine architecture, particularly in his numerous period revival residences of the 1930s. Additionally, the home’s builder, Ernst Off (1901-1993), was a major figure in building, design, and development in Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley from 1930 into the 1970s.

El Sueño is also significant for two of its former owners – Melba Bennett and Donna Reed – both of whom lived in the home during significant periods of their lives. Bennett, who gave the home its name, resided here when she spearheaded the creation of the Palm Springs Historical Society in 1955. Academy Award-winning actress Donna Reed used El Sueño as her desert retreat towards the end of her time doing the television classic *The Donna Reed Show* and her years as an anti-war activist as co-chairperson of Another Mother for Peace. It is also worth noting that the home was decorated by the legendary Arthur Elrod during the time Melba and Frank Bennett were the owners.

The home’s period of significance is 1934 to 1973, which comprises the time of the home’s completion to the end of its ownership by Donna Reed. Therefore, El Sueño technically bridges two distinct periods as defined in the Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings created by Historic Resources Group: “Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)” and “Post World War II Palm Springs (1945-1969).” However, it is largely associated with the first period.

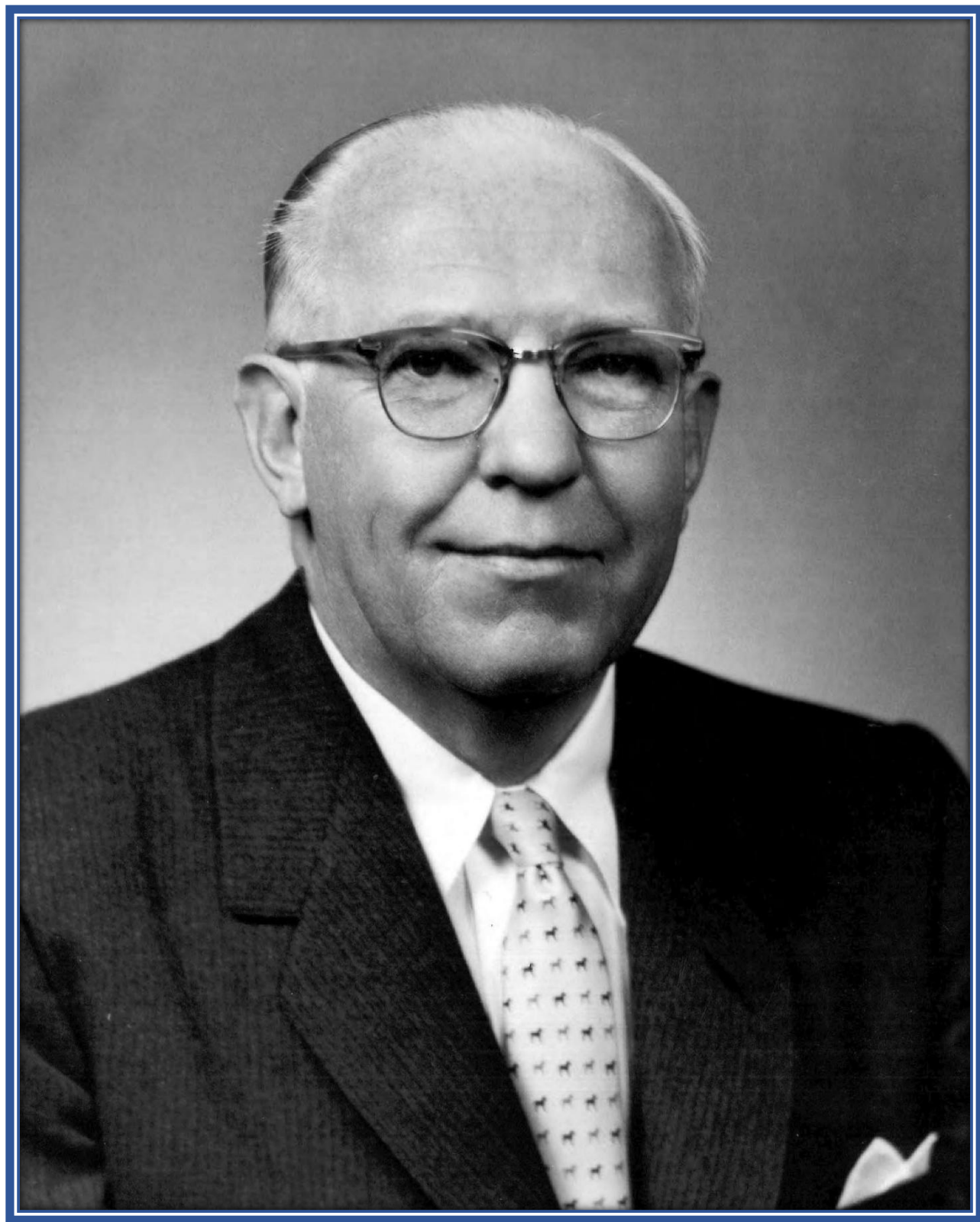
DESIGNATION CRITERIA:

El Sueño has been flagged as an important historic resource from as early as 1987 when the first list of potential historic sites, the Riverside County Historic Resources Survey, was produced by the City of Palm Springs Planning & Building Department and the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB). It also appeared on the city’s “Must” list for potential historic sites in 2001 (the Palm Springs 2001 Historic Structures Survey), as well as the Palm Springs Citywide Reconnaissance Survey Master List produced by the Architectural Resources Group (ARG) in 2004. Finally, the home was evaluated for Class 1 historic resource eligibility as part of the *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings* created by Historic Resources Group in 2016. They noted at the time that a definitive determination on integrity could not be made as the home was not fully visible from the street. However, the survey noted the home may be eligible based on both the significance of its early period of construction and its architecture/architect.

Criteria for the Designation of a Class 1 Historic Resource: Pursuant to the Palm Springs Municipal Code (PSMC) Section 8.05.070.C.1. A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource, provided one or more of the criteria in subsections “a” and “b” are met. Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register Bulletin “How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” of potentially historic resources for further information.

Based on the analysis outlined in this Historic Resources Report beginning on page 77, El Sueño meets three of the seven eligibility criteria for designation as a Class 1 Palm Springs Historic Resource. The relevant criteria are outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.070.C.1.a: (ii) The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state, or local history; (iii) Exemplifies a particular period in local history; and (v) Presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age, or that possesses high artistic value.

Additionally, El Sueño retains a “high degree” of historic integrity as outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.070.C.1.b in terms of Design, Materials, Workmanship, Location, Setting, Feeling, and Association (see Section 7, “Integrity Analysis”).



Charles O. Matcham, FAIA (1903-1980)
(Courtesy of the American Institute of Architects)



CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Department of Planning Services
3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262
Phone 760 323 8245

Fax 760 322 8360

Historic Preservation Officer 760 322 8364 x8786

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION (HRD)

WHEN TO USE THIS APPLICATION:

Use this application if you are seeking historic designation for a property, parcel or historic district.

For alterations to Class 1, Class 2, or contributing sites in a Historic District, use the CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS application. (C of A)

For alterations or demolition of Class 3, Class 4 or non-contributing sites in a Historic District use the MINOR ARCHITECTURAL APPLICATION (MAA).

(Contact the Planning Department if you are unsure of the classification of your property.)

WHO MAY APPLY:

Any individual or organization may apply to the City for consideration of a request for historic designation, however applications must be signed and notarized by the owner(s) of record of the site, structure, building or object for which the designation is sought. For Historic Districts written signatures from at least 51% of the property owners in the proposed district must be included in the application.

PROCEDURE:

1. For proposed historic sites or resources: Refer to Palm Springs Municipal Code ("PSMC") Section 8.05.070 for *Procedures and Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources*. ([www.palmspringsca.gov / government / departments / planning / municipal code / title 8 / section 8.05 "Historic Preservation"](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05_Historic_Preservation)).
2. For proposed historic districts: Refer to Municipal Code Section 8.05.090 for *Procedures and Criteria for Designation of Historic Districts*. ([www.palmspringsca.gov / government / departments / planning / municipal code / title 8 / section 8.05 "Historic Preservation"](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05_Historic_Preservation)).
3. Complete all parts of the application and include related reports, mailing labels and back up information in support of the application. Denote "NA" for any line item that is "not applicable".
4. Prior to submittal of the application, contact the City's Historic Preservation Officer ("HPO") to review the application for conformance and completeness.
5. Submit the completed application and related materials to the Department of Planning Services. A Planning Department case number will be assigned to the application.
6. Applications for historic site / resource or historic district designation are evaluated by City staff who will prepare the application for consideration by the City's Historic Site Preservation Board ("HSPB") at a noticed public hearing. Applicants should plan on attending the hearing. City staff will schedule site visits for members of the HSPB to become familiar with the site prior to the public hearing. (Exterior review only, interiors are not subject to HSPB review.)
7. At the public hearing, the HSPB will evaluate the application and make a recommendation for City Council action. The City Council will consider the application and the HSPB's recommendation at a second noticed public hearing. The applicant should again attend that hearing.
8. The final action of the City Council to designate will be recorded on the property title with the County Recorder's office.

FOR HISTORIC SITE / RESOURCE APPLICATIONS, SEE PART 1 BELOW.
FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT APPLICATIONS, SEE PART 2 BELOW.

PART 1: REQUIRED MATERIALS FOR HISTORIC SITE / RESOURCE DESIGNATION APPLICATIONS (See PSMC 8.05.070(A.3):

An application for historic site / resource designation must include the following items. After preliminary review of the application by the HPO, provide twelve (12) hard copies and 1 electronic copy on disk or thumb drive of the following materials unless otherwise noted:

		APPLICANT CHECK	CITY STAFF CHECK
1	Original Completed Application (1 copy)	☒	☐
2	Owner Consent Letter w/ notarized signature, (1 copy)	☒	☐
3	Ownership and address history; ("Chain of title") (1 copy.)	☒	☐
4	A report that describes how the proposed site(s), structures, buildings or objects are eligible and appropriate for designation under PSMC 8.05.070 for historic resources.	☒	☐
5	Photographs of the exterior of the proposed sites, structures, buildings or objects.	☒	☐
6	Aerial photo of the site / resource (from Google Maps or equal).	☒	☐
7	Information about the architect(s), designer(s), planner(s), and/or developers of the proposed sites, structures, buildings or objects, if known.	☒	☐
8	Date and method of construction of any structure, building or object upon the proposed site or within the proposed district (provide copies of building permits where possible).	☒	☐
9	A detailed assessment of the character-defining features of the site, structure, building or object, (such as materials, architectural details or landscape elements, architectural style, and other relevant descriptors, etc.)	☒	☐
10	Evaluation of the site, structure, building, or object relative to the Criteria and Findings for Designation of Class 1 and Class 2 Historic Resources. (PSMC 8.05.070 (C).1	☒	☐
11	Identify the source of the information provided in the application, such as building permit numbers, date and issue of publications, organizations or individuals.	☒	☐
12	Site Plan (8-1/2" x 11" or 11" x 17")	☒	☐
13	Any other documentation or research as may be deemed necessary by the HPO to determine the qualifications of the site, structure, building or object for historic designation.	☒	☐
14	Public Hearing Labels. The applicant shall submit public hearing mailing labels pursuant to Zoning Code Section 94.09.00.	☒	☐

¹Applicants are encouraged to review the City's Technical Assistance Bulletin titled "How to Apply the Palm Springs Eligibility Criteria for Historic Designation" available under "Historic Resources" of the Planning Home page of the City website (www.palmspringsca.gov) and the bulletin from the U.S. Department of the Interior National Register Criteria for Evaluation" (National Register Bulletin 15 (<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>)).



(to be completed by Planning staff:)

Date:
Case No.
HSPB No.
Planner:

CITY OF PALM SPRINGS
Department of Planning Services

HISTORIC RESOURCE DESIGNATION (HRD)

TO THE APPLICANT:

Complete all parts of this application. Denote "NA" for lines that are not applicable.
Submit the completed application with attachments to the Department of Planning Services at
3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262 Phone: 760-323-8245 Fax: 760-322-8380

This application is for a proposed: (Check one) ☒ Historic Site / Resource ☐ Historic District:

Applicant's Name: Thomas R. McClay and Michael D. Feddersen, trustees,

McClay-Feddersen Family Trust

Please Print

☒ Owner ☐ Lessee ☐ Authorized Agent ☐ City ☐ Other

Applicant's Address: 1184 Camino Mirasol

Number and Street Name or P.O. Box
Palm Springs, CA 92262

City State ZIP

Telephone Nos: (Michael Feddersen) 310-367-1950; (Tom McClay); 310-271-1111

Residence Cell Work

E-Mail address: (Michael Feddersen) mfedd@aol.com; (Tom McClay) trmla@aol.com

Note: For Historic District applications: On a separate page, provide a list all sites / parcels within the proposed historic district boundaries with the following information provided for each parcel / APN.

Site Address: 1184 Camino Mirasol

APN 505-202-016

Zone: _____

Section: _____ Gen'l Plan Land Use Desig. _____

Is the project located on the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Reservation? _____

(Refer to the Land Status Map under Tribal Resources on the Planning Department home page.)

Construction Date: 1934 ☐ Estimated ☒ Actual (denote source, i.e. bldg. permits)

Architect: Charles O. Matcham, FAIA (Heitschmidt & Matcham) Builder: Ernst Off

Present Owner: Thomas R. McClay and Michael D. Feddersen, trustees,

McClay-Feddersen Family Trust

Present Owner Address: 1184 Camino Mirasol, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Original Owner: Katherine deRoulhac Weed Seaman (1934-1940)

Other notable past owners: Melba and Frank Bennett, Donna Reed and Tony Owen

Other Historic Associations: Arthur Elrod, interior design (1955)

Common Name of Property: Donna Reed Residence, Melba Bennett Residence, Bennett-Reed Residence

Historic Name of Property: El Sueño

Attach to this application any information, photos, drawings, newspaper articles, reports, studies, or other materials to fully describe the characteristics or conditions that support this application for historic designation.

Architectural Style: Monterey Colonial Revival

(Refer to the Architectural Styles chapter of the Citywide Historic Context Statement, under Historic Resources on the Planning Home page (www.palmspringsca.gov)).

Period of Significance: 1934-1973

(See the Citywide Historic Context Statement Document.)

Please list any informational reference sources used to complete this application:

PSMC 8.05.070 (C.1): Criteria for the Designation of Class 1 Historic Resources.

A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 1 historic resource or a Contributing Resource in a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council, provided both of the following findings are met.

Provide a written description of how the site qualifies as historic resource under one or more of the following criterion:

FINDING 1: The site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed below:

- i. The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community.¹
- ii. The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state or local history.
- iii. The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history.
- iv. The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction, a period of construction or a method of construction.²
- v. The resource presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age, or that possesses high artistic value.
- vi. The resource represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, as used in evaluating applications for designation of historic districts, for parcels on which more than one entity exists.

- vii. The resource has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.

¹ NOTE: Unlike the National Register criteria, The City's criterion does not consider "patterns of events". For consideration of "patterns of events", use Criterion "iii", reflecting a particular period.

² Unlike the National Register criteria "type, period of method of construction relates to construction only" For design theme or characteristics use Criterion "iii" (period) or Criterion v (high artistic value).

FINDING 2: The site, structure, building or object retains most if not all of the following aspects of Integrity, as established in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards³: Design, Materials, Workmanship, Location, Setting, Feeling, Association.

PSMC 8.05.070 (C,2) Criteria for the Designation of Class 2 Historic Resources.

A site, structure, building or object may be designated as a Class 2 historic resource, or a Contributing Resource to a proposed historic district by the Palm Springs City Council provided the site, structure, building or object exhibits exceptional historic significance and meets one or more of the criteria listed in Finding 1 above. A Class 2 historic resource is not required to meet the findings for integrity as described in Finding 2 (above).

PSMC 8.05.090 (C) Criteria and Findings for Designation of Historic Districts.

In addition to the criteria listed in Finding 1, to be considered for designation as a Historic District, a defined area must:

- a. Contain contributing resources on a majority of the sites within the proposed district which individually meet the criteria in Finding (1). The defined area may include other structures, buildings, or archaeological sites which contribute generally to the overall distinctive character of the area and are related historically or visually by plan or physical development.
(Identify list by address and APN number each site / parcel that meets the criteria outlined in Finding 1 above and document how each meets the criteria.
- b. Identify non-contributing properties or vacant parcels to the extent necessary to establish appropriate, logical or convenient boundaries.
(Identify list by address and APN number each site / parcel within the proposed historic district that is considered non-contributing to the overall historic significance of the historic district.)

Please attach any additional information related to the application as necessary.

Questions: Contact the Palm Springs Planning Department at 760 323 8245.

³ Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior Bulletin for How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property.

Statement of Significance

Summary

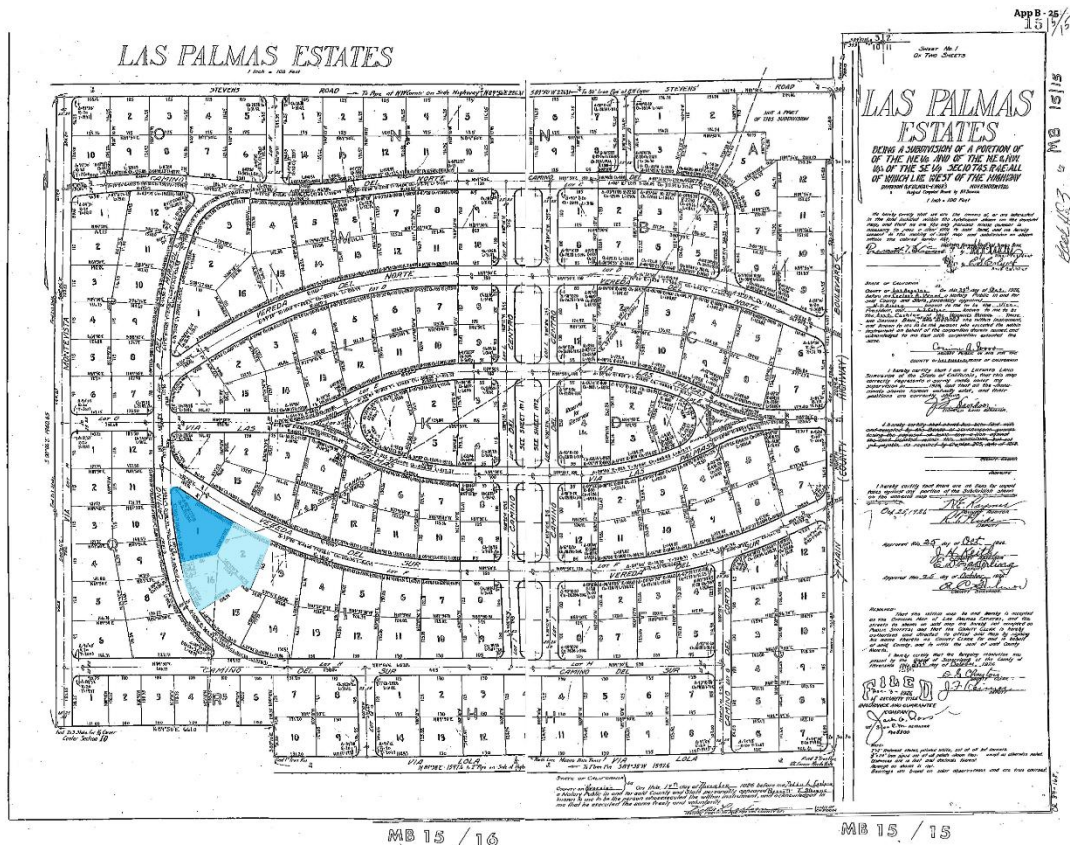
Completed in 1934, El Sueño is located within the historic Las Palmas Estates tract (1926), one of the earliest tracts to be developed in Palm Springs. Today, this tract, along with two adjoining tracts, Vista Acres (1923) and Merito Vista (1925), are commonly known under the umbrella designation of "Old Las Palmas."

