



# THE BURNHAM-WELLS RESIDENCE

SMOKE TREE RANCH

**John Porter Clark**

1936

Nomination Application for City of Palm Springs  
Class 1 Historic Resource  
Prepared by Steve Vaught  
for the  
Palm Springs Preservation Foundation  
June 2023. Revised August 14, 2024

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Front cover: 6-year-old Peter Sears poses at the front of the 4-year-old Burnham-Wells Residence in 1941. Note hitching post, still in situ in 2023.**  
(Courtesy Chuck and Julie Bentall)

**Above: Vintage lamp post at the Burnham-Wells Residence.**  
(Author photo. February 2023)

# THE BURNHAM-WELLS 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 July 2022, the PSPF board of directors engaged Steve Vaught to prepare the Burnham-Wells Residence’s Class 1 Historic Resource nomination.

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



**View looking east towards rear façade.  
Note the shed roof, deep porch. Pool is of recent (2016) vintage.  
(Author photo. February 2023)**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **SIGNIFICANCE:**

The property that is the subject of this historic resources report, the Ralph French Burnham-Gertrude Wells Overly Brennan Residence (hereinafter referred to as the “Burnham-Wells Residence”) is a single-family residence on Smoke Tree Ranch, a private gated community located south of East Palm Canyon Drive and east of South La Verne Way. One of the oldest homes to be built within the colony, its rustic, Ranch-style design exemplifies the intentions of Smoke Tree Ranch’s original developers who mandated that all homes be of “Early California ranch” architecture.

As a first-tier Smoke Tree Ranch residence, the Burnham-Wells Residence is significant as a rare, largely-intact representative of 1930s Palm Springs Ranch-style residential architecture. However, its primary significance comes from the home’s architect.

John Porter Clark, AIA (1905-1991), is considered one of the iconic masters of Palm Springs architecture and hailed as a co-founder (along with Albert Frey) of Desert Modernism. Yet, his current legacy rests almost exclusively on partnership associations. Clark’s individual contributions to Palm Springs architecture have been almost completely subsumed by his longtime collaborations with Albert Frey, Robson Chambers, and later, E. Stewart Williams. As such, documenting Clark’s individual work has proven difficult, a situation greatly exacerbated by the destruction of his papers, reportedly burned at the architect’s own direction sometime before his death in 1991.

Therefore, finding a structure that can be definitively traced to Clark and Clark alone is an extreme rarity, particularly one that has not been altered beyond the architect’s original intentions or lost altogether. While there have been some alterations to the home over its 86-year history, it still retains Clark’s vision.

The home’s period of significance of the mid to late 1930s, places it solidly in “Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941),” as defined in the *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings* created by Historic Resources Group. This is a period when wealthy and influential people were building second homes in the growing and increasingly well-known resort Village.

## **DESIGNATION CRITERIA:**

The Burnham-Wells Residence has not been previously evaluated for Class 1 historic resource eligibility.

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:

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

8.05.070 (C.1.a.) paragraph (ii) - **The resource is associated with the lives of persons who made a meaningful contribution to national, state, or local history:** In this nomination, the Burnham-Wells Residence is associated with several notable figures, principally Ralph French Burnham and later Gertrude Wells Overly Brennan, the latter twice-owner of the home. While these individuals were both prominent figures within their community and professional associations, they do not rise to a level that meets the criteria of persons who had influence in local and national history. Therefore, the Burnham-Wells Residence does not qualify for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 2.

8.05.070 (C.1.a.) paragraph (iii) - **The resource reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, state, or local history:** The Burnham-Wells Residence exhibits a number of stylistic markers which identify it as being of Ranch architecture. This style, which was popular both in the Pre-War and Post War periods, was first introduced in Smoke Tree Ranch at the end of the 1920s by Pasadena architect Garrett Van Pelt. John Porter Clark worked for Van Pelt during this period (1928-1932) and may have assisted in Smoke Tree Ranch's original designs. These are among the earliest, if not *the* earliest Palm Springs examples of the Ranch-style, putting them at the vanguard of what would become one of the village's most popular traditional building types of the 1930s through the 1950s. The home's style and original build date places it solidly in the context of "Palm Springs between the Wars (1919-1941)" as defined in the *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings* created by Historic Resources Group. The Burnham-Wells Residence may be viewed as an important component of the historical trends that have come to define Palm Springs' image as a center of notable architecture, i.e., a historical trend that exemplifies a particular period of the national, state, or local history. The Burnham-Wells Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 3.

8.05.070 (C.1.a.) paragraph (iv) - **The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction:** The Burnham-Wells Residence embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction reflective of the period in which it was built. Although board-and-batten construction had been used in earlier decades including on some of Palm Springs' pioneer buildings, it had largely been superseded by other methods. The use of board-and-batten construction on the Burnham-Wells Residence represented a renewed interest in this form, which was to become commonplace on homes of similar style over the ensuing years. The board-and-batten construction used on the Burnham-Wells Residence exhibits the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction popularly employed during the time of the home's period of significance. As such, the Burnham-Wells Residence qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 4.

8.05.070 (C.1.a.) paragraph (v) - **High Artistic Value - The resource 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:** The Burnham-Wells Residence has the unique distinction of being a verifiably solo work of master architect John Porter Clark. Regarded as a co-founder, along with long-time collaborator Albert Frey, of Desert Modernism, Clark nonetheless proved with the Burnham-Wells Residence his skill in interpreting traditional styles.

Executed in the Ranch-style, the Burnham-Wells Residence was intended to evoke the pioneer western ranch houses of the previous century. These structures were born of pure necessity, not artistry, and were constructed out of the simplest materials available in the simplest forms practicable. Aside from modern interior features such as plumbing and lighting, Clark stayed true

to concept for the Burnham-Wells Residence, using the same type of materials and basic architectural styling as its pioneer inspirations. The result showed how even something ostensibly as utilitarian as a pioneer ranch house could be made beautiful in the hands of as talented a practitioner as Clark. Therefore, for the well-proportioned simplicity of its design as created by master architect John Porter Clark, the Burnham-Wells Residence qualifies as a Class 1 Historic Resource under Criterion 5.

**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 Standards: Design, Materials, Workmanship, Location, Setting, Feeling, Association:**

8.06.070 (C,1, b) – Integrity: The site, structure, building or object shall be evaluated for integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association according to the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service’s National Register Bulletin titled: “How to apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation” as revised from time to time.

**SUMMARY:**

This evaluation finds the Burnham-Wells Residence eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Resource under 8.05.070 (C,1,a) paragraphs iii, iv, and v of the local ordinance’s seven criteria. Additionally, the Residence retains a “high degree” of integrity (see page 35, “Integrity Analysis”).





**John Porter Clark, A.I.A. (1905-1991)**  
(Via Wikipedia)



## 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](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05_Historic_Preservation) "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](http://www.palmspringsca.gov/government/departments/planning/municipal_code/title_8/section_8.05_Historic_Preservation) "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.



(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: **Charles E. Bentall and Julie Bentall, trustees, Smoke Tree Ranch Trust (2013)**  
Please Print

Owner  Lessee  Authorized Agent  City  Other

Applicant's Address: **4932 Meadfield Road**  
Number and Street Name or P.O. Box

	<b>West Vancouver</b>	<b>British Columbia</b>	<b>CANADA</b>
	City	State	ZIP
Telephone Nos:	<b>604-921-7436</b>	<b>604-812-6161</b>	
	Residence	Cell	Work
E-Mail address:	<b>cbentallarch@shaw.ca</b>		

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: **Smoke Tree Ranch, 1850 Smoke Tree Lane, Rock 6, 4 Left, Palm Springs, CA 92264**

APN **510-172-001 and 510-172-004** Zone: Section: \_\_\_\_\_ Gen'l Plan Land Use Desig. \_\_\_\_\_

Is the project is located on the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Reservation? **No** (Refer to the Land Status Map under Tribal Resources on the Planning Department home page.) Construction Date: **1936**

Estimated  Actual (denote source, i.e. bldg. permits)

Architect: **John Porter Clark under the aegis of Van Pelt & Lind**

Builder: **William Marte and H.L. Hansen (Marte-Hansen)**

Present Owner: **Charles E. Bentall and Julie Bentall, trustees, Smoke Tree Ranch Trust (2013)**

Present Owner Address: **4932 Meadfield Road, West Vancouver, British Columbia, CANADA**

Original Owner: **Ralph French Burnham and Ruth Burnham**



Other notable past owners: **Gertrude Wells (Overly Brennan)**

Other Historic Associations: **Melville R. Bissell, president of the Bissell Carpet Sweeping Co., lessee for the 1940-1941 season; Albert Frey, architect of later (1991-1993) alterations/minor additions**

Common Name of Property: **Burnham-Wells Residence**

Historic Name of Property: **Burnham Residence**

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: **Ranch (Ranch House Revival)**

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

Period of Significance: **Palm Springs Between the Wars (1919-1941)**

(See the Citywide Historic Context Statement Document.)