El Sueño is located at 1184 Camino Mirasol, Palm Springs, CA 92262.

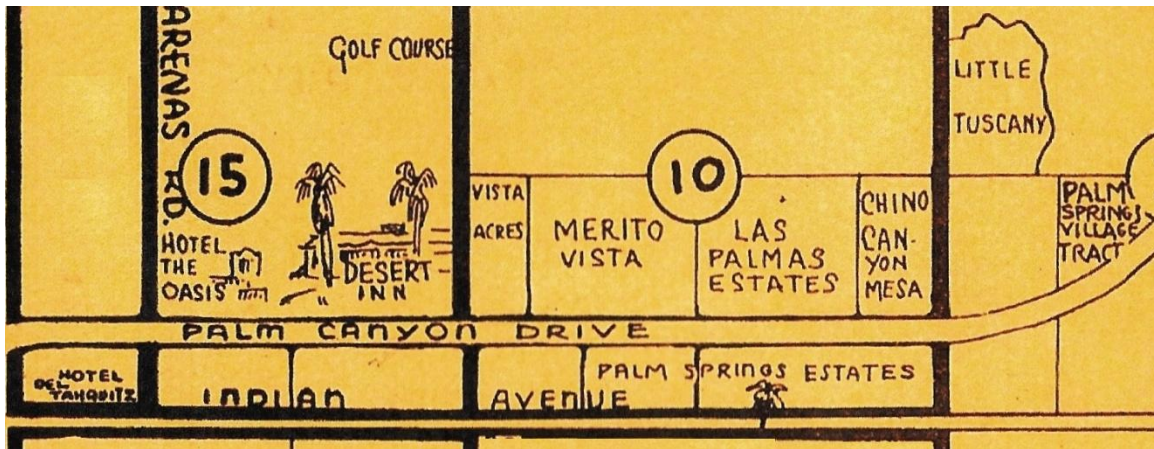
The legal description per the Riverside County Assessor is .73 ACRES NET IN PAR 1 RS 046/046 ACRES 000.73 NET Lot Type Parcel 1 Rec Map Type Record of Survey Map Plat B 046 Map Plat P 046

It should be noted that the original configuration of the property included Parcels 1, 2 and 16 in Block "I." However, Parcels 2 and 16 were sold off in the 1960s.

The home's APN is 505-202-016.



Sheets 1 and 2 of the tract map for Las Palmas Estates combined, October 1926.
The future location of El Sueño is shown in blue with its original additional parcels in lighter blue.



This 1930s map shows Las Palmas Estates' centralized position in the heart of Palm Springs.

The Las Palmas Estates Tract

El Sueño is located in the historic and exclusive Las Palmas Estates tract, part of today's "Old Las Palmas" district. First opened at the end of 1926, Las Palmas Estates was one of the earliest residential tracts developed in Palm Springs.

Las Palmas Estates was the third of four subdivisions created by the pioneering Palm Springs developer Prescott T. ("P.T.") Stevens (1845-1932). A critical figure in the early development of Palm Springs, Stevens was an important influence on the village's residential development, water resources and tourism. He was responsible for a series of important early tracts beginning with Vista Acres (1923); followed by Merito Vista (1925); Las Palmas Estates (1926); and Palm Springs Estates (1927). He was also the driving force behind the El Mirador Hotel (1927), a world-famous hostelry, second in popularity only to the Desert Inn.

Aside from the natural beauty of its mountain-base setting, Las Palmas Estates was distinguished by the interesting layout of its streets, which were curved in a manner evocative of country lanes rather than standard city blocks. Stevens had done this with the adjacent tract, Merito Vista, the previous year, and was so pleased with the result, he repeated it with Las Palmas Estates. These were given equally romantic names with all starting with either Vereda, Via or Camino. The one outlying exception was Stevens Road, which marked both the tract's northern border and a concession to the developer's vanity. He would hardly be the first or last developer to succumb to such a temptation.

The approximately 100-acre tract was divided into 165 individual lots, each a minimum of third of an acre in size. One critical decision Stevens included in his plans was to bury all telephone and utility cables, an expensive but far-sighted choice that has ensured the tract's lasting beauty. While that was an important decision aesthetically, another element would be an absolute necessity – water. Stevens promised residents of the tract would have easy and inexpensive access to irrigation water with no meters. It was a promise he knew he was able to keep.

While Stevens was an early visionary in the future of Palm Springs as a winter resort, he knew that its natural beauty and healthful climate would be a worthless draw without water and lots of it. Early on, during the 1910s, he began investing in water rights and, after his purchase of Chino Canyon in 1917, he began pumping water from it down into the village. In 1926, the same year

he opened Las Palmas Estates, he greatly increased his water rights with his purchase of the Palm Valley Water Co. And the following year, Stevens founded the Whitewater Mutual Water Co. (later renamed Palm Springs Water Co.) in partnership with J.J. Kocher, Alvah Hicks, Tom O'Donnell, and Warren Pinney. Within a few years, however, Stevens sold the company to his friend and oft-time business partner, Alvah Hicks (1884-1944).

Owing to his foresight and the willingness to expend extra money on added amenities, Stevens had ensured the long-term success of the Las Palmas Estates tract by the time it was officially opened for subdivision in October of 1926. Yet he would not personally guide its development, selling off his interests in Las Palmas Estates for the then-considerable sum of \$150,000 to the Hugh Evans Co. of Los Angeles. Evans was a major player in Southern California real estate at the time. By New Year's Day 1927, they began offering Las Palmas Estates to the public, having engaged the Palm Springs pioneering realtors Cree & Chaffey to serve as their local representative.

A Pleasure to Show you . . .

Las Palmas Estates

A High-class Residential
Development.

Overlooking Palm Springs.

All Telephone and Electric Wires
Underground.

Inexpensive Irrigation Water.

REALTY SERVICE, Inc.

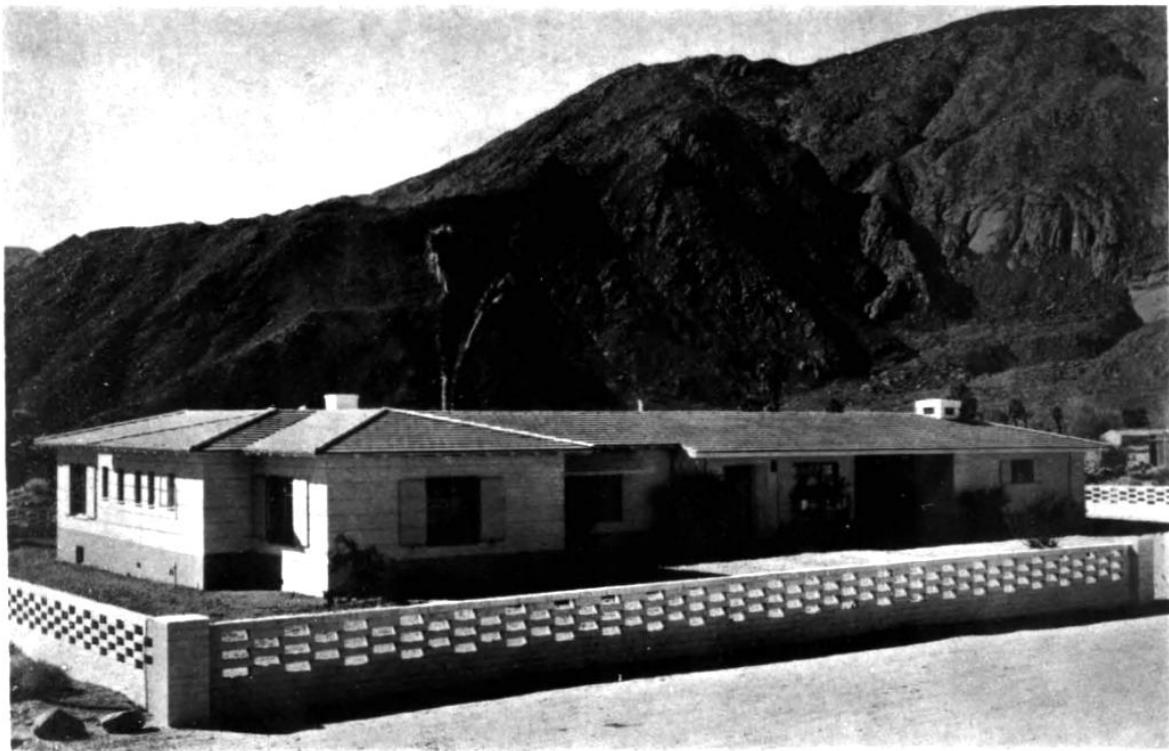
Opp. El Paseo Pharmacy Phone 3673

An advertisement for Las Palmas Estates from 1934, the same year El Sueño was built.
(*Desert Sun* via Newspapers.com)

Las Palmas Estates, like other early tracts in Palm Springs, was marketed to those wealthy enough to be able to build a permanent “winter” home in the desert. While an advertising campaign was mounted in such publications as the *Los Angeles Times*, it is likely most lot buyers came from guests of the Desert Inn, El Mirador, Oasis, and other local hotels who fell in love with the setting and made the decision to have a permanent piece of it for themselves. To boost the

tract's prestige and to ensure it attracted the "right kind" of people, significant restrictions were placed on the size and type of homes built, requiring a minimum \$5,000 investment for a one-story dwelling and \$7,500.00 for 2-stories. Only one private residence could be built on each lot, with any kind of multi-family dwelling, saloon or store building strictly forbidden. All architectural designs were to be approved by a designated architectural committee before any construction could begin. And, inevitably, for the era, no home could be occupied by "any person whose blood is not entirely that of the Caucasian race." Servants were exempted from this restriction.

While lot sales may have been good, actual home construction lagged. Although it only covers a portion of the tract, the 1929 Sanborn insurance map shows just two residences, at 260 Vereda del Sur and 1201 Main Street (North Palm Canyon Drive). This sluggish start was not unique to Las Palmas Estates, appearing to reflect an overall slow building pace in most of the local tracts developed at the time. Ironically, the pace of building picked up considerably in the early 1930s, right in the midst of the Great Depression, a time when the opposite was true around most of the country.



Photographs by Stephen Willard

LAS PALMAS DEMONSTRATION HOME

PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

The 1936 Las Palmas (aka Desert) Demonstration Home, designed by Charles O. Matcham, at 339 Vereda del Norte, drew thousands of visitors and brought much attention to the Las Palmas Estates.
(California Arts & Architecture. April 1936)

In 1930, Las Palmas Estates was purchased by a syndicate of Alvah F. Hicks, Warren B. Pinney (of El Mirador Hotel), and D.C. Hutchon. Hicks in particular had been closely associated with P.T. Stevens and his tract developments for a number of years. In fact, one of Stevens' greatest contributions to Palm Springs was encouraging Hicks to move into the village from his homestead near Desert Hot Springs in 1916. Like Stevens, Hicks would become one of Palm Springs' most important and influential early pioneers. At Stevens' behest, Hicks became the village's first and much-needed carpenter. Stevens began using him for his various building projects and before long he was sought after by others, literally helping the village to grow.

Hicks helped establish the look of success in Stevens' earlier tracts by building several speculative houses to show both positive growth as well as setting a tone of high quality in design. While current documentation is lacking, it is possible Hicks did the same in Las Palmas Estates, something his son Harold would later do.

During the 1930s, Las Palmas Estates became a sought-after setting for winter homes of the wealthy, a situation aided by a solid PR campaign by Harold Hicks through the Realty Service Co., Inc. A major component of the campaign included the construction of "demonstration" houses, showcase homes skillfully designed and professionally decorated, which were open to the public. The first of these, the 1936 "Desert Demonstration Home" aka "Las Palmas Demonstration Home," was located at 339 Verde Del Norte and designed by Charles O. Matcham. This proved to be such a success that a second demonstration house was built the following year, this one sponsored by Bullock's Department Store, and located a few doors to the east at 201 Vereda del Norte. This demonstration home was designed by important local architects Brewster & Benedict.

Matcham and Brewster & Benedict are among a distinguished group of architects, designers, and builders who have created notable homes in the tract, a list that includes such figures as Albert Frey, Gerard R. Colcord, Cliff May, Lee Miller, W.C. Pennell, Herbert W. Burns, and John Porter Clark, among others.

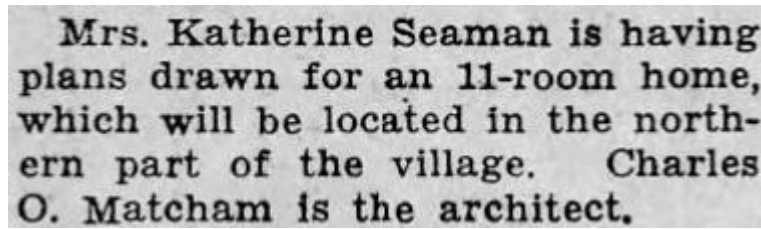
Las Palmas Estates has been a haven for celebrities and other well-known figures on a local to international scale from its earliest days with a long list of notables such as William Powell, Earle C. Anthony, Harold Hicks, Alan Ladd, Donna Reed, Melba Bennett, Katherine Finchy, Carolyn Jones, Mary Martin, Howard Hawks, Jerry Herman, and "Swiftly" Lazar, all calling the tract home. So many famous names have been associated with Las Palmas Estates, it was dubbed "the Bel Air" of Palm Springs in 1958 by society columnist Joan Winchell.

Today, Las Palmas Estates remains one of the most historic and sought after neighborhoods in Palm Springs.

The Original Builder and Owner – Katherine DeRoulhac Weed Seaman

In 1934, Katherine Ruffin deRoulhac Weed Seaman (generally referred to in both legal documents and the press as “Katherine DeR. Seaman”), a member of an old and distinguished North Carolina family and well-known society figure, purchased a three-lot parcel in the Las Palmas Estates tract with the intention of building a winter home. Born sometime between the years of 1878 and 1883 (sources differ), Seaman had made quite a splash in East Coast society circles during her youth, being noted for both her great beauty and considerable wealth. It was a potent combination that brought her much attention and some notoriety over the years.

During the 1920s, Seaman relocated to the West Coast where she quickly began building an impressive real estate portfolio. By 1934, it was reported that she owned homes throughout California including Pebble Beach, Santa Barbara, Malibu, and Beverly Hills. Palm Springs seemed like a logical addition to her collection. And while she was still officially married at the time to prominent yacht broker Stanley Myers Seaman (1876-1948), they appear to have been living separate lives and the home was intended for herself and her daughter, also named Katherine. She had a son, John, but he had a home of his own in Los Angeles. However, he and his family would be frequent visitors to the house during his mother’s ownership.



Mrs. Katherine Seaman is having plans drawn for an 11-room home, which will be located in the northern part of the village. Charles O. Matcham is the architect.

(*Riverside Daily Press* April 3, 1934)

The news that Mrs. Seaman was building a large house in Palm Springs was reported upon by both the *Desert Sun* and *Riverside Daily Press*. In April 1934, these papers reported that the home, which was to consist of 11 rooms, was to be designed by architect Charles O. Matcham with Ernst Off as contractor.

1934 was an important year for Palm Springs architecture as it marked the opening of not just one, but two full time architectural firms in the rapidly growing village – a Palm Springs office of the Pasadena firm of Van Pelt & Lind, and the same for the Los Angeles firm of Heitschmidt & Matcham. The local Van Pelt & Lind office, with Garrett Van Pelt’s full blessing, was really a front for his two talented yet unlicensed designers, John Porter Clark and Albert Frey. They would build their reputations under the banner of this distinguished and well-established architectural firm. As for Heitschmidt & Matcham, it was run directly and exclusively by Matcham, who had fallen in love with the desert and saw great potential in its future. Palm Springs structures credited to the firm of Heitschmidt & Matcham, and between 1936-1939, Heitschmidt, Matcham & (Paul O.) Davis, were all designed by Matcham. Matcham’s senior partner and mentor, Earl T. Heitschmidt, focused on commercial and civic structures in the Los Angeles area

Like his client, Mrs. Seaman, Matcham was also from a background of privilege and wealth. It is presently unknown how she came to choose him for the commission, but the pair appear to have known each other well enough for he and his wife to be invited to the wedding of Seaman’s daughter, held at El Sueño, in 1935.

Matcham's commission for Seaman in 1934 appears to have been one of his earliest, if not the earliest, of his desert designs. Around the same time, he completed two other works that gained more attention - the first unit of the Colonial House apartment-hotel (today's Colony Palms), designed in the Monterey Colonial Revival style, and the Bermuda-style William T. Walker house at 570 Via Corta. While the Walker house drew the lion's share of the attention, with layouts in *The Architectural Digest*, *California Arts & Architecture*, and the *Architectural Record*, his design for the Seaman house was nonetheless very well received and became a prized addition to Las Palmas Estates and Palm Springs.

Matcham, who would divide his time between Palm Springs and Los Angeles throughout the 1930s, had established not only a local office (in the El Paseo building), but a local residence as well, purchasing Rancho Grande, the former William Marte home at the corner of North Indian Canyon Drive and Tamarisk Road, just a few blocks from the Seaman house. Today, Matcham's former home is operated as a short-term vacation rental known as Citrus House.



Photographs by Mott Studios

While Rancho Grande was built prior to his advent in Palm Springs, Matcham remodeled and added onto it after purchasing it from contractor William Marte in the early 1930s. The pair would work together numerous times during Matcham's time in the desert.

(Mott Studios photo via *California Arts & Architecture*)

Although he could produce competent modern designs, Matcham favored classical revival styles and was a master at them from French to English to American Colonial, and of course, to Spanish. Matcham's Palm Springs work during the 1930s was almost exclusively in variations of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. In 1934, Matcham designed the residence of Katherine DeR. Seaman in the Monterey Colonial Revival style.

The Monterey Colonial Revival Style



The Thomas Larkin House, Monterey (1835), is considered the progenitor of the Monterey Colonial style and its subsequent revival in the 1920s and 1930s.
(Photo By J.S. Weida via Wikipedia)

The Monterey Colonial style, a sub style of Spanish Colonial, is unique for its blend of both Spanish and American architectural elements. It originated in Monterey in the 1830s during the period of Mexican rule over the future state, which was then known as Alta California. Monterey served as the provincial capital and center for international trade. Among those doing business with the Californians were certain enterprising American merchants who made the long and dangerous journey “around the Horn,” to trade luxury goods such as furniture and textiles in exchange for cowhides, dubbed the “California dollar.”

One of these merchants, Thomas O. Larkin, made the decision to establish himself full time in this new land of opportunity, joining his half-brother John Rogers Cooper, in 1832. In 1834, the recently married Larkin set out to build a house for himself and his growing family. Feeling nostalgic for the look and feel of homes in his native Massachusetts, Larkin took a simple one-story adobe house and added a second floor, which was an almost unheard-of extravagance in the province. To this, he surrounded the façade with a balcony that wrapped around the façade and in the process unintentionally created a new style that would be repeated time and again, not just in Monterey, but throughout the province, all the way south to San Diego.