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

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**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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.

**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 Standards<sup>4</sup>: Design, Materials, Workmanship, Location, Setting, Feeling, Association.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> Refer to the U.S. Department of the Interior Bulletin for How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property.

**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)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Owner Consent Letter w/ notarized signature, (1 copy)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Ownership and address history; ("Chain of title") (1 copy.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Photographs of the exterior of the proposed sites, structures, buildings or objects.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Aerial photo of the site / resource (from Google Maps or equal).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Information about the architect(s), designer(s), planner(s), and/or developers of the proposed sites, structures, buildings or objects, if known.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Identify the source of the information provided in the application, such as building permit numbers, date and issue of publications, organizations or individuals.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Site Plan (8-1/2" x 11" or 11" x 17")	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Public Hearing Labels. The applicant shall submit public hearing mailing labels pursuant to Zoning Code Section 94.09.00.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

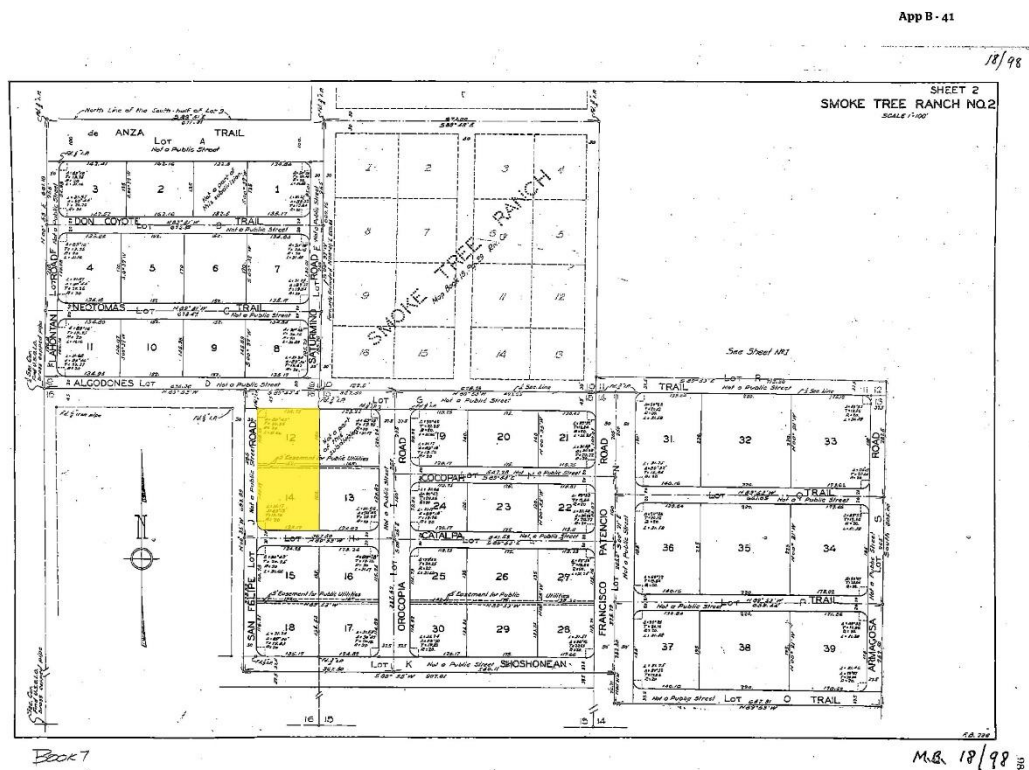
<sup>1</sup>Applicants are encouraged to review the City's Technical Assistance Bulletin titled "How to Apply the Palm Springs Eligibility Criteria for Historic Designation" available under "Historic Resources" of the Planning Home page of the City website ([www.palmspringsc.gov](http://www.palmspringsc.gov)) 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/>)).

## Statement of Significance

### Summary

Completed in 1936, the Burnham-Wells Residence is located within the historic Smoke Tree Ranch development. As is the case with all Smoke Tree Ranch homes, it bears the official addresses of 1850 Smoke Tree Lane and, alternately, 1800 South Sunrise Way, although internally it is located at Rock 6 4L, Algodones Road.

The property consists of 2 separate parcels. Parcel 1 consists of Lot 12, where the residence is located. Parcel 2 consists of Lot 14 and is known as the "view lot." Construction of any structure on this lot is explicitly forbidden by Smoke Tree Ranch covenants. The legal description per the Riverside County Assessor is LOT 12 MB 018/097 SMOKE TREE RANCH 2. The "2" is in reference to the different sections of the ranch, which was laid out and developed in four distinct parcels. The Burnham-Wells Residence was built in Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2., which had been officially opened for subdivision in June 1936.



A portion of the tract map for Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2, June 1936.  
The Burnham-Wells property is shown in yellow.



## Smoke Tree Ranch



**A western “sing along” at Smoke Tree Ranch, 1930s. From the beginning, Smoke Tree Ranch carefully cultivated its rustic, informal “old west” image.**  
(Courtesy smoketreeranch.com)

The location of the Burnham-Wells Residence provides a setting that is both picturesque and historic. Smoke Tree Ranch is considered not only one of the finest and most exclusive enclaves in Palm Springs, its reputation extends nationally and even internationally as well. For decades, this private gated community has been home to some of the most recognized names in business, finance, society, and motion pictures, each of whom have been drawn to the rustic, low key atmosphere of this desert hideaway. Names like Disney, Weyerhaeuser, Upjohn, Helms, Trousdale, Janss, Hoover, Haldeman, among many others, have all found Smoke Tree Ranch to be a place of peace and relaxation. Even President Dwight D. Eisenhower enjoyed the ranch's hospitality during his 1954 trip to the desert.

Although its official opening took place on January 2, 1931, the development of Smoke Tree Ranch had actually begun several years earlier when a consortium of investors led by Pasadena businessman and real estate developer L. Mac Blankenhorn, purchased the approximately 450-acre parcel about 2 miles from Palm Springs.

The property had been known locally as the Smoke Tree Forest owing to the profusion of the eponymous trees dotting the landscape. There was also an old ruin on the grounds, a sole surviving relic of “Palmdale,” a failed attempt to develop the property from the 1880s. Blankenhorn and his fellow investors envisioned a beautiful and private residential development where the

natural feeling was retained, a place where a select group of residents and guests could relax and get a true sense of rustic, Old West-style living.

Prior to the ranch's opening, wealthy winter visitors had only two options: They could stay at a hotel during the season or could build a home for themselves. While the latter may have offered privacy and freedom, it also came with expenses, maintenance, staff and caretaking issues. Smoke Tree Ranch offered both options, providing guest accommodations as well as the ability to build private homes. But here, home owners would have the unique advantage of hotel amenities as well as full community features such as a restaurant/club house, tennis, swimming, horse stables, riding trails, even a private school.

Blankenhorn and his fellow investors were adamant in their intentions that the development maintain a strict rustic atmosphere with all structures being designed in "Early California" style. Fortunately, one of the investors was master Pasadena architect Garrett Van Pelt, Jr. At Smoke Tree Ranch, the talented Van Pelt was able to put into physical form, the rustic, Old West feeling envisioned by the developers in a way that has proven timeless rather than dated.



**An original Garrett Van Pelt Smoke Tree Ranch Ranch-style design.  
Note stylistic similarities to the Burnham-Wells Residence.  
(Courtesy smoketreeranch.com)**

Van Pelt was responsible for all of the original Smoke Tree Ranch structures, most notably the tract office/community building, which would ultimately include a dining room and kitchen. He also planned the stables, a set of small guest cottages, and even the one-room school. Throughout this period, 1929-1931, Van Pelt had in his employ a young draftsman, John Porter Clark, and he may have actively assisted in the original design work.

As noted by the *Citywide Historic Context Statement & Survey Findings*, historian Lawrence Culver in his book, *The Frontier of Leisure*, identifies the early architecture of Smoke Tree Ranch as looking unlike much of Palm Springs architecture of the time and instead reflecting the Ranch-

style architecture in California and across America. “They were clear early examples of the ranch house—the domestic architectural style that would carpet the floor of the San Fernando Valley after World War II,” writes Culver, “and appear in every community in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s.”

While Smoke Tree Ranch had a unique, and what would ultimately be, a successful formula, it struggled to remain solvent during its early years, having opened during the Great Depression. However, in 1936, the development was taken over by the Mardo Corporation, an entity controlled by the husband-and-wife team of Fred and Mazie Belle Markham of Pasadena. The popular and dynamic couple brought a new energy to the venture, making it profitable for the first time while building upon the rustic ambiance originally envisioned by Mac Blankenhorn.