The Monterey Colonial style, like its sister Spanish Colonial, faded from popularity after California became a state, with its surviving examples either falling into ruin or surviving as quaint historic relics. However, when the state was swept up in the Spanish Colonial Revival movement of the 1920s-1930s, the Monterey variant was revived as well.

Monterey Colonial Revival became an important and popular architectural choice in California and elsewhere starting around the mid-1920s. It could be, and was, applied to bigger structures such as apartments, stores, and offices, but its real success came in residential applications. Most of Southern California's most important residential architects including Elmer Grey, Arthur Rolland Kelly, H. Roy Kelley, and John Byers, all produced excellent adaptations of Monterey Colonial Revival style. However, it was the masterful Roland E. Coate who emerged as the style's main champion.

For Coate, the Monterey Colonial house was the perfect marriage of romance and practicality, providing the solution to the long-sought quest for an architecture that was truly "Californian." In a 1929 article titled "The Early California House: Blending Colonial and California Forms," published in *California Arts & Architecture*, Coate extolled the style's many virtues. "It lends itself to many sites. It combines formal with the informal, it is quaint but dignified." Coate expressed that the heart of the home's appeal was in its intermingling of elements from both Hispanic and Anglo precedents. "It is new and yet it is old. Old traditions and old forms blended with new forms and treated in a new way."



Roland E. Coate's first essay into the Monterey Colonial Revival style, the Stafford Bixby house in South Pasadena (1925), was highly praised and much published, winning international architecture awards and helping to create a demand for homes of a similar type.
(UC Santa Barbara Architecture and Design Collection)

Architects and homeowners loved the Monterey Colonial Revival style because it had great flexibility. Like all architectural styles, it had a series of character defining features, however, there was considerable leeway in how the features could be employed. The exterior wall treatments could be stucco, brick or wood, often there was a combination of these such as brick for the first level and wood for the second. The brick could be common red brick (red or another color variant), or concrete pumice to simulate adobe. The brick could be left in its original state or whitewashed. Wood sheathing could be weatherboard, shingle or board-and-batten, done in horizontal or vertical boards. Roofs could be shingle or tile. Massing, often rectangular, could also be square, attached wings were common but their shape and orientation could vary. Windows were usually consistent, but their positioning could vary with some facades exhibiting symmetrical positioning while others were asymmetrical. Even the signature balcony could vary in considerable ways from heavy beams to lacy wrought-iron work. And the balconies could be either solely on the second level, or they could extend down to the first as well. The types and styles of balusters were almost limitless from wooden to metal to carved symbols and decorative designs.

This flexibility extended to the interiors as well. One of the great appeals of Monterey Colonial architecture is how it is compatible with a wide range of decorative styles. The original builders in the 1800s furnished their houses with pieces shipped from the East Coast and discovered American Colonial furniture harmonized perfectly with the hybrid Monterey Spanish and American Colonial architecture.

Monterey Colonial Revival reached the peak of its popularity in California in the 1920s and 1930s, however, the style continues to be a familiar choice in homebuilding in California and across the country owing to the timelessness and livability of its designs.



One of Charles O. Matcham's earliest designs, the Alan W. Burton house on Beverly Glen Boulevard (1932) in West Los Angeles, completed while he was still a draftsman for Earl T. Heitschmidt, is a virtual catalogue of classic Monterey Colonial Revival elements.
(Via *American Architect and Architecture*. January 1938)



A small sampling of Monterey Colonial Revival homes in California demonstrates a few of the ways in which the style can be individualized by use of materials, layout, balconies, etc.

The Monterey Colonial Revival Style in Palm Springs

The decision to design Katherine DeR. Seaman's new Las Palmas Estates home in the Monterey Colonial Revival, was an unusual one. While the style was at the peak of its popularity throughout the rest of California, it was virtually non-existent in Palm Springs. This omission was most likely that Monterey Colonial Revival homes are traditionally 2-stories while most homes built in the village were, and remain, single story.



While it walks a fine line between the Monterey and Spanish Colonial Revivals, Ojo Del Desierto showcases one of the Monterey Colonial Revival's signature elements with its bold cantilevered balcony.

(Courtesy Tracy Conrad)

Like Ojo Del Desierto, the Addison (A.C.) Hoof Residence (ca. 1927, architect unknown) at 828 Avenida (de los) Palos Verdes in today's Movie Colony, favored the Spanish rather than American Colonial precedents of the Monterey Colonial. Interestingly, the house underwent certain alterations in later years that brought it more in line with the more traditional Monterey Colonial Revival.



An early view of the Addison Hoof Residence in the Las Hacenditas tract, which shows typical rectangular massing of the style and signature cantilevered balcony.

(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)



A recent Google Earth view of the Hoof house shows how it has been altered over time to become more Colonial, including the addition of lacy wrought-iron railings.



El Pri-Tro, the Katherine N. Romer residence at 421 Santa Rosa Drive in Tahquitz Park. The home, designed by New York/Connecticut architect F. Nelson Breed in 1938, is one of the only Palm Springs homes credited specifically as Monterey Colonial Revival style by the Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings created by Historic Resources Group.

Ironically, the best-known Monterey Colonial Revival style home in Palm Springs, the Sparey-Kemper Residence at 345 Via Las Palmas, designed in 1936 by master Los Angeles architect, Gerard R. Colcord, AIA, was demolished in 1999 after a spirited effort by local preservationists failed to save it from the wrecking ball. It was a considerable loss for Palm Springs architecture.



When it was completed in 1936, the Sparey-Kemper Estate received much favorable attention in the architectural press including early layouts in *The Architectural Digest* and *California Arts & Architecture*. It was considered a masterful example of the Monterey Colonial Revival style. Its tragic loss only heightens the importance of El Sueño, the Bennett-Reed Residence. (Via *The Architectural Digest*)



An alternate view of the Sparey-Kemper house. This image is often mistakenly identified as El Sueño, the Bennett-Reed Residence. The properties do share numerous similarities.

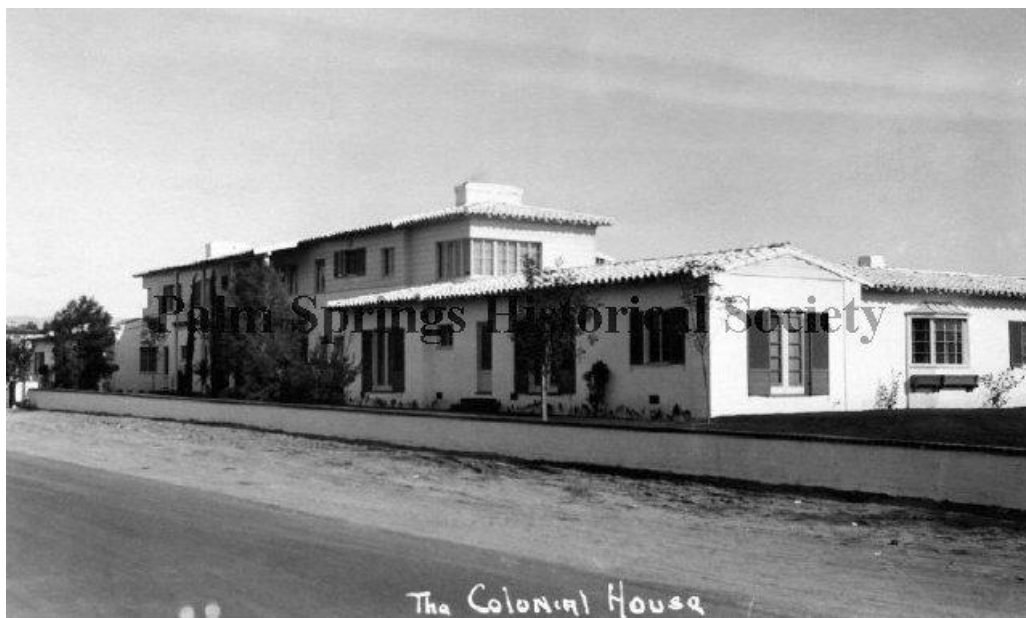


**Although Monterey Colonial Revival is most often associated with residential design, it could be used successfully in larger projects as well, as demonstrated by William Charles Tanner at the Desert Inn (1925)
(Mott-Merge Collection, California State Library)**





Other Monterey Colonial Revival projects in Palm Springs included two important apartment-hotels, both built in 1936 – The Town House and the Colonial House (today's Colony Palms Hotel). While nearly identical twins, they were designed by different architects, with the Town House by Brewster, Benedict & Taylor, and the Colonial House by Charles O. Matcham.
 (Lower image: Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)





(Above) The House of Murphy Apartment Hotel (originally the Rose Hotel) was a well-known landmark on South Palm Canyon Drive from the time of its completion in 1936. While the 1946 Crawford's Apartments at 855 North Indian Canyon Drive (Below) was a rare post-war Monterey Revival village design.





When it first opened in February 1938, the Palm Springs Tennis Club, designed by local architects Ormsby & Steffgren, was a notable addition to the village's collection of Monterey Colonial Revival architecture. In 1947, it was given a more modern look by A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams.
(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)

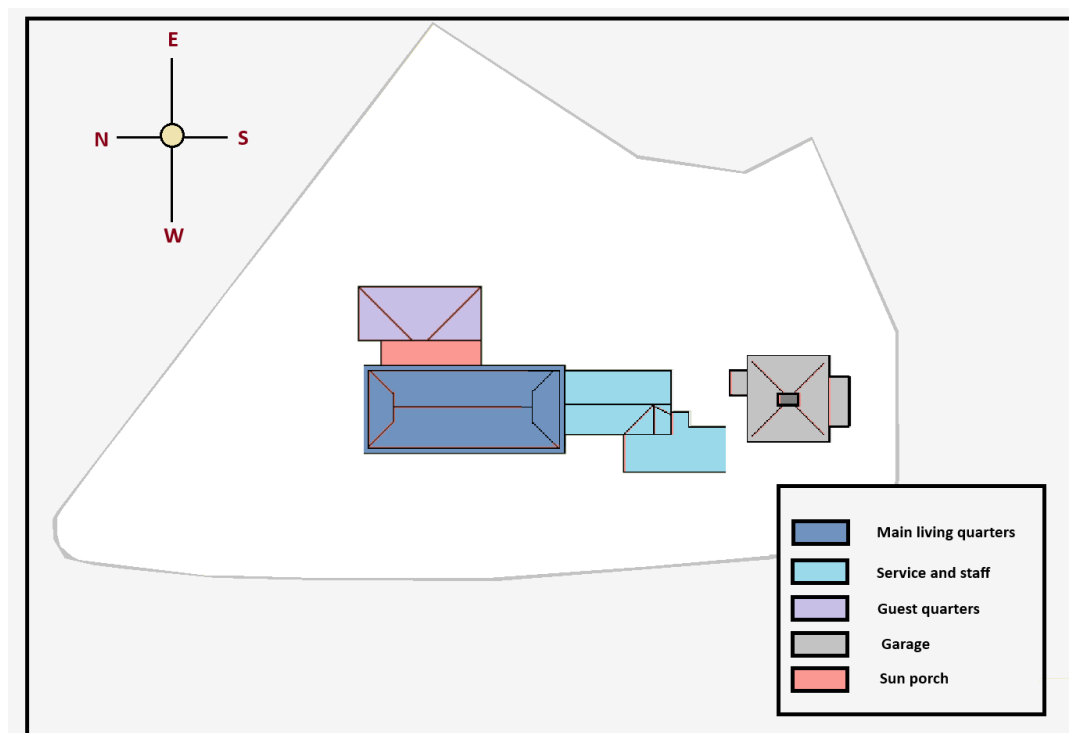
The Contractor, Ernst Off

It would appear architect Matcham had been working on the plans for the Katherine Seaman residence well before the grant deed on the property was officially finalized on April 25, 1934, as construction had already been announced three weeks earlier. The home was completed in approximately six months, a fairly short window for a property of such size. *The Riverside Daily Press* noted the home's completion in its October 27, 1934, issue, writing, "Another new home in the Las Palmas Estates is that of Mrs. Katherine De Seamon (sic) and her daughter. It has just been completed under the supervision of Ernest (sic) Off."

Ernst Off (1901-1993), the contractor for El Sueño, was a pioneering figure in Palm Springs architectural, building, and development history, whose career in the Coachella Valley spanned more than a half century. He built and sometimes designed hundreds of homes, apartments, and business buildings throughout the area. He was also a successful developer, most notably the Chino Mesa Estates tract in 1946 and the Palmeras Park tract in Palm Desert in the 1960s. (See full Off biography in Appendix VIII)

The Design of El Sueño

When Charles O. Matcham set out to design a Monterey Colonial Revival style home for Katherine DeR. Seaman he wanted to create a home that was visually evocative of the past but would not be a copy of any existing Monterey home. Rather, he picked Monterey elements from different structures that felt historic but was something entirely unique in unto itself.



A view of the way Matcham laid out the massing and orientation of El Sueño shows its straightforward yet still picturesque layout. The elongated plan allowed for maximum access to the outdoors and the views.

Matcham followed classic Monterey style traditions in creating a long, rectangular two-story main mass to which were attached one-story wings. This was both to avoid any monolithic look as well as create the illusion that the house had grown over time just as the original homes had done.

Las Palmas Estates required the home be built facing the front line of the lot and be built no closer than 35-feet from the lot line. Even without such a restriction, Matcham would likely have done the same to maximize the views. He oriented the house on a north-south axis, which would give the rooms on the second floor the maximum possible views of the nearby San Jacintos rising on the west, while rooms on the eastern side took in the morning sun, the future park-like grounds, and the mountain ranges beyond.



Matcham's design of El Sueño is a textbook example of the Monterey Colonial Revival style, with virtually all character defining features present.
(Courtesy of Patrick Stewart Properties. 2026)

For the exterior treatments, Matcham chose a classical combination of wood and brick, with brick sheathing the first level while wood covered the second. The choice of brick was hollow-tile pumice concrete slump, which was intended to mimic adobe. This effect was enhanced by how the masonry was troweled, purposely allowing it to squeeze out in between courses to create a rustic effect.



Detail of brickwork on the façade showing the rusticated manner of the troweling between courses. Note how Matcham used red brick as a contrast for the window apron and the use of wrought ironwork.
(Author photo. August 2025)

As for the woodwork, Matcham used a combination of vertical and horizontal board cladding. The vertical board-and-batten was used to sheath the second story on the north (main façade), but then he made the interesting choice of switching over to horizontal cladding for rest of the house.



The home's northern façade shows how Matcham switched the orientation of the board cladding from vertical to horizontal.
(Author photo. August 2025)



The above image is cropped from an aerial photograph of the Irving T. Snyder residence, *White Tiles*, at 1145 Camino (del) Mirasol, and captures a portion of El Sueño as it would have looked at some point between 1938-1946. Further close up below.
(Courtesy of Tracy Conrad)



The Western (Primary) Façade

Owing to landscaping and dividing walls, it is not possible to encompass the entirety of the western façade in one image. However, this façade is made up of two components – the main two-story mass and the attached one-story service wing projecting off the south.



**The main western façade with its one-story service wing partially visible at right.
Note the main entry door located at the junction of the main core and the one-story wing.
(Courtesy of Patrick Stewart Properties. 2026)**

The above photograph provides a visual highlight of the numerous architectural elements that comprise El Sueño, beginning with the very low-pitched hipped roof, the vertical board cladding on the second floor level, the concrete brick of the first level, the asymmetrical placement of the windows and doors, and the wraparound cantilevered balcony with its simple wooden balustrades, all character defining features of the Monterey Colonial Revival style.

No other element of El Sueño is more indicative of the Monterey Colonial Revival style than its signature balcony, which runs the entire length of the western and northern facades. Like the other character defining features of the style, there is a wide range in variations in the way balconies are treated. While the majority may be cantilevered, another common version is to have the balcony supported from the ground by posts. This is the way the balcony at the original Larkin House was constructed. Baluster treatments are seemingly limitless with variations that run from very simple to elaborately carved and can range from wood to metal.



The balcony from the second floor.
(Courtesy of Patrick Stewart Properties. 2026)



A section of the balcony as seen from below, which shows the contrast in materials between the first and second levels.
(Courtesy of Patrick Stewart Properties. 2026)

The South Facade



A glimpse of the one-story service wing seen from the arrival court.
(Author photo. August 2025)



A portion of the service wing as seen facing towards the west.
(Author photo. August 2025)

The North Façade

The narrow north façade is similar to that of the main, western, façade with the same visual elements as the wraparound balcony, concrete brick on the first level and board-and-batten on the second level. However, this side also shows the home's sun porch, which is sheathed in horizontal boards, and which makes up the roof of the passageway between the main house and the guest house.



(Author photo. August 2025)



(Author photo. August 2025)

The East Façade

The east façade of El Sueño shows how Matcham switched the orientation of the board cladding from vertical to horizontal, giving each façade its own distinctive look. Photographic evidence shows the sun porch had originally been open and that a one-story covered terrace once ran the length of the façade, which was removed at an unknown date.



(Courtesy of Patrick Stewart Properties. 2026)

The façade is highlighted and anchored by an enormous and asymmetrical fireplace chimney, which is made of the same rusticated brickwork as the first level. Matcham used the guest house wing to create a patio space for entertaining, adding a bar and charming outdoor fireplace. French doors opened off from multiple rooms to give ease of access to the patio. In 1955, this space was further enhanced by the addition of a large kidney-shaped swimming pool.

The spaces on the second level by the horizontal cladding define a study (on the left) and the sleeping/sun porch on the right. The service wing on the south was given a different roof treatment to further contrast it with the main core.



**A no-doubt much-loved and much-used feature is the outdoor fireplace.
Note the mission bell lights framing each side.
(Author photo. August 2025)**



**The outdoor bar is built in front of the guest house and convenient to the pool.
(Courtesy of Patrick Stewart Properties. 2026)**

The Garage



(Author photo. August 2025)

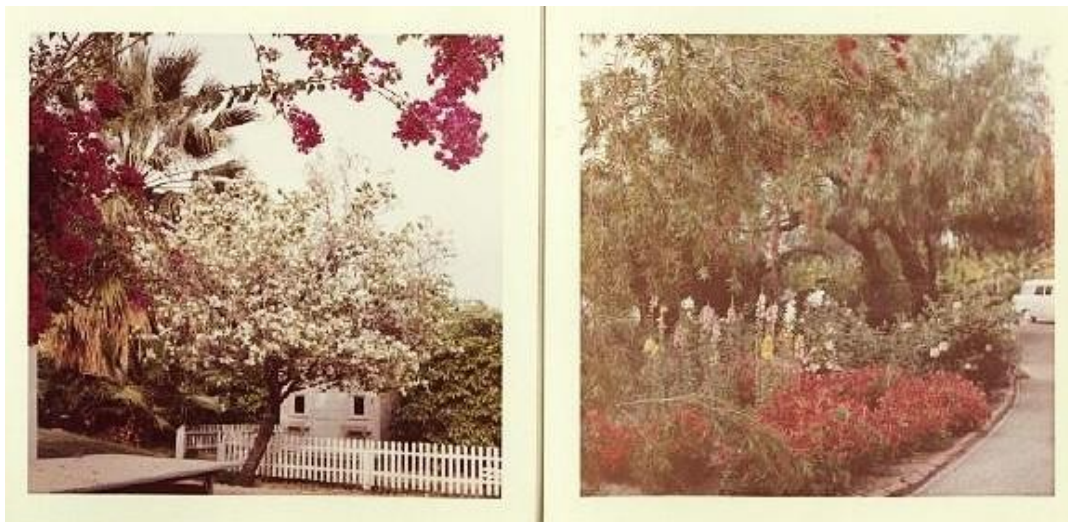
Believed to have been built contemporaneously with the main house, the two-car garage is a separate structure located just to the south of the home and running along the same axis. The garage is constructed with the same pumice concrete bricks as the main structure with courses troweled in the same rustic manner. The garage suffered fire damage with the roof being rebuilt. In 1978, as part of the rebuild, the garage was converted into a den by then-owner George Yanck.

It should be noted that the charming cupola surmounting the roof with bells reminiscent of a country school, was not part of the original roof configuration, but added at a later date.

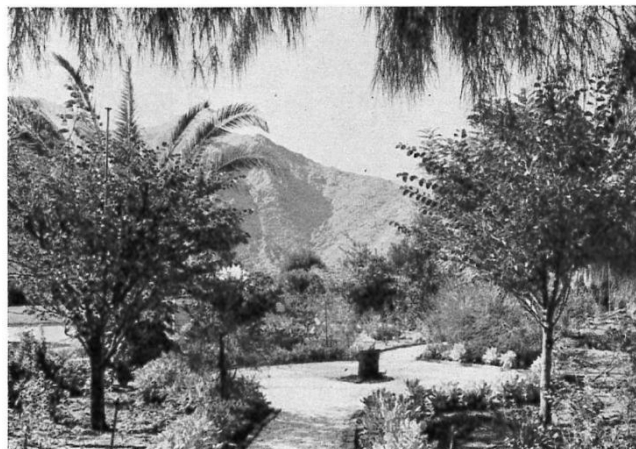
The Grounds

One of the most visually delightful features of El Sueño is its mature parklike gardens with dozens of mature trees, shrubs, flowers, lawns, and other diverse plantings. Today, El Sueño's exterior spaces cover .73 acres. Originally, they surpassed more than an acre until the estate was partially subdivided by the sales of Lots 2 and 16 in the mid-1960s. However, even in their reduced form, the garden spaces at El Sueño are among the most beautiful in all of Palm Springs.

While little is known of the history as to whom, if anyone, originally landscaped the property, it is known that the grounds were carefully curated during Melba Bennett's years of ownership, 1955-1966. As a founder and president of the Garden Club of Palm Springs, Melba devoted precious time and energy maintaining and improving the grounds. It was also Melba and Frank Bennett who introduced the large kidney-shaped swimming pool to the estate in 1955.



Two Polaroid snapshots from Melba Bennett's photo albums give a tantalizing glimpse of the El Sueño grounds under her decade-long stewardship.
(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)



A view from a 1958 *Palm Springs Villager* article.
(via *Palm Springs Villager*)



Donna Reed and Tony Owen's daughter, Mary Anne, posing in her very Mod boots by the pool in the 1960s overlaid on a contemporary image.
(Courtesy of Mary Owen)



(Author photo. August 2025)



(Author photos. August 2025)



Hardscaping and walls

The hardscaping at El Sueño has changed at various times based on photographic evidence. Today, this includes brick walkways, gravel drives and paths, as well as some decorative tilework (by pool patio).



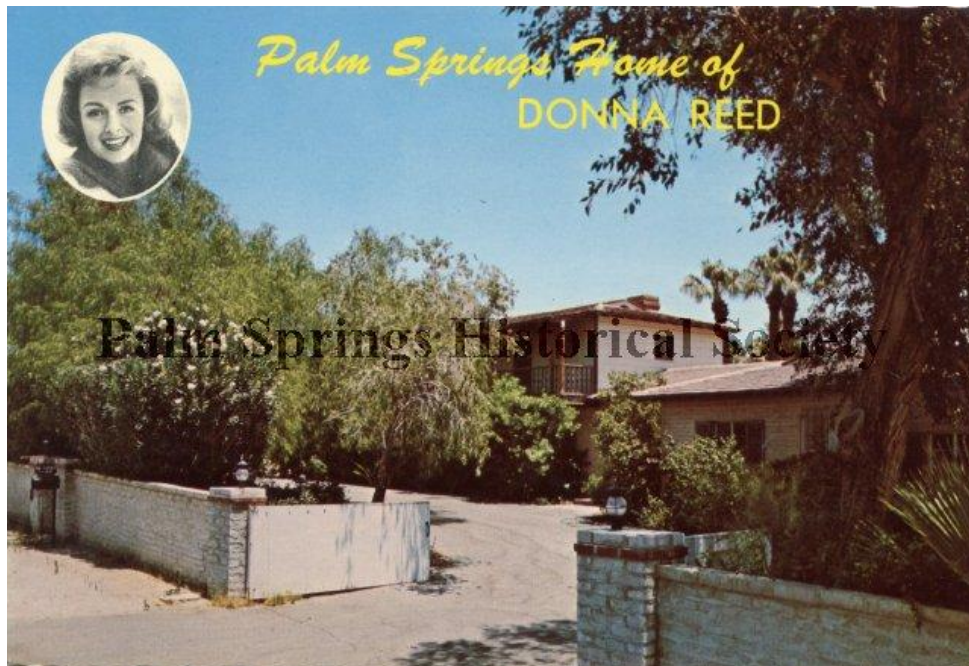
Part of the hardscaping surrounding the pool. Note the subtle difference between the outdoor area and the brickwork in the passageway. Also, three different types of tile may be seen.

(Author photo. August 2025)

The grounds also feature a series of walls of varying types and materials. The dates of their construction are unknown but, like the hardscaping, appears to have been added and altered over time.



The motor court entrance showing the entrance gate posts as well as a red brick wall running perpendicularly, used to separate the motor court from the front garden. During Donna Reed's time, the front walls were much lower with a semi-circular driveway curving from the street towards the front door. This was removed at a later date.



(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)



**A view looking into the enclosed patio between the main house and garage shows different wall types. Note the foreground wall shows evidence of having been raised higher at some point.
Below image shows brick wall separating motor court and front grounds
(Author photos. August 2025)**



El Sueño and its First Owner – Katherine DeRoulhac Seaman (1934-1940)

**RACQUET CLUB OPENING
PARTY ATTRACTS THROG**

Many prominent local people and movie stars, gathered at the Racquet Club party Sunday to celebrate the opening of the club for the winter season.

The local folk included Mr. and Mrs. George Roberson, Mr. and Mrs. Chuck Morrison, Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Hicks, Mr. and Mrs. C. O. Matcham, Mrs. Hobart Garlick, Mr. and Mrs. Darsie Lloyd, Mr. and Mrs. Ferris Webster, Mrs. Katherine de R. Seaman, Mr. and Mrs. A. I. M. Gardiner, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Bennett, Miss June Webb, Mr. and Mrs. John Beck, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Hicks, Mr. and Mrs. James Guthrie, Miss Dolly Harrison, Fred Ingraham, Bill Hollingsworth, Mrs. Ted Stein, Jr., and Miss Mary Helen Stein, Mrs. Alan Thompson, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Hicks, Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis Earl, Tony Burke, Miss Lola Hotaling, and innumerable others.

(Desert Sun 11-8-1935 via newspapers.com)

In the "It's a Small World," Palm Springs edition, the Matchams, the Bennetts, and Katherine DeR. Seaman socialized together in 1935, 20 years before Bennett would buy El Sueño. News accounts show them intermingling on several occasions with Matcham, a guest at El Sueño during both Seaman's ownership and that of the Bennetts.

Katherine DeR. Seaman took possession of her new home in October 1934, and it would remain her winter getaway for the next six years. Based on contemporary news accounts, Seaman was a popular figure in the village with her name mentioned frequently either dining out, attending fashion lunches at the Racquet Club or nightclubbing it with friends at the local hotspots. She also must have entertained at her showplace home. In 1938, the *Desert Sun* noted that Seaman was "long considered one of Palm Springs' most popular hostesses." Unfortunately, records detailing specific events are sparse. However, one major event did make the papers, the wedding of her beloved daughter and namesake, Katherine, held in the home's living room on May 4, 1935. About two dozen guests attended the festive occasion including Mr. and Mrs. Charles O. Matcham.

Seaman enjoyed having family to the house for extended stays with her sister Emilie coming down from Del Monte, and her son John and his family regularly dropping in from Los Angeles.

The press recorded one unwelcome visitor who came for an unannounced visit in 1937. Robert Lombard, an escapee from a prison camp outside Los Angeles, broke into the home while Mrs. Seaman was out of town. He stole nothing, but rather, enjoyed a luxurious bath, before departing and helping himself to a nearby car.



Perhaps it was a feeling of nostalgia for El Sueño that led Katherine DeR. Seaman to purchase this Monterey Colonial Revival home in Palm Beach, Florida in the early 1960s, some 20 years and 3,000 miles from her former desert oasis.

Second owners – Joseph N. and Lenora Borroughs (1940-1955)



“Towel King” Joseph N. Borroughs and his wife, Lenora,
basking in the excitement of a laundry supply convention.
(Via newspapers.com)

In 1940, Mrs. Seaman sold El Sueño and purchased a new house in Beverly Hills. Her Palm Springs home was picked by Joseph N. Borroughs (1881-1954) and his wife Lenora. The couple, who lived principally in Piedmont, used El Sueño as a winter residence just as had Katherine Seaman.

Borroughs was a highly successful businessman in the specialized world of towels. He was founder and president of the Oakland California Towel Co. and holder of a lucrative patent on roll-out linen towels. Borroughs' company had contracts servicing hotels and restaurants throughout California.

The Borroughs' appeared to lead a fairly quiet life in the desert with their names mostly absent from the social and society columns. However, it did not stop their daughter Beatrice Leona from finding love and romance in the desert, marrying Robert Cleary Hoover, son of Mr. and Mrs. H. Earl Hoover, well-known Palm Springs residents, associated with the Hoover Vacuum Cleaner Co., in 1948. Their son, Joseph N. Borroughs III was not to be outdone and also married during the family's time on Camino Mirasol, in 1950.

The Borroughs family time on Camino Mirasol ended with the sudden death of Borroughs, who had a heart attack while attending a laundry owners association convention in San Diego on June 11, 1954.

Third Owners – Frank and Melba Bennett (1955-1966) Owner of Significance



“La Grande Dame of Palm Springs,” the effervescent and energetic Melba Bennett enjoying a rare moment of quiet in her Arthur Elrod decorated and book-filled living room at El Sueño.

(Via Palm Springs Villager. October 1958)

The names Frank and Melba Bennett are well known to any student of Palm Springs history. The couple, particularly Melba has come down as one of the village’s foremost pioneering residents. The Bennetts first came to Palm Springs around 1930 to manage the Deep Well Guest Ranch. They were so taken by Palm Springs and the beguiling desert atmosphere, they purchased a stake in the ranch, becoming co-owners along with the Phil Boyds. Under their steady management, Deep Well grew into one of the desert’s most popular destinations. The couple were fun, outgoing and deeply interested in their newly adopted home, immersing themselves in virtually every aspect of village life for the next 40 years. By the time they purchased El Sueño in early 1955, the Bennetts had been indispensable village fixtures for a quarter-century.

From the very start, the Bennetts used everything at their disposal, most precious their own valuable time and initiative, to support Palm Springs, its residents and visitors. Deep Well became the nucleus for many activities with the ranch's famous "Long Room" used regularly for civic and social occasions. The Bennetts were among the founders of such classic institutions as the Desert Riders and the Desert Circus. Melba was deeply involved with Circus activities for decades, spearheading the popular "Village Insanities" program, which was always a highlight of the event.



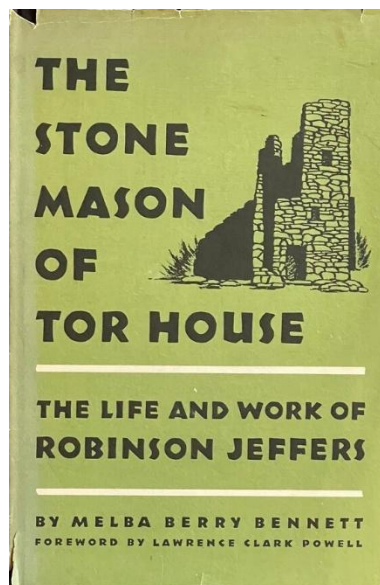
Prominent male villagers channel their feminine sides in one of the hugely popular Desert Circus "Insanities" performances directed and produced by Melba Bennett.
(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)

When the United States entered World War II, Melba and Frank jumped into the fray. Frank joined the Army and by war's end had risen to the rank of captain. Their son Peter also served. Not long after Pearl Harbor, Melba began regularly hosting events at Deep Well for soldiers stationed at the nearby bases. When the El Mirador was converted to Torney General Hospital, she began regularly entertaining both staff and patients with a weekly "Ranch Party." She even allowed the men of the Armed Forces Ferry Command to use the Long Room as a barracks, giving them a comfortable roof over their heads that they otherwise were lacking.

Melba also led the local USO as president and as director of its Hospitality House. She led the Red Cross "Gray Ladies" volunteer nurses training program. When the war ended, Melba did not forget those who had served and those still serving, continuing her activities well into the late

1940s. For this, she became a beloved figure to soldiers, earning the highest compliment of being called “Mom” by troops and staff.

While running a successful business, serving on boards of numerous charities, civic and political organizations, Melba still managed to find time to become a talented artist, dedicated historic researcher, and prolific author. Melba authored numerous articles for various publications, wrote poetry, and penned five books. Melba wrote her first book in 1936, *Robinson Jeffers and the Sea* (1936), about legendary California poet Robinson Jeffers. Although Jeffers was very much alive at the time, Melba was afraid to meet him for fear it might mar the perfection of his poetry. After the book came out, she was encouraged to visit him, and the pair developed a long and meaningful friendship. Jeffers had been so impressed by Melba and her first book that he asked her to be his official biographer under the stipulation that the book would not come out until after his death. She kept her word and, after Jeffers' death in 1962, she wrote *The Stone Mason of Tor House* (1966). This book, like so much of her literary output, was written in her book-filled study at El Sueño.



In 1949, Frank and Melba made a major shift in their lives by leaving Deep Well Ranch, which they had run with so much love and passion for nearly 20 years. Moving into a small Spanish style bungalow in Las Palmas Estates at 419 Valmonte Sur, not far from El Sueño, the pair now had more time to pursue their passions both individually and shared. One of their greatest loves was travel. Since their marriage in 1921, the Bennetts traveled whenever time allowed, across the state, the nation and the world. They became frequent visitors to Europe and had a particular love for Spain. Each trip brought numerous souvenirs ranging from art to pottery, to furniture, all of which found their way into the decoration of their home.

By 1955, Melba and Frank had long outgrown the small house on Valmonte Sur and when El Sueño became available, they jumped at the chance to purchase it. As for their old home, they sold it to a young interior designer, Arthur Elrod who was on the very cusp of what was to be a legendary career in design. Frank and Melba helped move Elrod forward by engaging him to redecorate their newly-acquired El Sueño.

When they took possession of the house at the beginning of 1955, the Bennetts were delighted by its beautiful architecture and oasis-like gardens. Yet they found there were some things that needed changing to suit their tastes and lifestyles. For one, the Bennetts found the house too dark and foreboding. Out went the heavy draperies and rugs and fresh white paint covered both the interior and the exterior. They also removed a number of interior doors. "There were doors everywhere," she told the *Palm Springs Villager*, "We tore them out to open it up."

The couple also remodeled the kitchen into "gleaming white" and turned what had been a maid's room into an adjacent utility space. The book-loving Melba added bookshelves everywhere she could until her husband couldn't take any more. "Frank says, 'No more bookshelves.'" But books were a major part of the home's personality, so the talented Elrod incorporated them into his design. So precise his attention to detail, the hooked rug in the living room was composed of colors matching the dust jackets on the nearby bookcase.

A master of modern design, Elrod was nonetheless quite capable of working with traditional styles, successfully integrating the Bennetts heirlooms with more up-to-date touches. He also blended the couple's extensive and diverse art collection and travel memorabilia into the design. As the *Los Angeles Times* wrote in 1956:

Knowing that unrelated items of varying designs are difficult to coordinate, the Bennetts wisely turned the problem over to Decorator Arthur Elrod. He skillfully arranged heirloom pine pieces and accessories into a charming personal background for living and entertaining.

One delightful and very personal addition to the home brought together the talents of both Melba Bennett and Arthur Elrod, was the inclusion of a set of hand-painted tiles surrounding the master bedroom fireplace. These tiles, hand-painted by Melba herself, memorialized the couple's 1954 trip to Spain. Fortunately, these tiles have remained in situ, decades after their installation in 1955.





“White walls of the living room dramatize the colorful furnishings and accessories. Here are art books brought back from Europe, a porcelain clock from France, a Worcester cup and Lowestoft plates from a London antique fair.” – *Los Angeles Times*, “The Dream in the Desert,” January 1, 1956. El Sueño ’s “culture corner” may be glimpsed through the doorway.



"In the 'culture corner,' a small room adjoining the living room, is a collection of operas and symphonies the Bennetts enjoyed in Madrid, Milan, Mexico, as well as art books."
(Los Angeles Times. January 1, 1956)



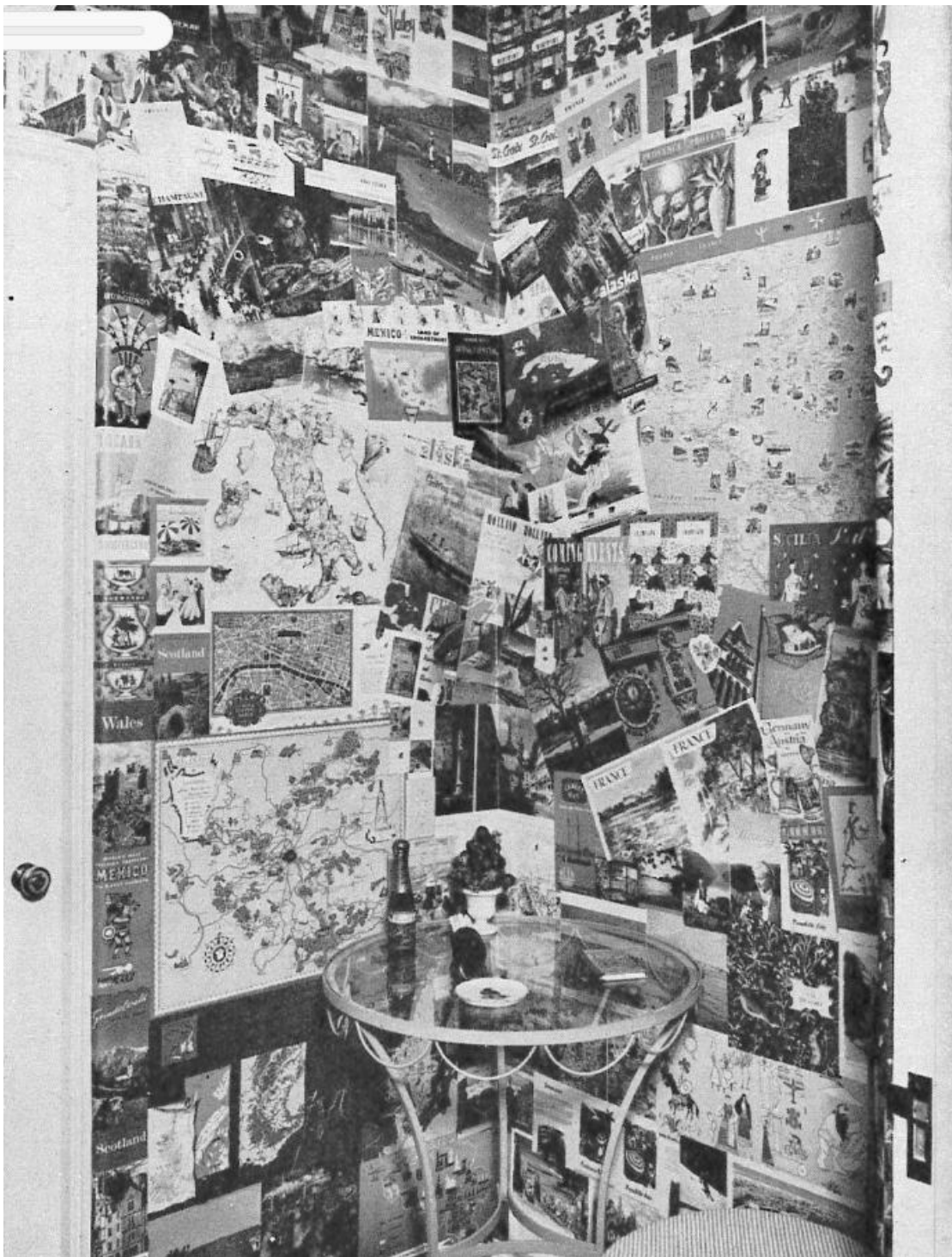
“Above the desk in the project room built-in shelves for books and magazines add to the convenience of the work corner. In this room overlooking the garden Melba Bennett writes or works on her varied hobbies.”
(Los Angeles Times. January 1, 1956)

While not included in the different photo layouts published on the home, Frank had his own “strong masculine” retreat as well, “a den where gun racks and sporting racks come to the fore.” “He lives in his own private world of feathers or fins,” reported Melba, “depending on the season.”