One of their biggest moves was to expand the development, beginning with Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2 in 1936, which provided an additional 52 parcels. The following year, 2 more sections (Smoke Tree Ranch No. 3 and No. 4) would be added to the development.

One of the first buyers in the newly-opened Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2 tract, would be Ralph French Burnham and Ruth Wilson Burnham, friends and fellow Pasadena neighbors of the Markhams. In June of 1936, the couple purchased Lot 12 of Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2. It was a choice spot at the corner of Algodones and San Felipe Roads right near the intersection with Saturmino Road (today known as Ranch House Road), within walking distance of Smoke Tree Ranch’s community amenities yet far enough away to ensure privacy. Upon acquiring the lot, the Burnhams set about engaging an architect and contractor to build their desert retreat.

### **The Architect – John Porter Clark**



*Recently completed home of the Ralph Burnhams of Pasadena.  
Sketch by John Clark of Van Pelt and Lind, Architects.*

**This sketch of the Burnham-Wells Residence by John Porter Clark appeared in the 12-5-1936 edition of the Palm Springs Limelight News.**

When the Burnhams made the decision to become Smoke Tree “colonists,” they agreed to a series of covenants intended to maintain the look and atmosphere of the development. One of the most important terms was regarding the architecture of any proposed structure, which must be of “Early California ranch architecture.” However, Smoke Tree Ranch went a step further in not only mandating the style, they also had final approval of any architectural plans submitted by the home builder. These plans would be reviewed by either an architect or architectural committee chosen by Smoke Tree Ranch. Written approval of the plans was required before any home could be built at the ranch.

Between 1934-1936, there were a dozen houses built at Smoke Tree Ranch. With the exception of the home prominent Los Angeles architect Harold G. Spielman designed for himself in 1935, it is likely most, if not all of the others, were the work of the Palm Springs office of Van Pelt & Lind, which consisted of Albert Frey, John Porter Clark and Richard A. Hansen.

While there is no documentation at present to completely verify, it is likely that the services of Van Pelt & Lind were recommended to the Burnhams. And on this project, the lead designer was Clark. With Clark’s records lost/destroyed, researchers have had to rely on other sources, most notably the records and recollections of Albert Frey in seeking out Clark designs. The Burnham-Wells Residence does not appear on any Frey inventory other than in regards to his 1990s alterations. Further, Clark was specifically named as the designer in The Palm Springs Limelight-News in 1936.

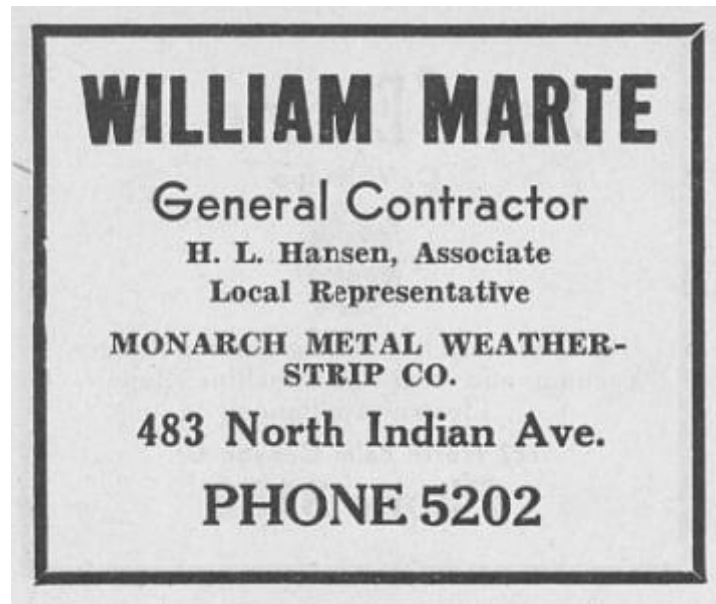
At the time of the Burnham-Wells commission, Clark was still not yet licensed as an architect, but had been working in the profession since graduation from Pasadena High School in 1923. Clark had managed to gain a position as a junior draftsman at the top firm in Pasadena – Marston & Van Pelt. In 1926, he left the firm to enroll at the Cornell University School of Architecture in Ithaca, New York, one of the country’s most prestigious architecture schools. At the time, Cornell’s curriculum focused on classic Beaux Arts design.

In 1928, after 2 years of study, he returned to Pasadena from Cornell and to the firm, now known as Marston, Van Pelt & Maybury, this time as senior draftsman. The young Clark appears to have particularly impressed Garrett Van Pelt and in 1930, when he left to go into independent practice, he took Clark with him. It was during this time that Van Pelt was involved in the Smoke Tree Ranch development and, while it presently cannot be verified owing to a dearth of documentation, it is possible, even likely that Clark worked with Van Pelt on the original Smoke Tree Ranch designs.

Clark saw great opportunities in the desert and, by 1934, he decided to relocate full time to Palm Springs, opening a branch office of the firm of Van Pelt & Lind with another ambitious young architectural designer Albert Frey. During their time under the Van Pelt & Lind banner, the pair would design a number of desert structures together and separately. And both would have long associations with Smoke Tree Ranch over the following years after they established their own firm of Clark & Frey. (Please see John Porter Clark Biography in Appendix VII.)



**The Contractor – William Lee Marte and associate, H.L. Hansen – Marte-Hansen**



Another young architect associated with the Palm Springs office of Van Pelt & Lind was Richard Alexander Hansen (1910-2006). Hansen was the son of Hans Lauritz (H.L.) Hansen (1883-1969), a pioneering Palm Springs carpenter who would have a long association with William Lee Marte, the contractor who built the Burnham-Wells Residence.

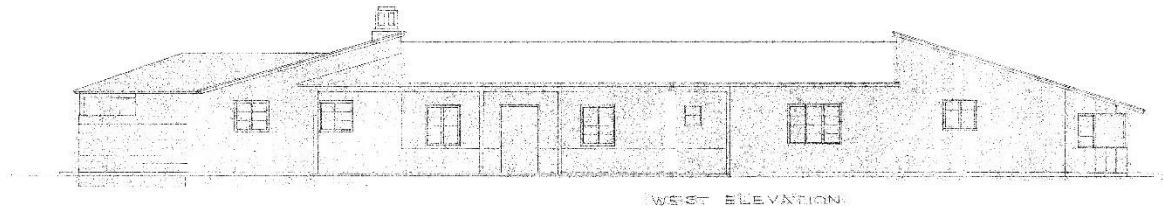
William Lee Marte (1887-1978) was one of the area's busiest and best-known builders throughout the period. The Ohio-born Marte was a pioneer Palm Springs resident, having been in the desert with his wife Henrietta and their children since the 1920s. Marte established a general contracting business in the original Palm Springs Theatre building, working with his longtime associate H.L. Hansen. He would later handle the rebuild of the theater as well as at least two others for Earl Strebe in Lake Arrowhead and Newport Beach.

Over the course of his long career, which spanned more than 60 years, Marte built dozens of structures throughout Palm Springs and beyond from residences to apartments, hotels, theaters, stores, governmental, and offices. His clients included such important local figures as Carl Lykken, Harold Hicks, H.J. Carpenter, and Rufus J. Chapman, as well as nationally known personages as actor William Powell, and Ambassador Charles Crane. In 1917, Marte built the summer cottage at Moss Point in Laguna Beach for presidential confidante Colonel Henry House, an area landmark gaining fame as a "Western White House," during the time it was occupied by President Woodrow Wilson in 1919. The house still stands at 139 Moss Street.

Marte worked with a number of the major Palm Springs architects including Charles O. Matcham, Brewster & Benedict, and Albert Frey. And he worked frequently with John Porter Clark. In addition to the Burnham-Wells Residence, he built the Welwood Murray Library, the Little Tuscany Model Home, the first City Hall, the Roland Walton Residence, among others.

During his time in Palm Springs, Marte lived with his family at the Spanish-styled home at 814 North Indian Canyon Drive, a home later occupied by architect Charles O. Matcham. In 1941, he sold the house and relocated to Bloomington where he would remain until his death at 91 on May 29, 1978.