"Master bedroom fireplace is framed in tiles from Spain. The painting over the mantel...by Alys Faurot-Bennett, is of the Bennetts' daughter."
(Los Angeles Times. January 1, 1956)

One of the most talked-about interior design additions to El Sueño may have had nothing to do with Arthur Elrod but the brainchild of Melba herself. A former coat closet off the main entrance, was transformed into the couple's "travel bureau." The closet was papered over from stem to stern with travel posters, maps, and brochures representing a collection from trips past and inspirations for future journeys. Melba was immensely proud of the space, telling a writer for the *Palm Springs Villager* that she did the work herself in 115-degree heat against the advice of a professional paper hanger. The nook was not just a decorative space but got regular use in travel planning. "Before," she said, "we used to plan our trips on the living room floor."



**"A glimpse into the Bennetts famous "travel bureau."
(Los Angeles Times. January 1, 1956)**

While they made a number of interior design changes, the Bennetts do not appear to have significantly altered the exterior other than to blanket the house in white paint. Their significant exterior additions involved outdoor spaces with the addition of the swimming pool and patio hardscaping.



“The piece de resistance of any Palm Springs home is the swimming pool and the Frank Bennett home on Camino (sic) is no exception. The graceful kidney-shaped Hoams pool is the center piece of family living, particularly in the summer time. It is attractively landscaped, and the patio is truly a home out of doors. It comes equipped with a snack bar that is practically a duplicate of an indoor kitchen, allowing easy preparation of any meal.”

(Palm Springs Villager. October 1958)



Palm Springs Historical Society

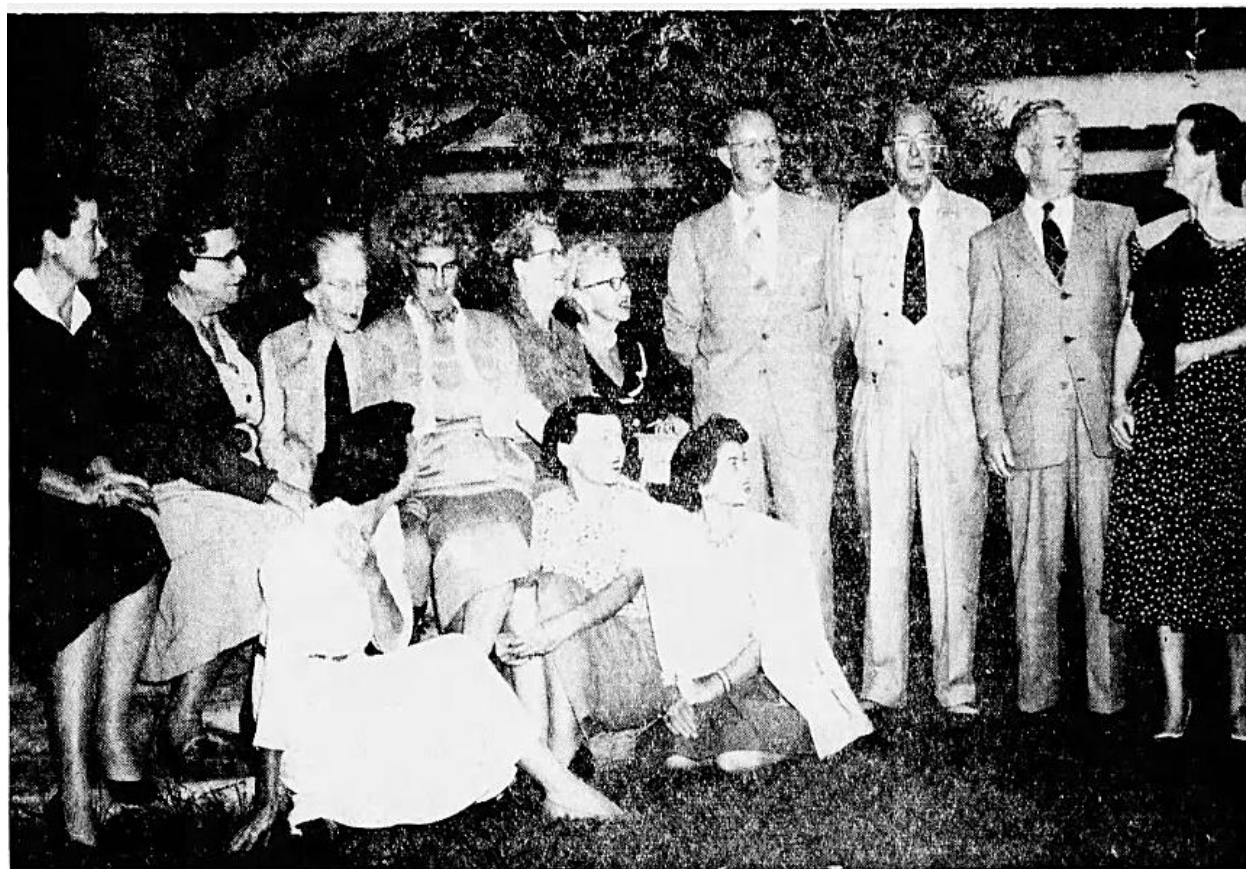
The Bennetts used the patio and covered terrace as an outdoor living room, adding travel posters, indoor-style furniture, and even a festive striped awning over the outdoor fireplace. Bottom image is a snapshot from Melba's photo album showing Judge Hilton McCabe and author Ed Ainsworth attending a reception in their honor at El Sueño in 1957.

(Both images Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)



After Arthur Elrod had redecorated the home and the Bennetts put on their finishing touches, El Sueño became ground zero for the myriad activities and interests of the dynamic couple. Throughout their decade in the home, the Bennetts hosted innumerable events, parties, meetings, receptions, open houses, tours, entertaining friends, family, villagers of all stripes, even movie stars like Rosalind Russell at the peak of her "Auntie Mame" fame, and political leaders such as United States Senator Thomas Kuchel.

Among the most significant activities were those revolving upon the foundation of the Palm Springs Historical Society. Out of her innumerable accomplishments, the creation of the historical society in 1955 ranks at the top of Melba's greatest achievements.



FIRST MEETING of the Palm Springs Historical Society was held Thursday afternoon in the patio of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library, with a large group of interested persons present. Pictured discussing the aims and activities of the new group are, left to right, front seated on ground, Mrs. William C.

Rogers, Mrs. Herbert Burns, and Mrs. Margaret Foldes Taylor; second row, Mrs. Burnham Bigelow, Mrs. O. S. McKinney, Miss Cornelia White, Mrs. Zaddie Bunker, Mrs. Carl Lykken, Mrs. Steve Vidossics, Herbert Samson, George Roberson, Earl Coffman, and Mrs. Frank Bennett, chairman.

(Desert Sun. February 21, 1955, accessed via newspapers.com)

Other notable events included functions for the County Federation of Republican Women (Melba was a dedicated IKE Republican), the Desert Arabian Horse Show, Desert Museum, Palm Springs Library (Melba was on the board of trustees from 1941 till her death in 1968), the Community Day Nursery, the WAIF (World International Adoption Fund) Ball committee, and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), among many others. Melba allowed El Sueño to be included on the second annual AAUW Home Tour, which raised money for

scholarships. In 1965, the home was a star attraction on another tour, this one for the Palm Springs Civic Art Association. This tour was different as the homes featured would not be the focus but rather the art within them. At El Sueño, guests could view the diverse and eclectic Bennett art collection with supplements from other local art collectors. As the *Desert Sun* reported:

The Bennetts personal collection of a Braque, a Toulouse-Lautrec, a Richard Whorf, and a Mary Beich will be augmented for the tour by a Dufy and a Miro from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Morris, and a Vlammick being loaned by Dr. Frederick Loewe. From the composer's collection also will come the Rodin sculpture "La Jeune Mere."

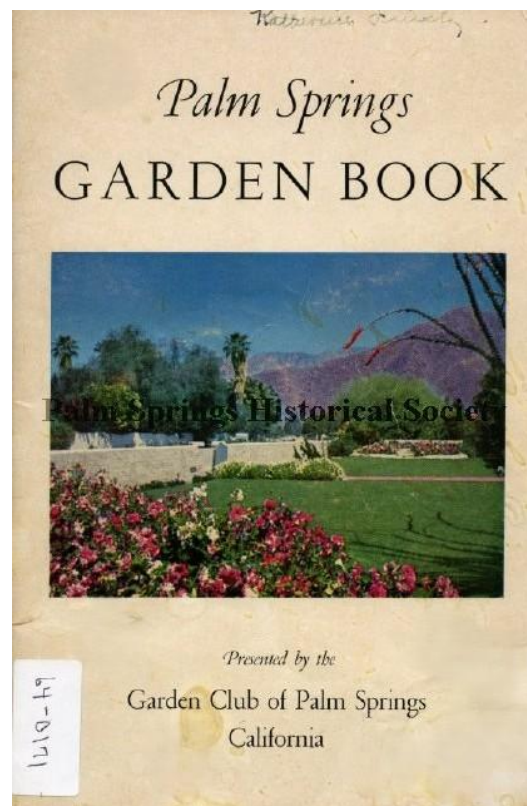


Melba's workshop at El Sueño was regularly a hive of activity, producing table decorations, artwork, and other items for various functions. Here, a group of ladies help Melba produce some of her famous "Palm Springs Hats," which became as locally famous as those worn at Ascot or the Kentucky Derby. Melba had unintentionally created this unique fashion back in the 1930s. When out on a trail ride with the Desert Riders she would pick wildflowers and stick them into the brim of her hat. The habit caught on and the "Palm Springs Hat" was born.

(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)

The home itself was only part of the overall estate, which in its original form comprised more than an acre. By the time the Bennetts purchased the home, the gardens were already considered a Palm Springs showplace with dozens of mature plantings including stately palm trees. Gardening was a favorite past time for Melba, and she was a founder and president of the Palm Springs Garden Club. Melba devoted precious time to enhancing the already beautiful gardens with special touches. The gardens were a natural meeting place and laboratory for the garden club with its winding pathways and planting beds busy with activity.

Melba was so deeply involved with the garden club that in 1956 she authored the *Palm Springs Garden Book*, intended to help villagers understand how to plant and maintain gardens in the desert climate. In addition to authorship, Melba even drew the line drawings. It would go on to become her best-selling book.



(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society)

In 1965, the Bennetts felt it was time to downsize and move on from their beloved El Sueño, putting the home up for sale and relocating to a smaller modern residence at the newly-opened Seven Lakes Country Club. Sadly, the bright light that was Melba Bennett was extinguished only a few years later when she was struck down by inoperable cancer. In typical fashion, she remained active up until the end, passing away on September 15, 1968.

(See Appendix V for the delightful and informative piece historians Renee Brown and Steven Keylon wrote on Melba as part of their "Founding Mothers of Palm Springs," article for *Eden* magazine, Fall 2017.)

Fourth Owners – Donna Reed and Tony Owen (1966-1973) Owner of Significance



Academy Award-winning actress Donna Reed had been a frequent visitor to Palm Springs well before her 1966 purchase of El Sueño.
(Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society via *The Desert Sun*)

In 1966, El Sueño got glamorous new owners in the form of internationally famed film and television star Donna Reed and her husband, producer Tony Owen. The couple, who had been coming out to the desert for years with their four growing children decided to settle in a permanent winter home, especially when El Sueño became available.

Cute young actress DONNA REED at the Dunes with agent TONY OWEN — same spot MAXINE HADLEY, who is the houseguest of THELMA DAVIS, with THELMA and VIRGINIA HENRY ROHAN.

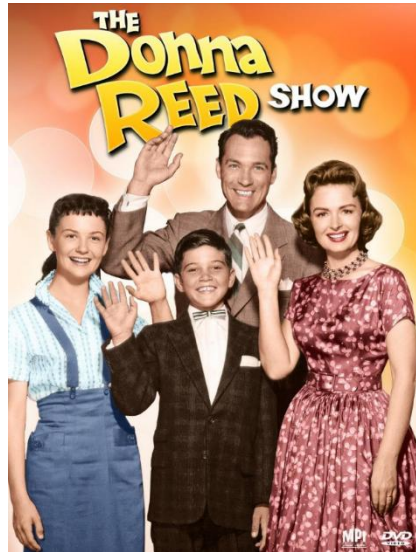
Donna Reed and Tony Owen had been coming to Palm Springs since the days when he was an agent and she was a “cute young actress.”
(*Palm Springs Limelight News*. May 17, 1945, via newspapers.com)

Donna had been a movie and television favorite since the early 1940s, gaining screen immortality for Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946); and Fred Zinnemann's *From Here to Eternity* (1953). Donna went wildly against type for the film, ditching her wholesome “girl next door” image for that of a prostitute. Donna's bravura performance was so impressive it won her an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actress. Despite her success in *From Here to Eternity*, the studios returned to casting Donna back in good girl parts largely for the rest of her career.



Donna Reed and friend at the 26th Annual Academy Awards ceremony, March 25, 1954. Both brought home Oscars for *From Here to Eternity*.

Donna's purchase of *El Sueño* came at the tail end of the long and successful run of *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966), today considered a classic of television's first "Golden Era," which had been produced by her husband for Screen Gems and ABC. Donna played "Donna Stone," the role of an honest, humorous, and nurturing mother much like her real self. Behind the cameras, she was the uncredited producer and director of the show, studying and mastering both lighting and cinematography, roles rarely handled by women of that time.



Reed won a Golden Globe Award and earned four Emmy Award nominations for her work on the series. The show was groundbreaking in presenting a mother character who was intelligent and capable. In a 1984 television interview, Reed said of her show, "I felt that I was making, for women, a statement. This mother was not stupid. She wasn't domineering, but she was bright and I thought rather forward-thinking, happily married."

While Palm Springs villagers may have expected the Oscar-winning actress to become one of the leading lights of the Palm Springs social world, Donna had actually come to Palm Springs for peace, quiet, and reflection. While she may not have consciously expressed it to others or even herself, Donna was at a crossroads as to where she wanted the next part of her life to go, and she used *El Sueño* to take a much-needed break after having worked for so long and so hard in films and the rigors of a weekly television series.

El Sueño proved to be a perfect spot for her to connect with her family, old friends, and no doubt, herself. Not to say that she was a recluse, Donna and Tony would be seen dining out at the Chi Chi or going into Los Angeles for a film premiere, but for the most part it was relaxing around the pool or soaking in the desert atmosphere exploring the garden paths or out on the balcony.

Ironically, it was her husband Tony who was more gregarious socially. It was Tony, along with his friend, former (and future) mayor and Palm Springs legend, Frank Bogert, who scored the village's most impressive social coup in 1966. The previous year, the pair had been in London and heard Prince Philip was planning a trip to the United States. Through a well-placed contact, they sent an invitation for the prince to include Palm Springs on his itinerary. The contact proved to be well-placed indeed and the invitation was readily accepted.



Roy Randolph, chairman of the Desert Circus welcomes Prince Philip to Palm Springs, March 12, 1966. Tony Owen had been instrumental in bringing the prince to the desert. Note, the Desert Circus “deputies” sporting versions of Melba Bennett’s famous “Palm Springs Hat.”
 (Courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society via *The Desert Sun*)

On March 12, 1966, both Tony Owen and Donna Reed were on hand to help greet Prince Philip upon his arrival at Palm Springs airport. Later, they joined a distinguished group that included Jack Warner, Kirk and Anne Douglas, Danny Kaye, Harold Hicks, Charlie Farrell, and other notables, at a barbeque up the street from El Sueño, at the Lou Taubman home at 925 Coronado Avenue.

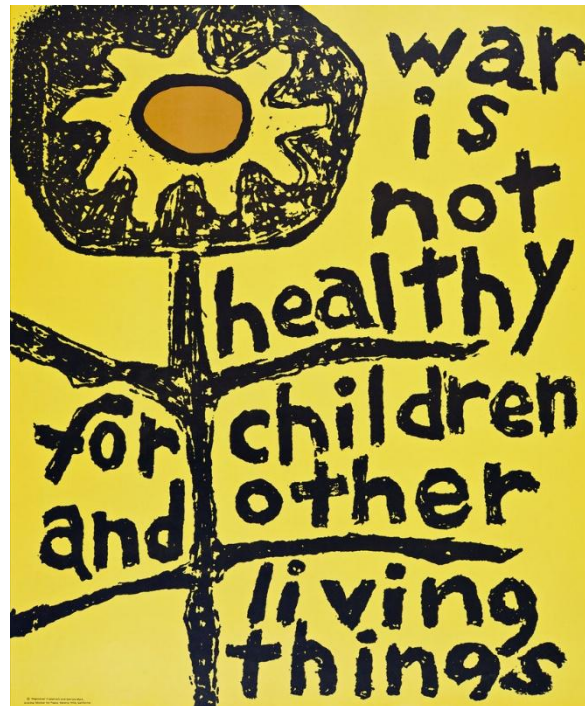


Donna, Tony, and daughter Mary out on the patio at El Sueño.
 (Courtesy of Mary Owen)

As 1966 turned to 1967, Donna, like many Americans, was growing increasingly disturbed by the ever-worsening situation in Vietnam and the futility of war in general. A lifelong Republican who had supported Barry Goldwater in the 1964 election, Donna found herself moving to the left on these issues and felt the urge to take some form of action. But where to begin and what to do?

The solution came literally right out of *The Donna Reed Show*. In 1967, Barbara Avedon, who had been one of the show's writers, invited Donna and a small group to celebrate the first birthday of her son, Josh. While the group was gathered around for the festive occasion, Barbara expressed her opposition to the war and her fear that she was raising a child just to have him later sent off to war.