### **Smoke Tree Ranch's Mandate on Ranch-style Architecture**



**The Louis Mac Blankenhorn Residence (1930), prototype of the Smoke Tree Ranch ranch houses, typifies the classic Early California Ranch-style architecture mandated at the ranch.**  
(Courtesy Albert Frey Collection. Palm Springs Art Museum)

As noted earlier, Smoke Tree Ranch required (and continues to require in 2023) that all structures built within the colony conform to their strict architectural guidelines which mandated Ranch-style architecture. Specifically, Article 3(c) of the Grant Deed executed between the Mardo Corporation (Smoke Tree Ranch) and the Burnhams in June of 1936 states:

Said building or structure must be of the Type (sic) of architecture and design commonly known as Early California ranch house design, and designed and finished to harmonize with desert surroundings and colors and with other buildings in the tract. The exterior walls shall be adequately covered and painted with white paint, excepting the trim, which may be in other appropriate colors. Roofs must not be red, either in tile, composition, shingles, or paint, or stain. The exterior design and finish must correspond with the general plan herein mentioned...

This mandate was what John Porter Clark would need to deal with in his design of the Burnham-Wells Residence. It is likely that Clark's design would come under additional scrutiny by Smoke Tree Ranch owing to the planned location of the home. It was to be sited at the head of a T-intersection and one of the first and most visible homes in the newly-opened Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2. Fortunately, Clark was well versed in the Early California Ranch-style and may have already designed similar homes within the colony under the aegis of Van Pelt & Lind.

### **"American" Early California Ranch Architecture**

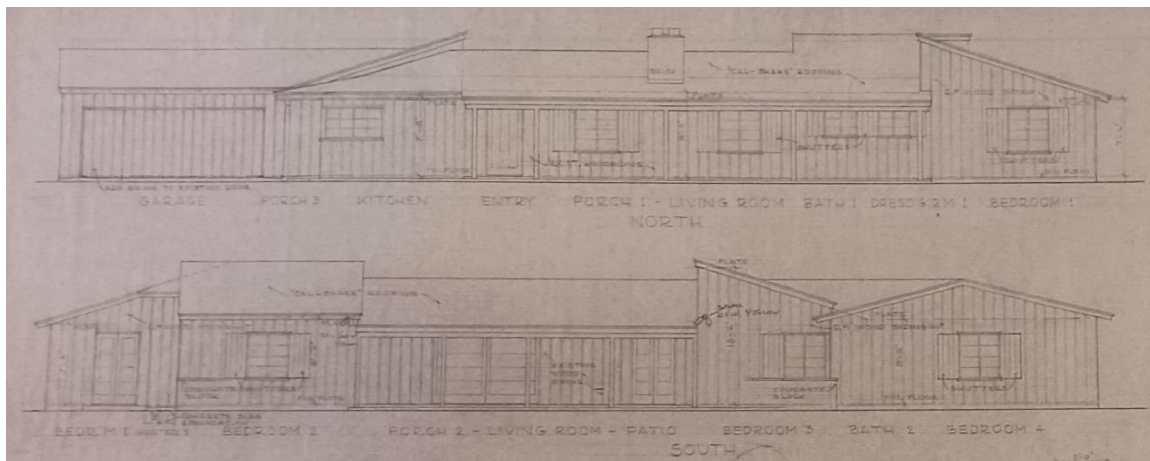
In Smoke Tree Ranch's directive regarding the home's architectural style, it was clear that a distinction was being made between the Early California architecture of the Spanish/Mexican pioneers and those of the later Americans. While these two types were almost identical in form and layout, they differed significantly in terms of materials. Spanish/Mexican ranch houses were almost exclusively of adobe/stucco, with American versions being of wood, generally board-and-batten construction. When it came to the roofs, it was tile most generally associated with Spanish/Mexican ranch houses. Tile was not specifically prohibited at Smoke Tree Ranch but the

color red was, which led to most all roof sheathing at Smoke Tree Ranch to be of wooden shakes stained a dark brown.

On the surface, these restrictions may have seemed short-sighted, dooming the colony to acres of monotonous repetition, but in the hands of talented architects such as Garrett Van Pelt, Albert Frey, John Porter Clark and others to follow, limitations were seen not as drawbacks, but rather as exciting challenges to find ways to produce something wholly unique while remaining in harmony with the others. As Cliff May, the undisputed master of the California Ranch-style was later to write, “[The ranch house] has never known a set style. It was shaped by needs for a special way of living – informal, yet gracious...It was kept simple by scarcity, both of materials and mechanical aids. It remained flexible under the stress of meeting infinite variety in terrain and climate.”

While the original ranch houses of the 1800s were born of necessity and scarcity of materials, the 1930s versions at Smoke Tree Ranch were anything of the sort. The builders of these houses were wealthy, some in the extreme, with substantial residences elsewhere. At Smoke Tree Ranch, they were looking to play out a fantasy of what life was like in the simpler days of the “Old West,” which had long since taken on a patina of romance the actual pioneers would not have experienced or recognized. The Burnhams were no exception, having a grand estate overlooking the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. At Smoke Tree Ranch, they wanted to “rough it,” to leave grandeur and big city amenities/problems behind and reconnect with nature. It was this desire that guided, and continues to guide the success of Smoke Tree Ranch today.

### Construction and Design of the Burnham-Wells Residence



**Albert Frey’s 1991 rendering of the home’s north and south elevations. Note how closely the Burnham-Wells Residence adheres to the same feeling of the 1930 Blankenhorn residence.**  
(Courtesy Albert Frey Collection. Palm Springs Art Museum)

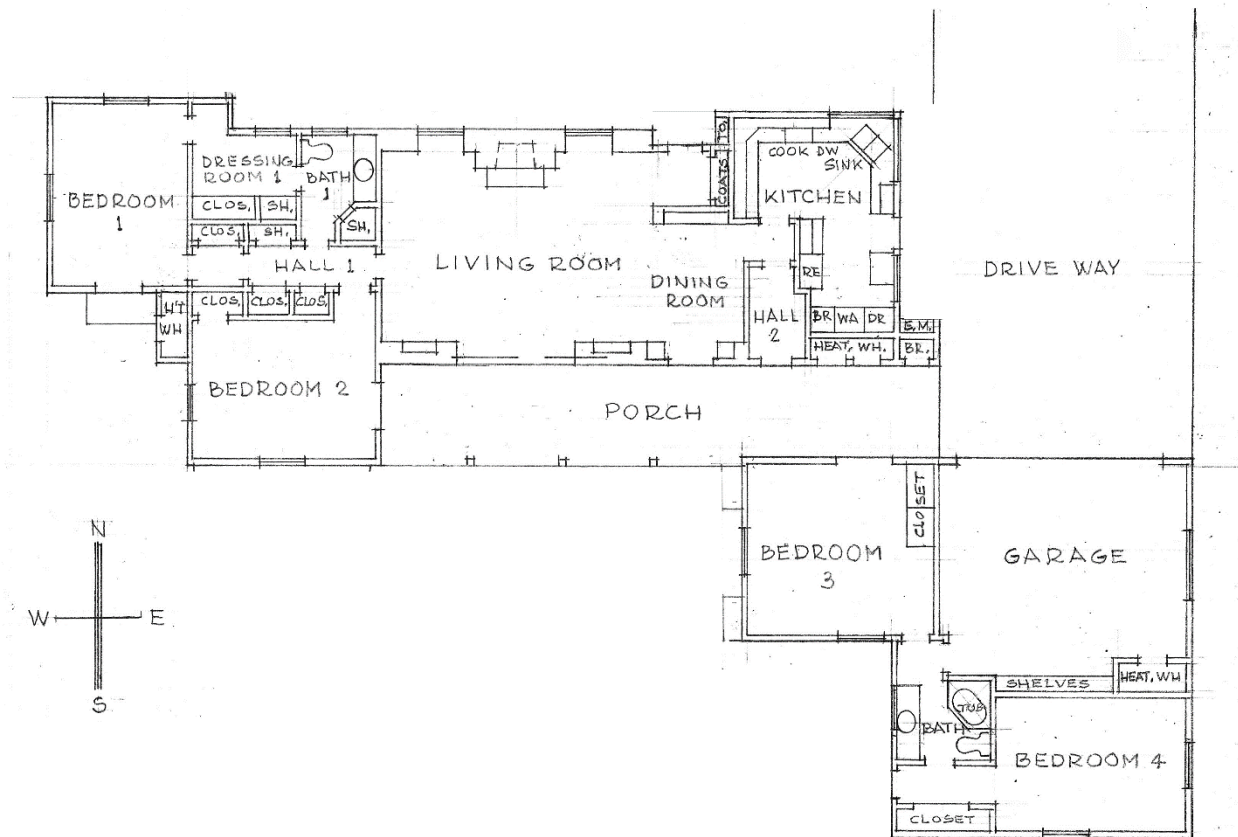
In designing the Burnham-Wells Residence, Clark first had to address the site. Smoke Tree Ranch covenants required that all structures be set back away from the road, allowing generous space between house and streetside. Clark sited the structure almost squarely in the center of Lot 12, with the adjoining lot, Lot 14, kept (as required) vacant to serve as a permanent “view” lot.

The house was set on an east-west axis with the north elevation serving as the front façade and the south making up the rear, patio and garden area. The main goal of the design, as with other

Early California Ranch houses, was to emphasize rustic simplicity, complete harmony with its surroundings, indoor-outdoor living, and access to natural vistas.

Clark's design began with a basically rectangular massing. However, he worked variety into the design by bringing certain portions forward while setting others back.

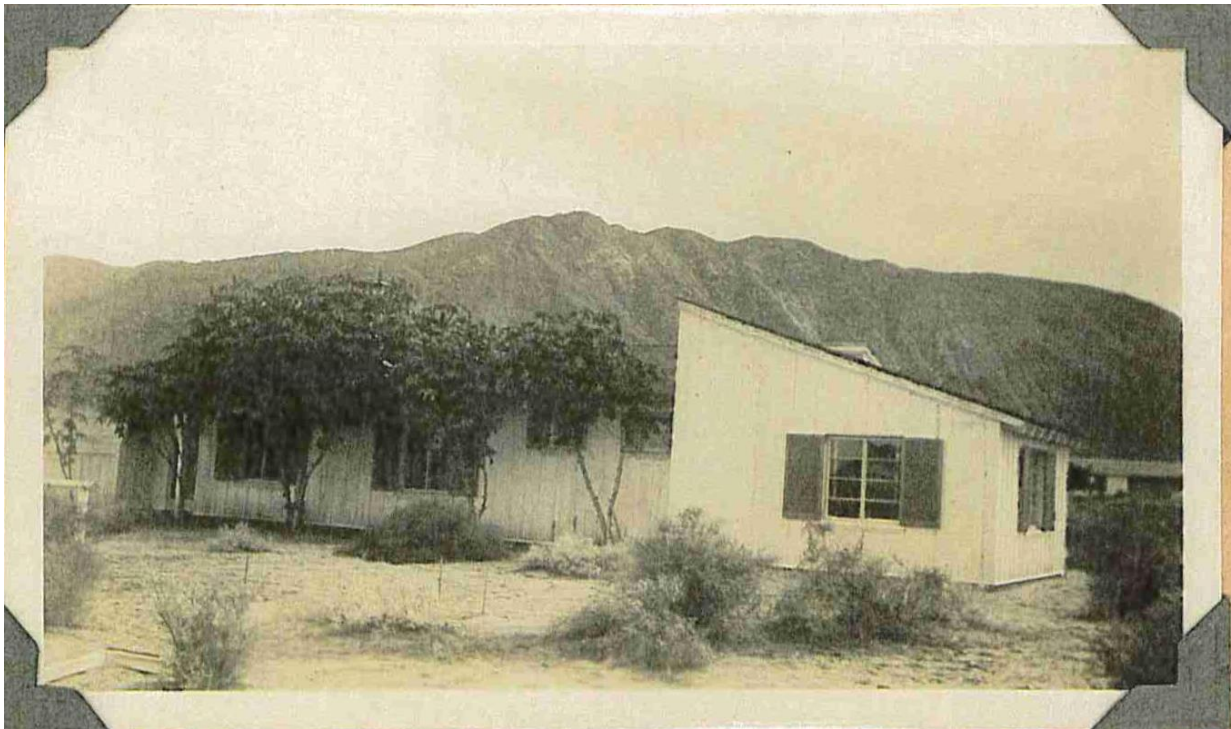
Built over a slab foundation, with standard wood-framed walls sheathed in board-and-batten and surmounted by a low-pitched roof, the home faithfully followed the tenets of Early California Ranch with a design that would have found favor in the Southern California of the 1860s. While it appeared on the surface as a vision from days of old, the house was thoroughly 1930s modern on the inside with electricity and indoor plumbing.



**This floorplan, adapted from an Albert Frey plan of 1995 shows the original 1936 footprint of the house and division of spaces.**  
(Courtesy Albert Frey Collection. Palm Springs Art Museum)

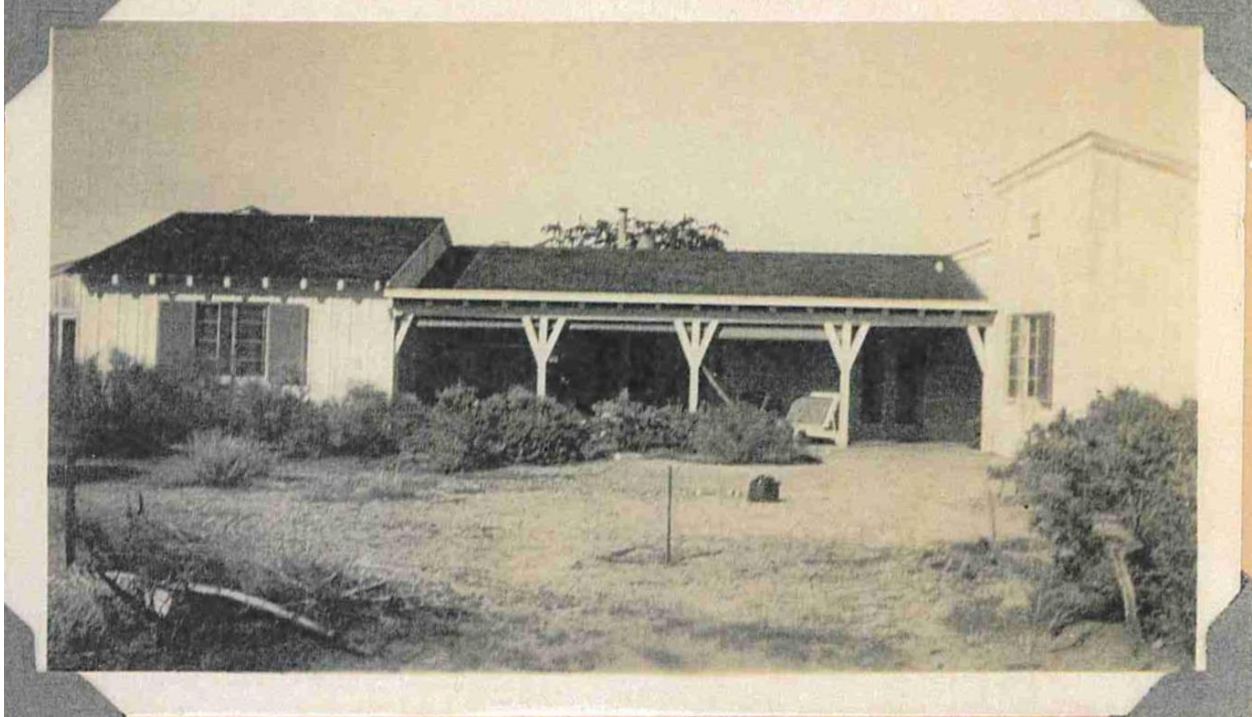


The house was to contain 2 principal bedrooms and 2 guest rooms. Clark carefully divided these spaces in a way that provided privacy yet convenience, as well as accessibility to the outdoors. Clark used the living room at the center of the plan to serve as a means of separation with the principal family bedrooms opening off the west, and the kitchen accessed on the east. Windows were standard steel casement types of varying sizes, with some bracketed by wooden shutters. In the kitchen, Clark employed a window configuration that was a favorite for both himself and Albert Frey, a corner intersecting casement window.



**In 1941, the Bissell family (of vacuum cleaner fame) leased the home. During their stay, they took a series of images, which have proven to be a valuable resource in documenting the home's early appearance. This photo shows the home's north façade. The shed-roofed section was a bedroom.**  
(Courtesy Chuck Bentall)

The guest bedrooms and garage were separated from the main house by the rear porch, which ran the length of the southern façade from the master bedroom to the driveway. However, Clark unified it with the main massing beneath a common roof. The organization of the rooms allowed the owners and their guests to be close but still affording privacy for all.



**Bissell photo of the south façade, 1941. Note, the interesting 3-prong post brackets and how Clark used variegated roof styles/heights to visually define each room.**  
(Courtesy Chuck Bentall)

The covered rear porch or verandah was intended to be the main focus for living, serving as an additional “room” in temperate weather. The living room, master bedroom and main guest room all opened up to this porch, providing a communal space for the occupants. In providing access to/from the living room, Clark created a unique and unusually wide set of French doors, which were so large they acted not only as doors but picture windows as well, bringing light into the house. When fully opened, these doors retracted into the walls to further expand the space.

Originally, the simple wooden posts of the rear porch had unusual brackets that gave the appearance of a fork or, as some have described, chicken feet. This interesting feature was also employed at the small front entry on the north side. Photographic evidence shows the same style posts on the Van Pelt & Lind (Clark) design for one of the Rancho Mirage model homes built at roughly the same time. The brackets were removed at an unknown date, possibly by Albert Frey during his 1991-1994 work on the house.