The discussion sparked a call for action and on February 8, 1967, a group of 15 met at Barbara's home to discuss how they could help make a difference. The result was the creation of an advocacy group they would call "Another Mother for Peace (AMP)." Their initial act was breathtaking in its simplicity – they would send out a Mother's Day card to the President and members of Congress expressing their yearning for peace. That was it. The card featured an illustration by artist Lorraine Schneider who had donated her work, *Primer*, for the cause.



For my Mother's Day gift this year,
I don't want candy or flowers.
I want an end to killing.
We who have given life,
Must be dedicated to preserving it.
Please talk peace.

The campaign struck a nerve with people across the country, surprising even the organizers. The initial printing started with 1,000 cards but had to be upped repeatedly until it reached 200,000. While the message was critical, the messengers may have had a big part as well. As Avedon later told journalist George Zucker, "We were not bearded, sandaled youths, 'wild-eyed radicals or dyed in the wool 'old line freedom fighters' and we wanted the Congress to know they were dealing with an awakening and enraged middle class." Instead of hippies, the public saw none other than the most "American as Apple Pie," mother herself – Donna Reed, who took on the role of co-chairperson for the group. Other famous faces were greatly active as well including Dick Van Dyke, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, Robert Vaughn, and Debbie Reynolds, among others. Donna knew her controversial stance could (and would) hurt her acting career, but she felt it was a cause bigger than her own self interests.



Donna and Dick Van Dyke hold a press conference in Beverly Hills on behalf of AMP and its message.
(Cropped image via Wikimedia commons)

During this turbulent period, Donna traveled across the country, and the world, spreading AMP's message of peace and a plea for nuclear disarmament. At home she continued to shuttle between the family home at 702 North Alpine Drive, Beverly Hills, and El Sueño, which must have seemed more like a restful paradise than ever before.



**Donna and Tony did very little large-scale entertaining at El Sueño, preferring the company of family and old friends. Here, Donna is seen leaving El Sueño with a visiting friend from St. Louis.
(Courtesy of Mary Owen)**



Through it all, Donna could still find time to use El Sueño for its intended purpose.
(Courtesy of Mary Owen)

By the dawn of the 1970s, another major shift was taking place in Donna's life when her long-time marriage to Tony Owen came to an end. In 1973, they sold the home to new owners. Both Donna and Tony were to remarry. In 1974, Donna married Dr. Grover Asmus and moved into a sleek midcentury modern residence at 919 North Alpine Drive, which had been designed by the talented Burton A. Schutt in 1951.

Donna ultimately returned to acting on occasion if she felt the part was worth it. Another Mother for Peace closed operations in 1985. However, it was reactivated in 2003 and continues with the mission it established in 1967 (anothermother.org).

Donna died just shy of her 65th birthday of pancreatic cancer on January 14, 1986. Her husband, Grover Asmus and a group of family, friends, and former co-workers honored Donna's memory by creating the Donna Reed Foundation for the Performing Arts, which is headquartered in the actress' hometown of Denison, Iowa. The purpose of the foundation is to help those aiming for a career in the arts. (See Donna Reed film biography in Appendix VI)

Changes to El Sueño

Like all houses of its age, El Sueño has been subject to the inevitability of modifications as new owners passed through its portals bringing with them ideas as to how to make the home their own. However, these alterations have largely been done in a way that does not diminish the home's original integrity. It should be noted that the city building permits on the house go back only as far as 1955, the year Frank and Melba Bennett became the home's third owners. While it cannot be confirmed with 100% certainty, it seems likely the home was largely as originally built when the Bennett's took over with any verifiable changes occurring post-1955.



Comparisons between the image on the left dated June 1955 and 2026, on the right, show a set of windows added between the doors (above the rocking chairs).

Through a combination of permits, photographs, and newspaper accounts it appears that there have been at least three alterations to the main house that should be noted. The first is regarding the fenestration on the second floor of the western (primary) façade. A comparison of photographs dated 1955 and 2026 respectively, show that a set of casement style windows have been added between two doors near the southern part of the facade. Fortunately, the additional windows are of a style compatible with other windows on the home and found on similar Monterey homes of the 1930s, limiting the impact of their addition.

The second alteration of note is to the cantilevered balcony itself and the appearance of the balusters. Again, using photographs for comparison (below), the balusters appear to have been altered at least three times from the original crisscross pattern of 1934. In the June 1955 image, the balusters are shown in this pattern. However, in a 1960s postcard view, the balusters have been altered to a vertical turned style. At some point prior to 2025, they were changed again to different turned vertical style.



These images show how the balusters have changed from 1955 to the present.

In 2026, the current preservation-minded homeowners returned the balusters back to a crisscross pattern similar to that originally designed for the house by Charles O. Matcham in 1934. While they are not an exact recreation, they are a close match to the balusters Matcham designed for the Alan W. Burton house in Little Holmby in 1932.



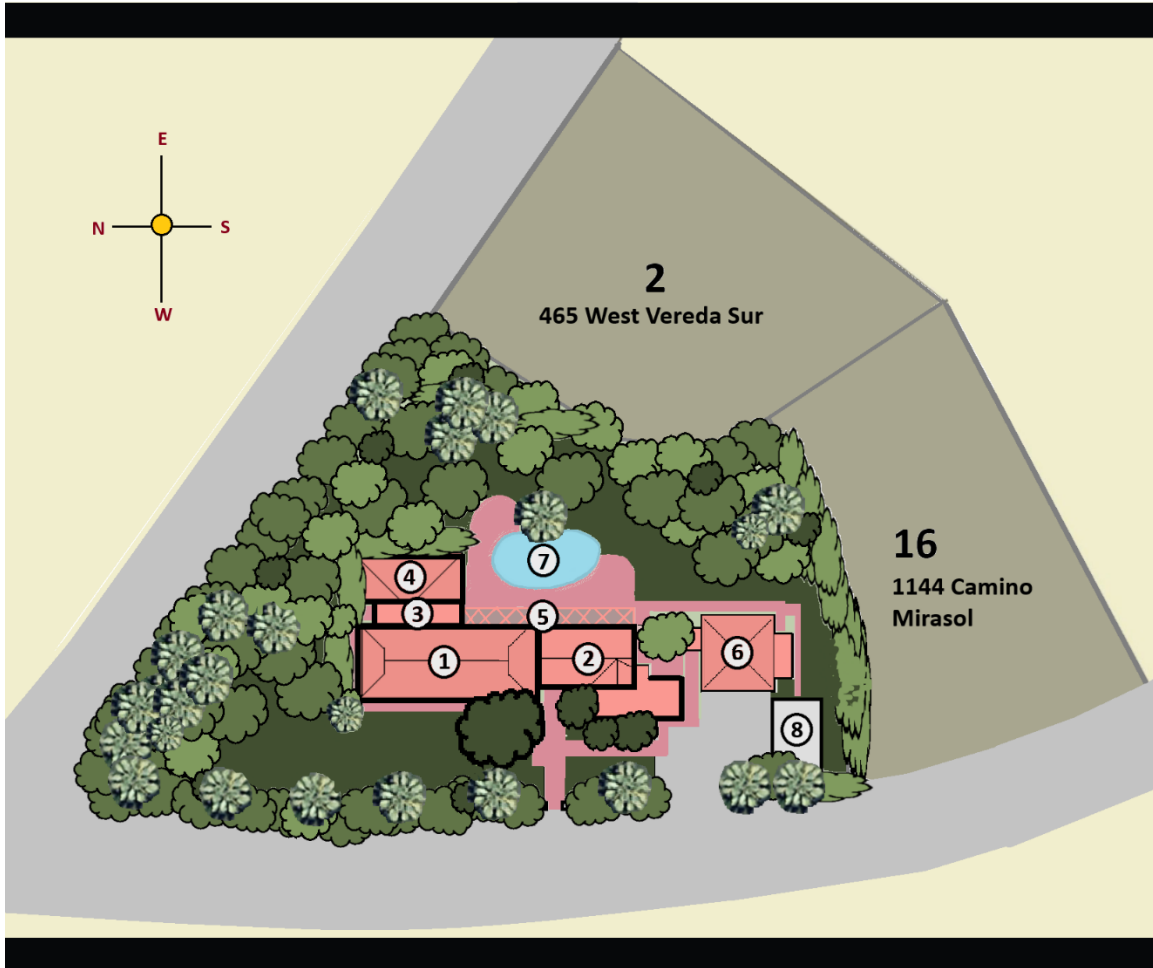
The third noteworthy alteration is found on the east (rear) façade. Again, based on photographic comparisons between 1955 and today, several changes have been noted. The first is that the sleeping/sun porch, located above the passageway separating the guest wing from the main house, has been enclosed. This may have occurred in 1968 during the ownership of Donna Reed and Tony Owen. A permit from 1968 shows a “remodel of 2nd floor room.” However, because of the vagueness of the description, it cannot be fully verified. A larger change occurring on the same façade was the removal of what is assumed to have been an original feature in the form of a covered terrace, which ran across the length of the east façade from the sun porch. There are no permits that match any work fitting that description, so a date is unknown. Today, the area remains open.



A comparison between a current (2025) image and one from 1956 shows location of the former covered terrace. Also, note changes in sun porch windows.

It is likely that some other windows and doors have been changed in the later years. However, these are not reflected in any permits. The only other major change noted was the installation, in 2009, of 30 voltaic solar panels on the roof of the main core. These additions are not visible from below.

SITE PLAN
EL SUENO
THE MELBA BENNETT -
DONNA REED RESIDENCE
CHARLES O. MATCHAM. 1934



 Former parcels sold off in the 1960s.

1. Main core section - living/bedrooms
2. Kitchen/Service wing
3. Sleeping/Sun porch
4. Guest wing
5. Covered terrace (no longer extant)
6. Garage
7. Pool (1955)
8. Car shelter (non-contributing)

Character Defining Features of El Sueño

El Sueño is an exceptional example of Monterey Colonial Revival architecture. Its character defining features include:

- Asymmetrical façade
- Two-story height
- Rectangular plan
- Low-pitched hipped and side gable roofs with clay tiles
- Pumice concrete bricks intended to mimic adobe for first floor exterior walls
- Second floor vertical and horizontal board cladding
- Second-floor covered cantilevered wood balcony across primary façade and wrapping around north elevation with simple wood posts and wood railing
- Double-hung windows with divided lights
- Louvered shutters
- Recessed entrance with paneled wood door

Contributing Elements

- The original 1934 main residence
- 1955 Hoams swimming pool
- Wooden cantilevered balcony
- Exterior patio fireplace and surrounding tilework
- Patio bar and tiles
- Wood and brick lintels
- Brick window aprons
- Brick front door surround
- Multi-light and single-light steel casement windows
- Wooden French doors
- Original wrought-iron door hardware and shutter dogs
- Wrought iron grillwork
- Wooden shutters
- Sleeping/sun porch
- Box bay window/door extension on east façade near outdoor fireplace
- Historic landscape elements particularly palm trees

Non-Contributing Elements

- Hardscaping
- Walls and fencing
- Garage
- Car shelter
- New window addition
- Balcony balusters

BACKGROUND / HISTORIC CONTEXT

The relatively short history of Palm Springs can be organized into several distinct periods, as defined by the Historic Resources Group's *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*. These include the following:

- Native American Settlement to 1969
- Early Development (1884-1918)
- Palm Springs Between the Wars (1919-1941)
- Palm Springs During World War II (1939-1945)
- Post-World War II Palm Springs (1945-1969)

It is within the context of the period "Palm Springs Between the Wars" that El Sueño will be evaluated. The following context statement is extracted from Historic Resource Group's *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*: Palm Springs Between the Wars (1919-1941):

This context explores the transformation of Palm Springs from a modest spa town into a luxury winter resort in the years between the First and Second World Wars. By 1918 Nellie Coffman and her sons, George Roberson and Earl Coffman, understood the town's potential, not as a health spa for asthmatics and consumptives, but as an exclusive winter resort for the well-to-do, and set about transforming their sanatorium into the luxurious Desert Inn, one of the most renowned hostleries in the country. Their success inspired the development of two equally spectacular hotels in the 1920s and cemented the town's growing reputation as one of the country's premier luxury winter resorts. The Oasis Hotel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Jr. (known as Lloyd Wright) opened in 1925 by Pearl McCallum McManus; and the grand Hotel El Mirador, designed by Walker and Eisen in a sumptuous Spanish Colonial Revival style and opened in 1927.

Automobile tourism played an early and important part of the success and growth of Palm Springs as a destination. In 1914, highway bonds were passed in Riverside County for extensive road improvements and construction of new routes. As part of these efforts, the highway connecting Los Angeles and Palm Springs was completed in October 1916. Pavement of the highway through to Indio was completed in 1924, allowing travelers to drive all the way from Los Angeles to Palm Springs in less than four hours, all on paved roads.

The first residential subdivisions were recorded in the early 1920s on tracts largely concentrated on land immediately surrounding the existing village and the resorts. Several tracts were subdivided by Prescott T. Stevens, along with other prominent early Palm Springs settlers including Pearl McManus, Raymond Cree, and Harriet Cody.

In the 1920s, business tycoons, industrialists, and other wealthy businessmen, along with the Hollywood elite discovered the desert and began to transform Palm Springs into an international resort. While the movie stars primarily stayed at the resort hotels when visiting Palm Springs, other wealthy residents and seasonal visitors started building architect-designed estates and drawing increased attention to the growing resort town.

The 1930s saw Palm Springs blossom, as more and more celebrities made it their winter weekend getaway, and more development sprang up to house and entertain them. By the start of World War II, Palm Springs had so long been thought of as a movie star's playground that some of the neighborhoods were described as "Beverly Hills in the desert." One section was so filled with film

notables, the neighborhood was ultimately dubbed the "Movie Colony."

In the 1930s important figures in finance and business continued to flock to the desert in the winter, helping to cement the village's reputation as one of the nation's top winter resort destinations.

Architecturally, the Spanish and Mediterranean-Revival styles were the town's dominant architectural expression during this period. In addition, there are examples of simplified Ranch houses featuring rustic details and board-and-batten exterior walls. Beginning in the 1930s, prominent modernist architects began making significant contributions to the architectural landscape in Palm Springs.

EVALUATION:

Criterion 1: Significant Events. *The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community: El Sueño is not affiliated with significant events and does not qualify as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 1.*

Criterion 2: Significant Persons. *Criterion 2 recognizes properties associated with the lives of persons who made meaningful contributions to the national, state or local history:*

El Sueño has been home to two separate figures of prominence who rise to the level that meets the criteria of persons who had influence in local and national history. The first is Melba Bennett (1901-1967) who owned the home with her husband Frank between 1955-1966. Known as the "Grande Dame of Palm Springs," Mrs. Bennett had a significant influence on the village's development. Arriving in 1930, she became and remained, as the *Desert Sun* noted, "active in almost every phase of Palm Springs life." A successful author, and artist, and deeply involved in civic and social affairs, Bennett today is best remembered as co-owner of the famous Deep Well Ranch hotel and for being the principal founder of the Palm Springs Historical Society. El Sueño, which is the name she gave to the home, was the setting for many social and civic events during her time in residence. It was Bennett who brought in the now-legendary interior designer Arthur Elrod to redecorate the home in 1955. In 1966, the Bennetts sold El Sueño to the home's second significant resident, Academy and Emmy Award-winning actress Donna Reed (1921-1986). Reed and her husband, producer Tony Owen (1907-1984), resided at El Sueño from 1966-1973, beginning in the final year of her classic television series *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966). She used the home as her desert retreat during her years of activism for the anti-war group Another Mother for Peace. **Therefore, El Sueño qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 2.**

ARCHITECTURE (Criteria 3 – 6)

Criterion 3: *The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state or local history:* Completed in 1934, El Sueño exhibits many stylistic markers which place it directly in the historic context of the "Palm Springs Between the Wars (1919-1941)" period. The custom-designed and built structure represents a fine example of significant Monterey Colonial Revival architecture which, while popular throughout California, was an extreme rarity in Palm Springs. Monterey Colonial Revival is considered a sub-style of Spanish Colonial Revival. Therefore, El Sueño is part of the group of structures, which established Spanish Colonial Revival as Palm Springs' dominant architectural style. And it was during this period, 1920s-1930s, that Palm

Springs rose to prominence as a world class resort. Spanish Colonial Revival would remain Palm Springs' principal architectural style all the way up to the end of World War II when Desert Modernism began its ascent. As such, El Sueño is viewed as an essential component of the historical trends that have come to define Palm Springs' image as a world-class resort, i.e., a historical movement that exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history. **Therefore, El Sueño qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 3.**

Criterion 4: The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction: El Sueño was built using simple materials and conventional construction methods. As such, the residence is not noteworthy for its type or construction method and does not qualify for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 4. **El Sueño does not qualify for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 4.**

Criterion 5: (That (a): represents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or (b): that possesses high artistic value):

5a: Work of a Master: El Sueño was the work of master architect Charles O. Matcham, FAIA (1903-1980). During his 40-year career in architecture, Matcham left an enduring mark on the built environments of both the Los Angeles area and Palm Springs. In 1934, Matcham established the local branch of the successful Los Angeles firm Heitschmidt & Matcham. Over the next half dozen years, Matcham designed a series of significant residences, which drew praise not only locally but nationwide as well, bringing distinction to Palm Springs architecture. Matcham designed homes for village notables such as Alvah F. Hicks, Harold Hicks, James E. "Dad" French, Austin and Pearl McManus, and others. He also did two demonstration homes, which were well-published in the architectural press and visited by thousands - the Las Palmas (Desert) Demonstration House (1936) and the Tahquitz Demonstration House (1938). Matcham was also responsible for the Police and Fire Department Building (1935), the Telephone Building (1935), the central portion of Colonial House Apartment-Hotel (1936), the Wilson-Sorum Building (1937), and the Rogers Stables (1938), among others. During the same busy period, he also designed homes throughout Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, and the San Fernando Valley. Additionally, the home's builder, Ernst Off (1901-1993), was an important pioneer in Palm Springs building, design, and development. Off, built dozens of homes throughout a career spanning 50 years that were known for their very high-quality construction. **Therefore, El Sueño can certainly be described as the work of a master in view of Matcham's history of architectural excellence and Off's record of quality construction.**

5b: Properties possessing high artistic values: High artistic values may be expressed in many ways, including areas as diverse as community design or planning, engineering, and sculpture. El Sueño was a showcase of Monterey Colonial Revival style architecture that represented the very ideals of what has made the style so enduringly popular such as its emphasis on indoor-outdoor living and a relaxed, casual atmosphere.

El Sueño certainly articulates the best of what made Monterey Colonial Revival style architecture so popular to a level of excellence that, in total, could easily be considered an aesthetic ideal. **Therefore, for its distinctive characteristics representing the Monterey Colonial Revival style, as the work of a master architect, and its high artistic values, El Sueño qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 5.**

Criterion 6: (That represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction). This Criterion was created to address the resources contained within a potential historic district and as such it does not apply to this nomination. **Hence, El Sueño does not qualify as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 6.**

Criterion 7: (That has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to the national, state or local history or prehistory.) El Sueño is not likely to yield information important to the national, state or local history or prehistory. **Hence, El Sueño does not qualify as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 7.**

SUMMARY: This evaluation finds El Sueño eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Resource under 8.05.070 C.1. a., paragraphs ii, iii, and v of the local ordinance's seven criteria.

INTEGRITY ANALYSIS

Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. To be listed in the local registry, a property must not only be shown to be significant under the criteria, but it also must have integrity. The evaluation of integrity is sometimes a subjective judgment, but it must always be grounded in an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance. Historic properties either retain integrity (that is, convey their significance) or they do not. The definition of integrity includes seven aspects or qualities. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects. The retention of specific aspects of integrity is paramount for a property to convey its significance. Determining which of these aspects are most important to a particular property requires knowing why, where, and when the property is significant. The following sections define the seven aspects and explain how they combine to produce integrity.