The most striking feature of Clark’s design was how he addressed the home’s roof, creating multiple rooflines through a mix of hipped, gable and shed roofs, the latter a Clark favorite. These were visually unified by their sheathing, which was composed of wooden shakes stained a dark brown.

At the time of its completion at the end of 1936, the new Burnham home exhibited virtually all of the features associated with Ranch-style architecture as defined in the Historic Resources Group *City of Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context Statement* including:

- One-story
- Sprawling L-shaped plan
- Low, horizontal massing with wide street façade
- Low-pitched hipped, gable and shed roof with open overhanging eaves and wood shakes
- Board-and-batten siding
- Divided metal sash windows
- Wide, covered porch with wood posts
- Attached garage linked with open-sided breezeway

### **Changes and Additions to the Burnham-Wells Residence**

Over the course of its nearly 90-year existence, the Burnham-Wells Residence has undergone certain inevitable changes. However, these do not appear to have altered the look or intention of John Porter Clark's original design.

As the home was built prior to incorporation of the city, it was not possible to find any official building data. However, the relevant information on the home's original construction was put together through various references in the local newspapers.

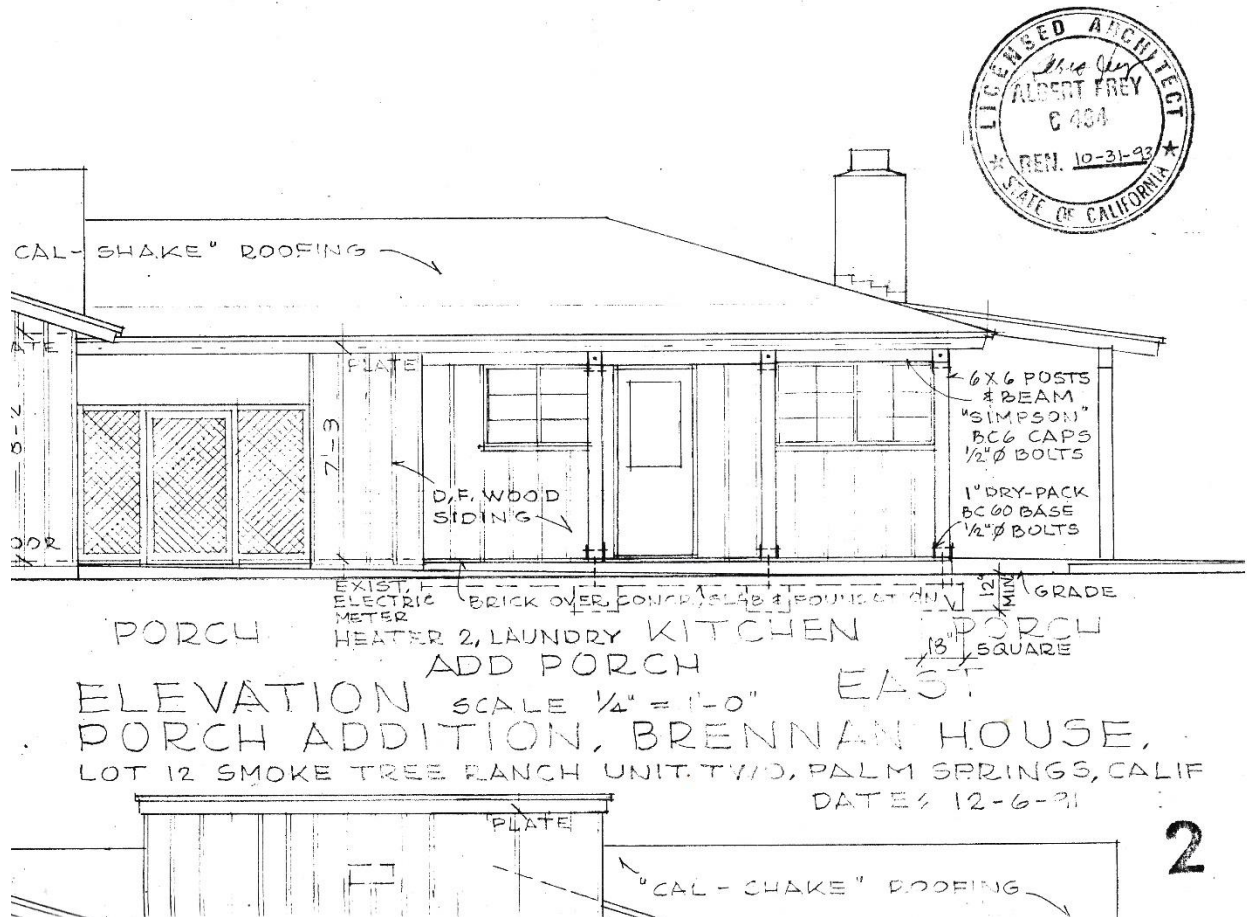
Additionally, a search was made with the city of Palm Springs for post-1938 permits. In spite of using different search criteria including parcel, lot number, APN, etc., the city was unable to locate any permits earlier than 2013. It is clear there must have been permits, at least related to Albert Frey's 1991-1995 work.

While most permit work was unavailable, it is still possible to make a reasonable assessment based on other sources, primarily the Bissell photographs (1941) and the Albert Frey Archives.

### **Front Porch Addition Date Unknown Between 1941-1991**

Both the 1937 sketch of the house by John Porter Clark as well as the series of Bissell photographs of 1941 fail to show a front porch. However, by 1991, there was (and remains) a front porch structure. The Albert Frey archives do not show any work on the house prior to 1991 and, as there are no John Porter Clark archives, no verifiable evidence it was done as part of any later work. However, the porch is designed in the same manner as the rear porch, with matching posts, and the roofline integrated into the original main roofline.

## Albert Frey Additions/Alterations 1991-1995



**A section of blueprints from 1993 showing Albert Frey's plans for a side porch to harmonize with the existing front porch.**  
(Courtesy Albert Frey Collection. Palm Springs Art Museum)

Gertrude Wells who owned the home twice, had a long and close relationship with Albert Frey as both a client and a friend beginning with his design of her first Smoke Tree Ranch home in 1941 as well as additions to her second home in 1966. When she repurchased her former home in 1991, Frey was the obvious choice to update the house. Further, Clark, who had long since retired from active practice, had died that same year. Frey, naturally, had a better understanding of Clark's work than anyone else, having partnered with him since the mid-1930s.

The work Albert Frey did for Gertrude Wells Brennan was minimal, mostly a kitchen remodel as well as other structural updates such as a new roof and repairing/replacing certain sections of the board-and-batten siding. Removal of the exterior window air conditioners, repainting, electrical upgrades, etc. Frey also planned a new driveway, perimeter wall, and revised landscaping. The biggest change Frey made was the addition of a small porch along the north side of the house, adjacent to the kitchen. Stylistically, he tied this addition to the other porches as well as matching its roofline to blend with the existing slant.



Frey had proposed other work on the house, which included the replacement of the original 1936 steel-casement windows, which no longer opened, with matching style aluminum-frame versions. He also planned an 18'x36' swimming pool for the rear, oval in style, and set asymmetrically from the house massing to be built by Anson Constructors for \$17,500. However, this addition, along with a new perimeter wall, new "Kooldeck" patio, and other smaller details, were not completed.

In the end, it appears the only notable exterior change made by Frey was the new kitchen porch.

### **Bentall Alterations/Additions 2013-2016**



**A portion of the north elevation of the Burnham-Wells Residence in 2023. Windows are recent replacements set within original openings.  
(Author photo. February 2023)**

Upon purchasing the Burnham-Wells Residence in 2013, Chuck and Julie Bentall embarked upon certain alterations and additions to the house. While they wanted to adapt the house to their own needs they were keenly aware of the home's historic architecture and associations and sought to work as closely as possible to match both John Porter Clark and Albert Frey's intentions. Bentall, himself an architect, referenced blueprints Frey had prepared during his 1991-1995 alterations/additions.

## Master Bedroom Addition



**The future site of the 2016 master bedroom addition.  
(Courtesy Chuck Bentall)**

The most notable addition was a new 531 square-foot master bedroom added in 2016 at the end of the west elevation of the home. The west end was the location of the home's bedroom wing, which consisted of 2 bedrooms, a dressing room and shared bath. The new bedroom addition did not require any significant demolition of the existing house, which validated one of Cliff May's most important tenets of Ranch architecture – the ranch home is designed to easily accommodate future expansion.

The addition was planned to match the home's existing style. The sloping shed roof was a callback to the other shed roofs found on the house. Built with the same methods as the original house – frame construction over concrete slab – the addition was sheathed in identical board-and-batten siding with identical windows and doors found elsewhere. The oversized doors opening off the southern elevation were a match of those found on the rear patio.

A porch was added to the south elevation, but a trellis design was used for the roof to retain an open feeling. Internally, the former bedroom adjacent to the north was converted into a new master bath. This did not involve any exterior alterations.

It should be noted that the permit application lists Jorge Garcia of J. Garcia Design Associates of Palm Desert as the addition's designer. However, the homeowner, Chuck Bentall, a prominent architect in his native Canada, states that he designed the addition using a local practitioner with a California license to carry out the work.





**The completed master bedroom addition. Compare with photo on previous page.  
(Author photo. February 2023)**

### **Front Entry**

The Bentalls made an alteration to the front entrance of the home, which was pushed out slightly from the original façade to create, according to Bentall, “a more inviting entry with wood detailing to match the other entrance doors.”

### **Windows and Doors**

In his plans in the early 1990s, Albert Frey had made plans to replace all of the home’s original steel casement windows, which had largely become inoperable owing to overpainting. As Gertrude wrote to Frey in January 1991, “I still find it hard to believe that anyone would live in a house where many of the windows can’t be opened. Especially in the desert.” Yet, while Frey specified new windows, aluminum-framed, designed to match existing openings, it is unclear how many, if any, were actually replaced.

Upon taking over the house, the Bentalls completed Frey’s plans with new aluminum-framed windows of the same type originally specified by Frey. The Bentalls also replaced the doors with matched-style replacements.



**Rear porch showing oversized sliding door on left with new twin on right.  
Picture window in center is also a recent addition.  
(Author photo. February 2023)**

While the Bentalls adhered largely to the Frey plans, one area where openings were reconfigured was on the south façade living room wall. Originally, this wall had three openings – an oversized sliding door, a set of French doors and a standard door. The Bentalls began by replacing the original oversized slider, which had become worn, with a matching duplicate. They then had a second duplicate slider made to create a pair. In between the sliders, they added a large picture window. (Compare with 1941 image on page 52.)

Window shutters were changed from the original louver-style to board-style to match the type specified by Albert Frey in his 1990s alterations.

Additionally, the Bentalls replaced the existing plain metal sliding garage door with a sawn wooden version.



### Swimming Pool, Spa and Perimeter Walls

In his alteration plans for Gertrude Wells Brennan, Albert Frey included plans for a swimming pool and perimeter wall addition to the rear of the property. However, these plans were not carried out during Gertrude's remaining time at the house.

In 2016, the Bentalls did add a private swimming pool and spa. While Frey had planned for an oval-shape, the Bentall's pool was rectangular. Built by Alternative Energy Concepts of Palm Springs, the pool was completed at a cost of \$48,000.

The Bentalls also built 6' perimeter walls designed to enclose the rear of the property while remaining low enough to prevent interruption of the spectacular mountain and desert vistas beyond. D.W. Johnston, who had also been the contractor for the master bedroom addition, was the builder of the walls.



**Pool and perimeter wall additions. Guest wing is center left.**  
(Author photo. February 2023)

## Landscaping and Hardscaping

The Bentalls added new hardscaping to the rear of the home as part of the pool and spa addition. There had been a brick patio that was removed for the new work. The same was done on the north and east porches with slightly wider and more rustic brown/grey pavers.

To update and enhance the home's landscaping, the Bentalls engaged Wayne Carlton Connor of Wayne Carlton Connor & Associates, who serves on the advisory board of the Living Desert in Palm Desert.



(Author photo. February 2023)



## Character Defining Features of the Burnham-Wells Residence

The Burnham-Wells Residence is an exceptional example of Ranch-style architecture, a style which began to appear in Palm Springs during the 1930s and which would reach its peak of popularity in the 1950s-1960s. The Burnham-Wells Residence exhibits classic Ranch-style elements including:

- An emphasis on horizontality including low pitched roof
- Multiple roof lines including shed, flat and hipped
- Blending of indoor and outdoor spaces
- Informal, asymmetrical layout
- Board-and-batten exterior wall treatments
- Overhanging eaves
- Covered patios and arcades
- Oversized sliding glass door off living room

### Contributing Elements

- Main 1936 residence and attached garage
- Original hitching post
- Original light post

### Non-Contributing Elements

- 2016 Swimming pool and spa
- Hardscape
- Perimeter wall and equipment enclosure wall
- Replacement windows and doors
- 2016 Bedroom addition
- Modern exterior lighting fixtures

## 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*. It is within the context of the period "Palm Springs between the Wars" that the Burnham-Wells Residence will be evaluated. The following context statement is edited 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 as an exclusive winter resort for the well-to-do. They set about transforming their sanatorium into the luxurious Desert Inn, one of the most renowned hostelrys in the country.

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."

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.

One of their favorite neighborhoods was the Smoke Tree Ranch. Smoke Tree Ranch is a 375-acre resort and housing development that was one of the few subdivisions developed in Palm Springs during the Great Depression. Originally developed as a dude ranch resort, Smoke Tree Ranch was started in 1930 by L. Mac Blankenhorn and named after the characteristic trees that dot the landscape. Early advertisements for the guest ranch emphasized an exclusivity that continues to this day. "Designed for those wishing to escape from the turmoil of weekend resorts...introductions or satisfactory references are required." In 1936, Fred and Mazie Belle Markham (operating as the Mardo Corporation) bought Smoke Tree Ranch. With the help of local educator and real estate investor Raymond Cree, Markham subdivided the ranch into parcels for single-family residences.

Under the Markhams, the guest ranch did not advertise or seek publicity. The Smoke Tree way of life (for guest ranch patrons as well as homeowners who are historically known as "Colonists") was simple without the need to impress, as "most who have come here have been every place, seen everything and done most things." Smoke Tree Ranch purposefully maintained a rustic atmosphere. Homes were required to be one story and sit apart on large lots with no large lawns or non-native shade trees. They were to be built in traditional Ranch-style with a pitched shingle roof. Streets were intentionally left as dirt roads groomed by a sprinkler wagon and scraper. There were no street signs, and instead roads were indicated with rock markers.

In his book *The Frontier of Leisure*, historian Lawrence Culver identifies Smoke Tree Ranch as looking unlike much of Palm Springs architecture of the time and instead reflecting the Ranch-style architecture in California and across America. "They were clear early examples of the ranch house—the domestic architectural style that would carpet the floor of the San Fernando Valley after World War II, writes Culver, "and appear in every community in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s."



## EVALUATION:

**Criterion 1: Significant Events. *The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community: The Burnham-Wells Residence is not affiliated with significant events and does not qualify 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:***  
The Burnham-Wells Residence was built by Ralph French Burnham (1884-1943), a prominent Pasadena businessman who was heavily involved in the citrus industry in both Orange and Riverside counties. The home was later owned on two separate occasions by Gertrude Wells (1919-2011), first from 1944-1952 with husband Homer Overly, Jr., and the second time, 1991-2011 (as Gertrude Wells Brennan). While these individuals were both prominent figures within their community and professional associations, they do not rise to a level that meets the criteria of persons who had influence in local and national history. *Therefore, the Burnham-Wells Residence does not qualify 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 1936, the Burnham-Wells Residence exhibits many stylistic markers which identify it as being of the Ranch-style. This style was to gain popularity throughout the 1930s before becoming even more popular in the Post War building boom, not just in Palm Springs, but elsewhere in California and nationwide as well. The Burnham-Wells Residence and the other structures built at Smoke Tree Ranch during this period may have been the very first, or at least among the earliest, examples of the Ranch-style to be produced in Palm Springs. As such, the residence and the associated Smoke Tree Ranch structures served as the vanguard of the future popularity of Ranch-style architecture that was to follow soon after. As such, the Burnham-Wells Residence may be viewed as an important component of the historic trends that have come to define Palm Springs' image as a center of important Ranch-style architecture, i.e., an historic trend that exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history. *The Burnham-Wells Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource on the local registry under Criterion 3.*

**Criterion 4: *The resource embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction:*** The Burnham-Wells Residence embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction reflective of the period in which it was built. Although board-and-batten construction had been used in earlier decades including on some of Palm Springs' pioneer buildings, it had largely been superseded by other methods. The use of board-and-batten construction on the Burnham-Wells Residence represented a renewed interest in this form, which was to become commonplace on homes of similar style over the ensuing years. The board-and-batten construction used on the Burnham-Wells Residence exhibits the distinctive characteristics of a type of construction popularly employed during the time of the home's period of significance. *The Burnham-Wells Residence qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Historic Resource on the local registry 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: The Burnham-Wells Residence was the work of John Porter Clark, AIA (1905-1991). It was an early design by Clark under the aegis of the Palm Springs branch of the noted Pasadena firm of Van Pelt & Lind. Regarded as a co-founder, along with long-time collaborator Albert Frey, of Desert Modernism, Clark is considered one of Southern California's most important and influential architects. Therefore, the Burnham-Wells Residence can certainly be described as the work of a master in view of Clark's history of architectural excellence.