LOCATION

Location is the place where an historic property was constructed or the place where an historic event occurred. The relationship between the property and its location is often important to understanding why the property was created or why something happened. The actual location of a historic property, complemented by its setting, is particularly important in recapturing the sense of historic events and persons. Except in rare cases, the relationship between a property and its historic associations is destroyed if the property is moved. ***El Sueño remains in its original location and therefore qualifies under this aspect.***

DESIGN

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property. It results from conscious decisions made during the original conception and planning of a property and applies to activities as diverse as community planning, engineering, architecture, and landscape architecture. Design includes such elements as organization of space, proportion, scale, technology, ornamentation, and materials. A property's design reflects historic functions and technologies as well as aesthetics. It includes such considerations as the structural system; massing; arrangement of spaces; pattern of fenestration; textures and colors of surface materials; type, amount, and style of ornamental detailing. ***El Sueño's essential characteristics of form, plan, space, structure, and style have survived largely intact. Similarly, the structural***

system; massing; arrangement of spaces; pattern of fenestration; and the type, amount, and style of detailing have survived almost entirely intact. With regards to fenestration, it appears that there have been certain changes made at an unknown date to the second story portion of the western façade. However, the changes were done using windows and doors that reflected the original period of construction and Monterey Colonial Revival design. It also appears that certain windows and doors may have also been swapped out for new versions, however, these too follow the look and feel of the original intent of the architect. Likewise, the balusters have undergone several changes throughout the decades. However, the current owners have recently replaced them with what is believed to have been an approximate of the original pattern, which is a crisscross design. As such, the home still reflects the same Monterey Colonial Revival style architecture, design elements such as simulated adobe walls, wood cantilevered balcony, and other elements first introduced by master architect Charles O. Matcham in 1934.

SETTING

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Whereas location refers to the specific place where a property was built or an event occurred, setting refers to the *character* of the place in which the property played its historical role. It involves *how*, not just *where*, the property is situated and its relationship to surrounding features and open space. Setting often reflects the basic physical conditions under which a property was built and the functions it was intended to serve. In addition, the way in which a property is positioned in its environment can reflect the designer's concept of nature and aesthetic preferences. ***El Sueño was built in 1934 in a prominent spot in the high-end Las Palmas Estates tract, one of the oldest residential tracts in Palm Springs. The house was, and continues to be, surrounded by an impressive and mature garden setting, cultivated over a period of decades. Although the original parcel was partially subdivided in the 1960s, the main part of the lot, .73 acres, remains. The home continues to enjoy the same views it did when first built, with no taller structures blocking it off. The setting of the El Sueño continues to reflect the architect's original design relationship of site and structure.***

MATERIALS

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. The choice and combination of materials reveals the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of particular types of materials and technologies. ***El Sueño's exterior surface materials, which consist primarily of slump stone concrete bricks intended to mimic adobe, low-pitched hip roof, wood rafter tails and eave brackets, wooden shutters, French doors and windows, have remained essentially intact and continue to express the physical elements as designed during the building's period of significance; the pattern and configuration that today forms the residence survives intact.***

WORKMANSHIP

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. It is the evidence of artisans' labor and skill in constructing or altering a building, structure, object, or site. Workmanship can apply to the property as a whole or to its individual components. It can be expressed in vernacular methods of construction and

plain finishes or in highly sophisticated configurations and ornamental detailing. It can be based on common traditions or innovative period techniques. Workmanship is important because it can furnish evidence of the technology of a craft, illustrate the aesthetic principles of a historic or prehistoric period, and reveal individual, local, regional, or national applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles. Examples of workmanship in historic buildings include tooling, carving, painting, graining, turning, and joinery. ***The fine workmanship of El Sueño is evidenced in different ways such as how the slump stone concrete blocks were produced to give the effect of ancient adobe; the simple but solid woodwork of the cantilevered balcony; the skillfully forged wrought-iron work; the artistry of the patio fireplace; etc., help provide ample evidence of a high degree of contemporary period workmanship that comprises El Sueño.***

FEELING

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. It results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character. For example, a rural historic district retaining original design, materials, workmanship, and setting will relate the feeling of agricultural life in the 19th century. ***When it was completed in 1934, El Sueño was intended to provide a comfortable desert home that allowed its occupants to not only connect meaningfully with the natural environment which surrounded it, but also to visually transport them through its historically evocative architecture, to the days of Southern California's romantic Spanish/Mexican past. More than 90 years later, El Sueño continues to reflect that exact same aesthetic. Accordingly, the residence retains its original integrity of feeling.***

ASSOCIATION

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. A property retains association if it is the place where the event or activity occurred and is sufficiently intact to convey that relationship to an observer. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character. For example, a Revolutionary War battlefield whose natural and man-made elements have remained intact since the 18th century will retain its quality of association with the battle. Because feeling and association depend on individual perceptions, their retention alone is never sufficient to support eligibility of a property for the National Register. ***El Sueño is an important example of a custom-designed 1930s Monterey Colonial Revival style house. It, along with a number of other structures built during the same period (mid-1920s to mid-1930s) set the architectural tone for Palm Springs, helping to transform its look from a disjointed mix of frame structures into a stylish Spanish resort. As its integrity has remained intact, El Sueño offers a powerful visual callback of that period when Palm Springs was a haven for historic Spanish Colonial Revival architecture well before it was diluted by newer styles. Accordingly, it continues its association with a pattern of events that have made a meaningful contribution to the community.***

INTEGRITY SUMMARY: El Sueño appears to be in excellent condition partially due to the use of construction materials suitable for the harsh desert environment. This integrity analysis confirms that the building and site of El Sueño still possesses all seven aspects of integrity. ***As noted, El Sueño retains a remarkable amount of original detail. In summary, El Sueño still possesses***

a high degree of integrity sufficient to qualify for designation as a Class 1 Historic Resource.

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Michael Feddersen
Tom McClay
Mary Anne Owen

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Riverside County Assessor's Office

APPENDIX I

Owner's Notarized Letter of Support

Thomas McClay – Michael Feddersen
1184 Camino Mirasol
Palm Springs, CA 92262

January 2, 2025

City of Palm Springs
Historic Site Preservation Board
3200 Tahquitz Canyon Way
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Dear Honorable Board,

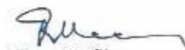
As the current owners of the Melba Bennett Residence (also known as the Donna Reed Estate) located at 1184 Camino Mirasol in Palm Springs, California, we enthusiastically support the Class 1 Historic Resource designation of our property by the city of Palm Springs. We have asked the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation to assist us in the preparation of the required nomination paperwork.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

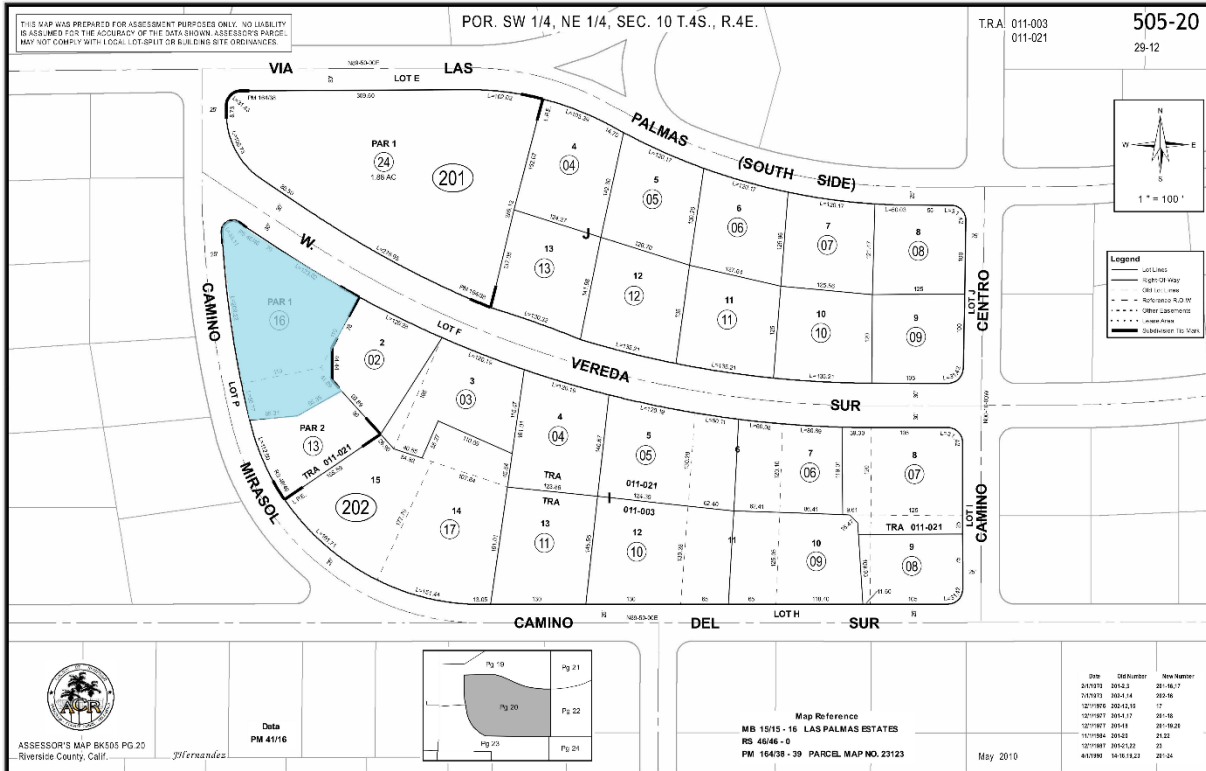


Mike Feddersen
310-367-1950
feddersenmichael9@gmail.com



Tom McClay
310-271-1111
trmla@aol.com

Assessor Map



APPENDIX III

Chain of Title

04-25-1934	Grant Deed: Bank of America National Trust & Savings Association grants to Katherine DeR. Seaman , a married woman, all the real property situated in the Las Palmas Estates Tract, Block I, Lots 1 and 16. Lot 2 was granted under a separate agreement made between the parties on the same date.
04-16-1940	Grant Deed: Katherine DeR. Seamon grants to Joseph N. Borroughs
02-21-1955	Executor's Deed: First Western Bank & Trust Company , as executors of the estate of Joseph N. Borroughs , deceased, grants to Frank N. Bennett , a married man
1965	Agreement not in files: Sale of Lot 16 by Frank N. Bennett and Melba B. Bennett to Dr. Kurt Bochner and Carol Bochner . The rights to this sale were transferred to Anthony I. Owen and Donna M. Owen on April 10, 1966, as part of the sale of 1184 Camino Mirasol to the Owens'.

Property is henceforth referred to as Parcel 1 in subsequent transfers.

04-13-1966	Grant Deed: Frank N. Bennett and Melba B. Bennett to Anthony I. Owen and Donna M. Owen (p.k.a. Donna Reed).
1973*	Grant Deed: Anthony I. Owen and Donna M. Owen (p.k.a. Donna Reed) to Thomas T. Anderson and Jacquelyn D. Anderson . *Agreement not dated but stamped by title company on 3-1-1973.
02-17-1976	Quitclaim: Jacquelyn Anderson quitclaims to Thomas T. Anderson
07-29-1977	Joint Tenant Agreement: Thomas T. Anderson grants to George R. Yanck and Suzanne Helms Yanck , husband and wife, as joint tenants-in-common
10-17-1988	Grant Deed: George R. Yanck and Suzanne Helms Yanck , husband and wife, as joint tenants-in-common grant to Craig Brown , a single man
10-27-1989	Grant Deed: Craig Brown grants to Peter Mark Benassi
05-09-1991	Quitclaim: Peter Mark Benassi quitclaims an undivided 50% in Parcel 1 to Albert Legittino as tenants-in-common
08-22-2001	Grant Deed: Peter Mark Benassi and Albert Legittino as tenants-in-common grants to Peter Mark Benassi and Albert Legittino , joint tenants-in-common with the right of survival
10-20-2005	Grant Deed: Peter Mark Benassi and Albert Legittino , joint tenants-in-common with the right of survival grant to Peter Mark Benassi and Albert Legittino as tenants-in-common
10-20-2005	Peter Mark Benassi and Albert Legittino , joint tenants-in-common with the right of survival grant to Peter Mark Benassi , trustee of the Benassi 2005 Limited Trust and Albert Legittino , trustee of the Legittino 2005 Limited Trust
05-30-2008	Grant Deed: Peter Mark Benassi , as trustee of the Benassi 2005 Limited Trust dated October 20, 2005; and Albert A. Legittino , as trustee of the Legittino 2005 Living Trust, each with a 50% interest as tenants-in-common grants to Wallace O. Sellers, Jr. , an undivided 90% interest, and Brett M. Benner , an undivided 10% interest, registered domestic partners, as tenants-in-common
12-28-2022	Grant Deed: Wallace O. Sellers, Jr. , an undivided 90% interest, and Brett M. Benner , an undivided 10% interest, registered domestic partners, as tenants-in-common grants to Thomas R. McClay and Michael D. Feddersen , trustees of the McClay-Feddersen Family Trust dated January 16, 2019.

APPENDIX IV

Building Permits

The following is a summary of building permits provided by the Palm Springs Department of Building and Safety. No permits prior to 1955 were located.

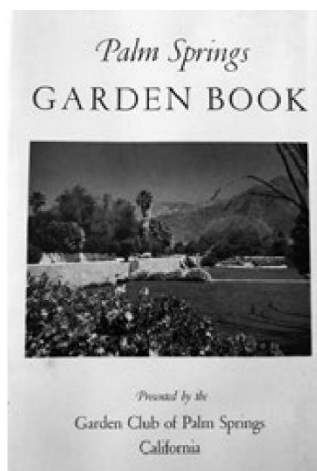
Date	Permit No.	Owner	Architect/contractor	Type of work
04/11/1955	6815	M/M Frank Bennett	Hoams Construction Co.	Plumbing
04/11/1955	6134	M/M Frank Bennett	Hoams Construction Co.	Electrical
04/11/1955	7471	M/M Frank Bennett	Hoams Construction Co.	Gunite swimming pool, 20'x40' \$4,000
06/10/1955	1915	M/M Frank Bennett	Juan Le Men, plumber	Plumbing
05/06/1957	7536	M/M Frank Bennett	A. Belden Crist	(Illegible) remodeling (Illegible). \$10,000
03/22/1967	B09835	Tony Owen	William Miner	Remodel den and install wet bar
05/10/1967	A02028	Tony Owen	J.J. Bentsen Electric Co.	Electrical outlets and light fixtures
05/09/1968	B11027	Tony Owen	William Miner	Remodel second story room
05/14/1968	A02619	Tony Owen	J.J. Bentsen Electric Co.	Electrical outlets and light fixtures
08/23/1978	B03615	George Yanck	Damis Construction	Repair fire damage to garage and convert to den
02/25/1985	B6047	George Yanck	George Yanck	Convert to city sewer
04/20/2009	C23996	Wallace Sellers	Mohr Power Solar	Install 30 solar panels on roof
06/02/2023	BLDR-2023-0466	Michael Feddersen	Chris W. Foster, Inc.	Garage remodel, pedestrian entries
06/29/2023	BLDR-2023-0936	Tom McClay	Hyde's A/C	HVAC Changeout
10/05/2023	BLDR-2023-2217	Michael Feddersen	Chris W. Foster, Inc.	Laundry and powder room remodel

APPENDIX V

Melba Bennett Biography in *Eden, Fall 2017*



FALL 2017 • Journal of the California Garden & Landscape History Society • Volume 20, Number 4



“LA GRANDE DAME”



Melba Bennett
(1901–1967)

Besides Nellie Coffman, there was perhaps no other woman in Palm Springs as universally loved as Melba Berry Bennett. Bennett lived her life with a passion. With style, grace, humor and charm she spread enthusiasm for the things she loved. Palm Springs was clearly the city she loved, and for nearly forty years Bennett devoted herself to the betterment of her city.

Melba Eloyse Berry was born into a colorful Los Angeles family on August 1, 1901. Her father, “Hen” Berry, was “replete with adventure.”³⁰ He struck it rich in the Klondike Gold Rush, boasting that he “cleaned up the biggest pile of gold ever accumulated in a single day, \$63,000 in the yellow metal.”³¹ At the end of the gold rush, Berry and his brother Clarence came home with \$450,000. He bought racehorses, the Los Angeles Angels and San Francisco Seals baseball clubs, and later became involved in the oil industry.

Young Melba attended Stanford and in her junior year met Frank H. Bennett, a senior. They eloped in 1921 and after graduation settled in Beverly Hills.³² Frank Bennett became a partner in Bennett & Charles, a Los Angeles firm that managed income properties. By 1930 the Bennetts were in Palm Springs, managing the Deep Well Guest Ranch. They were so enamored of the desert that the following year they bought the Ranch in partnership with Mr. and Mrs. Philip Boyd. (Boyd became the first mayor of Palm Springs in 1938.)

Like the nearby Smoke Tree Ranch, Deep Well Ranch was an exclusive western-themed “dude ranch,” where movie stars and titans of industry could dress up and play cowboy for the winter, albeit with all the amenities of a country club. Guests were encouraged to “do and dress as you please.” The 70-acre campus, designed by African-American architect Paul R. Williams, was described as a “broad oasis walled in by long hedges of brave green trees.”³³ Williams designed charming “Old California”-inspired cottages, made of “Adoblar” (a hard-fired brick resembling adobe) and topped with red-tiled roofs. The



site plan was organized around a rambling but cozy communal “Long Room,” surrounded by ramadas and patios covered by palm-fronds. Open lawns contrasted with more intimate hedged and tree-shaded outdoor rooms, while walks bordered by flower beds led to the swimming pool, tennis court, and other recreational amenities. “Whether you are a Republican, a Democrat, or a Technocrat, you will find the balmy sun and restful desert quiet of Deep Well Guest Ranch entirely impartial. Science provides no more potent remedy for tired bodies and frazzled nerves.”³⁴ For the next 18 years, Frank and Melba Bennett lived at and managed Deep Well Guest Ranch. This was a true labor of love for a woman who lived for horses and the art of entertaining. During the dark years of Depression and World War II, Bennett added fun to every activity planned at the ranch, drowning out much of the gloom of the outside world.

Melba and Nellie Coffman shared a special friendship. Melba recalled that Nellie’s “advice was always good and that she never hesitated to give [it] freely, even to her competitors, as Deep Well Guest Ranch could have been viewed. ‘What do you say to people to get rid of them?’ Bennett once asked Coffman when she had some ‘undesirables’ under her roof. ‘Why, Melba, I don’t say anything. I just wait it out... the gardener puts a little too much

fertilizer around by their windows, a little breeze comes, and that’s all it takes.”³⁵ Their friendship was reciprocal: “Melba, what kind of a shot are you with a gun? There’s a sign right out there on Palm Canyon Drive that shouldn’t be there. Go out and shoot it down, tonight,” Nellie instructed her friend. The sign that offended Mrs. Coffman was an advertisement for “colonics.”³⁶

Bennett was one of the first organizers of the famed Desert Circus, and, as part of that, produced and directed the “Desert Insanities” (later the “Village Vanities”), a fashion show with a twist. In 1939 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that “In fact, the models will be chosen from the ranks of the bachelors and benedicts! Qualifications: good looks, and an ability to strut! (We have several in mind who could tie for first place).” At the “Insanities,” the *Times* continued, “Lady Bella Bustabodice (Melba Bennett, who tried to look funny but looked beautiful) announced her creations modeled by 12 stunning MANikins — one of them Mayor Philip Boyd.”³⁷ Another Desert Circus tradition Melba started was the creation of the “Palm Springs Hat” — a cowboy hat bedecked with flowers and ribbons — a tradition that caught on and came to symbolize the resort area. Women would try to outdo each other, and it was not unusual to go into any business, bank, or

Opposite, top to bottom: *The Palm Springs Garden Book*, 1956. The book was written, illustrated and designed by Melba Bennett, and was the first book to discuss the problems of gardening in the Palm Springs area; Melba Bennett wearing one of her famous Palm Springs Hats, a straw cowboy hat embellished with ribbons and flowers. 1940s. Courtesy PSHS. Above: The swimming pool at Deep Well Guest Ranch, 1935. Courtesy PSHS.

grocery store and see every woman sporting a Palm Springs Hat.

Active in almost every phase of civic life in Palm Springs, Bennett was founder and President of the Palm Springs Historical Society, one of the first members of the Palm Springs Racquet Club, on the Board of Directors of the Desert Museum, a trustee of the Palm Springs Unified School District, one of the founders of the Welfare and Friendly Aid Society, a trustee of the Welwood Murray Memorial Library, one of the most active members of WAIF-ISS, and fundraising chairman and diligent worker for the Palm Springs Child Development Center, and a member of the Sierra Club.³⁸ Melba Bennett seemed tireless in all that she did, but Nellie Coffman grew concerned and warned her about burning out, saying in a letter, "From one busy woman to another. I heaved a great sigh when I heard you had taken on the onerous duties of directing the Palm Springs Insanities again. However I know that you will rise to the occasion. Only remember that you're not made of steel or iron, and some day you will feel the results if you keep going too hard. Ease up a little, girl, ease up."³⁹

In addition to all her charitable pursuits, Melba Bennett was an author. She wrote two books about her major literary interest, California poet Robinson Jeffers: *Robinson Jeffers and the Sea* (1936) and her highly-regarded biography of Jeffers published after Jeffers' death

in 1962, *The Stone Mason of Tor House* (1966). Bennett, who founded the Palm Springs Garden Club in 1946, was the first to write extensively about the unique challenges to gardening in Palm Springs, offering solutions and suggestions from her own experimentation at Deep Well Guest Ranch. She believed that there were "no gardens in the world which can be as breath-taking as our Palm Springs gardens during the spring when trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals are out-rivaling each other in a riot of colorful blooms."⁴⁰ Bennett began writing gardening articles for the *Desert Sun*, and had a monthly feature in the *Palm Springs Villager* magazine in the 1950s called "Through the Garden Gate, with Melba Bennett."

In 1956, working with the Palm Springs Garden Club, Bennett wrote, illustrated, and published *The Palm Springs Garden Book*. The first book of its kind, it focused on "fulfilling a need shown by queries over the years by newcomers to the Village, on just what type [of] plants will thrive here, and the soil, feeding, watering, etc., to best grow them."⁴¹ Bennett wrote that the book would serve as "An introduction to a 'sport' which demands no expensive costuming, which is easier on the temper than golf or tennis, which can be held to a minimum of expense and effort by the introduction of native, drought-resistant plants, or can develop into a purse-taxing

luxury, and a muscle-developing hobby, if you become an addict."⁴² The book broke desert landscaping into sections: trees (including citrus and palm), shrubs, bulbs, vines, perennials, annuals, lawns, and ground-covers.

Faced with development encroaching on Deep Well Guest Ranch, the Bennetts sold the Ranch in 1949, keeping three acres for themselves, and engaged architectural designer Cliff May to design their new home. The surrounding land was subdivided, and is today the still-fashionable Deepwell Estates neighborhood. After a short bout with cancer, Melba Berry Bennett died in 1967.

APPENDIX VI

Donna Reed Biography



(This biography is Donna Reed's official biography featured on the Internet Movie Database, IMDB. It was written by frequent IMDB biographer Denny Jackson.)

Donna Reed was born in the midwestern town of Denison, Iowa, on January 27, 1921, as Donna Belle Mullenger. A small town - a population of less than 3,000 people - Denison was located by the Boyer River and was the county seat of Crawford County. Donna grew up as a farm girl, much like many young girls in western Iowa, except for one thing - Donna was very beautiful. That wasn't to say that others weren't as pretty, it's just that Donna's beauty stood out from all the other local girls, so much so that she won a beauty contest in Denison. Upon graduation from high school Donna left for college in Los Angeles, in the hopes of eventually entering movies.

While at Los Angeles City College, she pursued her dream by participating in several college stage productions. In addition to the plays, she also won the title of Campus Queen. At one of those stage plays Donna was spotted by an MGM talent scout and was signed to a contract. Her first film was a minor role in MGM's *The Getaway* (1941). That was followed by a small part in *Babes on Broadway* (1941), with Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland as a secretary. She then won her breakthrough role in *Shadow of the Thin Man* (1941). Afterwards, MGM began giving her better parts, in films such as *The Bugle Sounds* (1942), *The Courtship of Andy Hardy* (1942) and *The Man from Down Under* (1943). In 1944 she received second billing playing Carol Halliday in *See Here, Private Hargrove* (1944), a comedy about a reporter drafted into the army who

eventually meets up with Donna's character as a worker in the canteen. The following year Donna starred in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945), her best role to date. It was a love story set in London in 1890. It got mixed critical reviews but did well at the box-office. Donna was now one of the leading ladies of Hollywood.

In 1946 she starred in what is probably her best-known role, as the wife of James Stewart in the classic *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). This timeless story is a holiday staple to this day. The film also starred Lionel Barrymore and Thomas Mitchell. The next year Donna starred as Ann Daniels in Paramount's *Beyond Glory* (1948) with Alan Ladd, which did well at the box-office. Her next role was the strongest she had had yet—*Chicago Deadline* (1949), again with Ladd. It was one of the best mystery dramas to come out of Hollywood in a long time and did very well at the box office.

As the 1940s faded out and the 1950s stormed in, Donna's roles got bigger but were mainly of the wholesome, girl-next-door type. In 1953, however, she starred as the hostess Alma in the widely acclaimed *From Here to Eternity* (1953). She was so good in that film she was nominated for and won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, beating out such veterans as Thelma Ritter and Marjorie Rambeau. The film itself won for Best Picture and remains a classic to this day. Later that year Donna starred in *The Caddy* (1953), a comedy with Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. Three years later she landed the role of Sacajawea in *The Far Horizons* (1955), the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, starring Charlton Heston and Fred MacMurray.

After finishing *The Whole Truth* (1958), Donna began her own TV series (produced by her husband), *The Donna Reed Show* (1958), a hit that ran for eight years. She was so effective in the show that she was nominated for TV's prestigious Emmy Award as Best Actress every year from 1959-1962. She was far more popular in TV than on the screen.

After the run of the program, Donna took some time away from show business before coming back in a couple of made-for-TV movies (in 1974, she had made a feature called *Welcome to Arrow Beach* (1973), but it was never released. She did get the role of Ellie Ewing Farlow in the hit TV series *Dallas* (1978) during the 1984-85 season. It was to be her final public performance.

On January 14, 1986, less than two weeks before her 65th birthday, she died of pancreatic cancer in Beverly Hills, California. Grover Asmus, her husband, created the Donna Reed Foundation for the Performing Arts in her hometown of Denison. The foundation helps others who desire a career in the arts. Donna never forgot her roots. She was still a farm girl at heart.

APPENDIX VII

Charles O. Matcham in Palm Springs

Charles O. Matcham first began practicing in Palm Springs in 1934, a time when he had just been promoted from senior draftsman to partner with Earl T. Heitschmidt. The pair appears to have agreed to let Matcham open a branch of the firm in Palm Springs while still working on projects in the Los Angeles area. It was an arrangement that suited everyone and over the next half dozen years Palm Springs became the beneficiary of a series of high-quality works, mostly residential, by Matcham that helped to elevate the architectural profile of the growing village. A number of these structures remain and are treasured while others have and continue to be lost in the name of progress. A small sampling of Matcham's Palm Springs output includes:



The first Palm Springs Fire Department and Police Department offices on North Palm Canyon Drive (1935). These structures have both been demolished. He is also attributed as architect on the adjacent Telephone Co. Building (1935), as well, which is still extant.

Matcham also designed the first (main portion) of Colonial House Apartment-Hotel in 1936, the Raymond Wilson (Wilson-Sorum Building) in 1937, as well as the Rogers Stables, and additions to the Racquet Club, among others. But his principal output was residential and between 1934-1941 he designed at least two dozen homes, a number of which were so well received they earned layouts in architectural magazines on both a regional and national scale.

The following is a list of known Matcham projects in Palm Springs. Other projects by the architect continue to be discovered.

1934	1184 Camino Mirasol Palm Springs	Katherine DeRoulhac Weed Seaman	R	Extant
1934	570 Via Corta Palm Springs	William T. Walker	R	Extant
1935 ca.	814 North Indian Canyon Drive/200 Tamarisk Road Palm Springs	Charles O. Matcham	Addition/altera tions to existing residence	Extant
1936	282 West El Camino Way Palm Springs	James E. French	R	Extant
1936	365 Camino Del Norte Palm Springs	Harold Hicks	R	Extant
1936	438 West Merito Place Palm Springs	Judge Ralph H. Clock	R	Extant
1936	749 (735) North Prescott Drive Palm Springs	H.E. Crawford	R	Extant
1936	Colonial House 572 North Indian Canyon Drive Palm Springs	Thelma Wertheimer, Al Wertheimer	Apartment- hotel	Extant
1936	Las Palmas Demonstration House 339 Vereda Del Norte Palm Springs	Alvah F. Hicks	R	Extant
1936	Casa Del Labrador 148 West Camino Descanso Palm Springs	Teresa M. Fields	R	Extant
1936	197 Camino Encanto Palm Springs	James W. McAlister	R	Extant
1937	183 West Camino Encanto Palm Springs	Gabriel Duque	R	Extant
1937	Raymond Wilson (Wilson- Sorum) Building 664 North Palm Canyon Drive Palm Springs	Raymond R. Wilson Co.	Office building, 2 stories	Extant
1937	348 West Merito Place Palm Springs	M/M Claude Binyon	R	Extant
1937	635 East Granvia Valmonte Palm Springs	Jane W. Mouton	R	Extant
1937	687 East Vereda del Sur Palm Springs	Fred Le Blond	R	Extant
1937	Palm Springs Polo Club		Club with club rooms, polo	Project only

	Northwest corner of Field Club grounds Palm Springs		grounds, swimming pool	
1937	325 West Chino Drive Palm Springs	A.E. Menke	R	Extant
1938	1325 Camino Mirasol Palm Springs	Harold S. Vance	R	Demolished
1938	487 Vista Chino Palm Springs	Marion Clancy	R	Extant
1938	Tahquitz Demonstration Home 366 South Patencio Road Palm Springs	Pearl and Austin McManus	R	Extant
1938	318 West Vereda Del Sur Palm Springs	William F. Prisk	R	Extant
1938	Palm Springs	George McManus	R	Project only?
1938	Palm Springs	Dr. John Robert MacCartney	R	Project only?
1938	294 West Crestview Drive Palm Springs	William Kidston	Guest house	
1938	Palm Canyon Drive Palm Springs	E.E. Prusso	Restaurant	Project only?
1938	Racquet Club Palm Springs	Charles Farrell	Additional structures to existing club; solarium, guest house, apartment for club manager, Finnish vapor bath house,	
1938	196 West Vereda Del Sur Palm Springs	M/M Carl B. Kumpe	R	Extant
1939	Rogers Stables Pear and Rogers Roads Palm Springs	Rogers Stables, Inc.		
1939	Shangrela 501 Santa Rosa Drive Palm Springs	M/M E.W.A. Peake (Will and Wanda)	R	Extant
1941	795 North Patencio Road Palm Springs	Dorothy Stein	R	Extant

APPENDIX VIII

Ernst Off Biography



Ernst Off (1901-1993) was a pioneering figure in Palm Springs architectural, building and development history, whose career in the Coachella Valley spanned more than a half century. He built and sometimes designed hundreds of homes, apartments, and business buildings throughout the area. He was also a successful developer, most notably the Chino Mesa Estates tract in 1946 and the Palmeras Park tract in Palm Desert in the 1960s.

Born in Unterreichenbach, Germany in 1901, Off immigrated to the United States in 1923 and settled in Los Angeles. He not only had relatives in the city, but they were important and wealthy. Charles Off, Sr. (1866-1937) was a millionaire oil man who was a major figure in the California petroleum industry. He also headed Los Feliz Nurseries, located not far from the family mansion at 4801 Los Feliz Boulevard.

With the family mansion as his home base, Off began establishing himself in business, working first in banking and sales, but it would not be long before he found his true passion. The 1920s

was a time of unprecedented growth in Southern California and Off saw opportunity in real estate, particularly in the still-emerging village of Palm Springs. Off was a regular winter visitor to Palm the desert starting in 1925, returning each season until, in 1930, he decided to relocate permanently and open his own construction company.

Off's decision was meant with incredulity by well-meaning friends with one banker telling him, "You'll starve out there in that Godforsaken place." Off didn't starve, but literally hit the ground running, immersing himself in his new home and quickly becoming an important member of the fledgling community. In 1930, he was one of the founders of the Desert Riders. Two of his fellow founders were future owners of El Sueño, Frank and Melba Bennett.

Off also volunteered to help establish and manage the first local boy scout troop as well care for the airport, which was then little more than a dirt track. He later recalled his management included organizing volunteers "to pull the biggest tumble weeds out by hand and stomp out the biggest gopher holes by foot."

The first house Off was to build in Palm Springs in his more than 50 years of construction was appropriately one for himself. In 1934, he constructed a rambling hacienda he named "La Finca Feliz," at 630 Tachevah Road. Off built it in time to host his wedding to Mazie Lee Murrell of Los Angeles, which was held in the living room on February 7, 1934. He presented the house to her as a wedding gift. This home, an early Palm Springs landmark, later became the longtime residence of film star and Palm Springs mayor, Charles Farrell.

During the 1930s, Off was heavily involved in civic and social affairs with his construction business building dozens of homes throughout Palm Springs. Off would build homes on his own for resale or he would serve as builder on custom designs, either designing them himself or working with an architect as in the case of El Sueño. He also became involved in development, joining forces with two important pioneers, Culver Nichols and his wife, Sally Prescott Nichols to develop the El Mirador Estates tract.

As successful as he had been in Palm Springs, Off developed wanderlust and in 1937 he and his wife left the desert and relocated back to Los Angeles where he maintained other business interests including a ranch near La Habra and an investment banking house downtown. He was also said to own a large ranch outside of Havana and would travel there from time to time to oversee its operations. Travel became the primary focus for Off and his wife in the prewar years. He had become a naturalized citizen shortly after Hitler came to power and spent the last years of the 1930s traveling through Europe and the world.

At war's end, Off returned to Palm Springs to participate in the area's post-war boom. His construction company, which advertised itself as "Building Homes of Distinction Since 1930" was very busy. At the same time, he became involved with another tract development, the Chino Mesa Estates near Little Tuscany.

Off remained a prolific builder in the Coachella Valley over the next decades with some of his bigger projects being the Sun Village on Desert Way and Palmeras Park in Palm Desert. One of his later projects was the Burt Armstrong residence at 2432 Southridge Drive in 1971.

Ernst Off died in Palm Springs on April 25, 1993.

APPENDIX IX

Grant Deed

Branch :O25,User :JECR

Comment:

Station Id :VR64

RECORDING REQUESTED BY: FIRST AMERICAN TITLE COMPANY		DOC # 2023-0000484 01/03/2023 11:14 AM Fees: \$30.00 Page 1 of 3 Recorded in Official Records County of Riverside Peter Aldana Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder
AND WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO: MIKE D. FEDDERSEN and TOM R. MCCLAY 583 POLARIS CT. PALM SPRINGS, CA 92264		**This document was electronically submitted to the County of Riverside for recording** Receipted by: ELENA #448
THIS SPACE FOR RECORDER'S USE ONLY:		
Title Order No.: 0625-6916206 Escrow No.: 115-004060-MS		
GRANT DEED		
THE UNDERSIGNED GRANTOR(S) DECLARE(S)		TRA No.: 011-021
DOCUMENTARY TRANSFER TAX is \$4,592.50		
☒ computed on full value of property conveyed, or ☐ computed on full value less value of liens or encumbrances remaining at time of sale. ☐ Unincorporated area ☒ City of PALM SPRINGS AND		
FOR A VALUABLE CONSIDERATION, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged,		
WALLACE O. SELLERS JR., as to an undivided 90% interest and BRETT M. BENNER, as to an undivided 10% interest, Registered Domestic Partners, as Tenants in Common		
hereby GRANT(s) to:		
THOMAS R. MCCLAY AND MICHAEL D. FEDDERSEN, TRUSTEES OF THE MCCLAY-FEDDERSEN FAMILY TRUST DATED JANUARY 16, 2019		
the real property in the City of PALM SPRINGS, County of Riverside, State of California, described as:		
LEGAL DESCRIPTION ATTACHED HERETO AS EXHIBIT "A" AND MADE A PART HEREOF		
Also Known as: 1184 CAMINO MIRASOL, PALM SPRINGS, CA 92262 AP#: 505-202-016		
DATED: December 28, 2022		
Signature Page attached hereto and made a part hereof		
MAIL TAX STATEMENTS TO PARTY SHOWN BELOW; IF NO PARTY SHOWN, MAIL AS DIRECTED ABOVE:		
Exemption reason declared pursuant to Government Code 27388.1 ☒ This document is a transfer that is subject to the imposition of documentary transfer tax. ☐ Recorded concurrently "in connection with" a transfer subject to the imposition of documentary transfer tax.		

DOC #2023-0000484 Page 2 of 3

Signature Page


WALLACE O. SELLERS JR.
BRETT M. BENNER

A notary public or other officer completing this certificate verifies only the identity of the individual who signed the document to which this certificate is attached, and not the truthfulness, accuracy, or validity of that document.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF Los Angeles
On 12/24/2022
before me, Seung H. Kim
A Notary Public personally appeared
Wallace O. Sellers Jr. and
Brett M. Benner

who proved to me on the basis of satisfactory evidence to be the person(s) whose name(s) is/are subscribed to the within instrument and acknowledged to me that he/she/they executed the same in his/her/their authorized capacity(ies), and that by his/her/their signature(s) on the instrument the person(s), or the entity upon behalf of which the person(s) acted, executed the instrument.

I certify under PENALTY OF PERJURY under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing paragraph is true and correct.

WITNESS my hand and official seal.

Signature 



(Seal)

DOC #2023-0000484 Page 3 of 3

Exhibit "A"

Legal Description

A.P.N.: 505-202-016

Real property in the City of Palm Springs, County of Riverside, State of California, described as follows:

PARCEL 1 OF RECORD SURVEYS, IN THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, ON FILE RECORDED JULY 21, 1965 IN BOOK 46, PAGE 46 OF RECORD OF SURVEYS, RECORDS OF SAID COUNTY.

EXCEPT THEREFROM ALL OIL, GAS, MINERALS AND OTHER HYDROCARBON SUBSTANCES, LYING BELOW A DEPTH OF 500 FEET, WITHOUT THE RIGHT OF SURFACE ENTRY.