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. The Burnham-Wells Residence showcased the type of Early California Ranch-style architecture that was mandated for all construction within Smoke Tree Ranch. The desire was to create a feeling of relaxed informality through simple, rustic design, and providing a sense of "roughing it," in the "Wild West" to those accustomed to far grander residences.

In his design of the Burnham-Wells Residence, Clark demonstrated ways such simple styling could also be aesthetically pleasing. The home's artistry derives from how he was able to produce a design that was both authentic to its pioneer roots and yet subtly elegant.

The Burnham-Wells Residence was intended not only as a comfortable and attractive home for its occupants, it was intended to act as an informal prototype for what an ideal Ranch-style home could and should look like to those prospective home builders in the newly-opened Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2. The home certainly articulates the best of what made Ranch-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 Ranch-style, as the work of two master architects and its high artistic values, the Burnham-Wells Residence 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, the Burnham-Wells Residence does not qualify 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.) The Burnham-Wells Residence is not likely to yield information important to the national, state or local history or prehistory. Hence, the Burnham-Wells Residence does not qualify under Criterion 7.

**SUMMARY:** This evaluation finds The Burnham-Wells Residence eligible for listing as a Palm Springs Historic Resource under 8.05.070 C.1. a., paragraphs iii, iv, 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. ***The Burnham-Wells Residence 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. ***The Burnham-Wells Residence'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 largely intact. A 2016 master bedroom addition is the only notable change to the home's original footprint and this was done using the same architectural style, window/door types, roof and board-and-batten sheathing as the existing home. As such, the home reflects the same rustic Ranch-style architecture, design elements such as board-and-batten sheathing, shake-type roofing, etc., first introduced by master architect John Porter Clark in 1936.***

## 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. ***The Burnham-Wells Residence was built at a prominent spot in the newly-developing Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2 tract. Like all Smoke Tree Ranch homes, it was set back away from the road to foster a more rural rather***

*than suburban atmosphere and to bring it more in harmony with its natural surroundings and expansive vistas. The surrounding landscape and hardscape features were mandated to be minimal and of native plantings only, an edict that remains the same today (Grass is allowed in the rear only). The setting of the Burnham-Wells Residence continues to reflect the architects' 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. ***The Burnham-Wells Residence's exterior surface materials, which consist primarily of redwood clapboard board-and-batten sheathing, shake roof, wooden shutters, brick fireplace chimney, 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. It should be noted that, while the doors and windows have been replaced in recent years, they are largely duplicate types that fit into the same openings as the original. Windows are now aluminum versions as opposed to the original steel casements. With the exception of the front door, which is now glass, other doors (i.e. French and sliding varieties) are approximations of the originals.***

## **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 the Burnham-Wells Residence is evidenced by how well various materials have been integrated into the whole structure. This is most notable in how skillfully the wooden sheathing has been applied across the multiple facades in both horizontal and vertical manners. The same may be said of the rooflines, eaves and shakes, all presenting a unified whole rather than a patchwork of placement and quality. The Burnham-Wells Residence continues to express a high degree of contemporary period workmanship.***

## **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, circa 1936, the Burnham-Wells Residence was intended to provide a rustically casual lifestyle allowing its occupants to have a sense of life in the pioneering western days and***



**connect meaningfully with the natural environment which surrounded it. Nearly 90 years later, the Burnham-Wells Residence continues to reflect that exact same aesthetic, with the later addition following the same style and philosophy of the original. 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. ***The Burnham-Wells Residence is an important example of a custom-designed 1930s traditional Ranch-style private residence in the Smoke Tree Ranch development of Palm Springs, a unique enclave of approximately 100 homes all designed within the parameters of the Ranch-style. The home was one of the earliest built within the colony and its skillful design could characterize it as a quintessential Smoke Tree Ranch residence. Accordingly, it continues its association with a pattern of events that have made a meaningful contribution to the community.***

INTEGRITY SUMMARY: The Burnham-Wells Residence 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 the Burnham-Wells Residence still possesses all seven aspects of integrity. ***As noted, the Burnham-Wells Residence retains a remarkable amount of original detail. In summary, the Burnham-Wells Residence still possesses a high degree of integrity sufficient to qualify for designation as a Class 1 Historic Resource.***

---

## **Bibliography**

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Attached is a list of books, articles, and other sources cited or used in preparing this application and other documentation that may be relevant.

### Books

Culver, Lawrence. *The Frontier of Leisure*. New York, NY; Oxford University Press, 2010.

Hess, Alan. *Ranch House*. New York, NY; Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004.

Koenig, Gloria. *Albert Frey 1903-1998: A Living Architecture of the Desert*. Köln, Germany; Taschen GmbH. 2008.

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*Palm Springs City Directory*. Long Beach, CA; Western Directory Co., Various dates.

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Tuttle, Kathleen. *Sylvanus Marston: Pasadena's Quintessential Architect*. Santa Monica, CA; Hennessey + Ingalls, 2001.

### Collections

Albert Frey Archives, Architecture and Design Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara

Albert Frey Archives, Architecture and Design Collection, Palm Springs Art Museum

American Institute of Architects (AIA), Washington D.C.  
John Porter Clark. membership files and related documents

### Newspapers

Various issues of:

Desert Sun

Detroit Free Press

Hollywood Daily Citizen

Jackson Hole (WY) News

Los Angeles Evening Express

Los Angeles Herald-Examiner

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

Palm Springs Limelight News

Pasadena Evening Post

San Bernardino County Sun

Santa Ana Register

### Internet Resources

Accessingthepast.org

Ancestry.com

Californiarevealed.com

Findagrave.com

Newspapers.com

Ps Preservation Foundation.org

Smoketreeranch.com

Realtor.com  
Calisphere  
Orange Public Library and History Center

### Interviews

Tracy Conrad  
Charles S. Bentall

### Videos

Smoke Tree Ranch: A Way of Life. Directed by Tracy Conrad. Produced by Bill Bailey.  
Digital Rain Films

### Other Sources Consulted

Palm Springs Historical Society  
City of Palm Springs (Planning and Building Departments)  
Historic Resources Group. *City of Palm Springs Citywide Historic Context Statement; Survey Findings*. Pasadena, 2015 (Final Draft, December 2018).  
Riverside County Assessor's Office

# APPENDIX I

## Owner's Notarized Letter of Support

DATE, 2022 NOV, 28

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

Dear Honorable Board,

As the current owner of the residence located at 1850 Smoke Tree Lane (Rock 6 4L at the end of Ranch House Road) in Palm Springs, California, I enthusiastically support the Class 1 Historic Resource designation of my 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 contact me at [cbentallarch@shaw.ca](mailto:cbentallarch@shaw.ca).

Sincerely,



Charles Bentall

**\*\* PLEASE SEE ATTACHED \*\***  
**CALIFORNIA NOTARY CERTIFICATE**



## California All-Purpose Certificate of Acknowledgment

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.

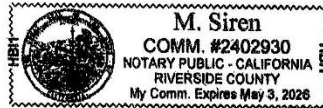
State of California }  
 County of Riverside } s.s.  
 On 11/28/2022 before me, M. Siren, Notary Public  
Name of Notary Public, Title  
 personally appeared Charles Bentall  
Name of Signer (1)

Name of Signer (2)  
 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.

M. Siren, Notary Public  
Signature of Notary Public



Seal

### OPTIONAL INFORMATION

*Although the information in this section is not required by law, it could prevent fraudulent removal and reattachment of this acknowledgment to an unauthorized document and may prove useful to persons relying on the attached document.*

#### Description of Attached Document

The preceding Certificate of Acknowledgment is attached to a document titled/for the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_  
 containing \_\_\_\_\_ pages, and dated \_\_\_\_\_

The signer(s) capacity or authority is/are as:

- Individual(s)
- Attorney-in-fact
- Corporate Officer(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Title(s)
- Guardian/Conservator
- Partner - Limited/General
- Trustee(s)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

representing: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name(s) of Person(s) Entity(ies) Signer is Representing

#### Additional Information

##### Method of Signer Identification

Proved to me on the basis of satisfactory evidence:  
 form(s) of identification     credible witness(es)

Notarial event is detailed in notary journal on:

Page # \_\_\_\_\_ Entry # \_\_\_\_\_

Notary contact: \_\_\_\_\_

##### Other


- Additional Signer     Signer(s) Thumbprints(s)
- \_\_\_\_\_

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

Dear Honorable Board,

As Trustee of the Smoke Tree Ranch Trust (2013) I enthusiastically support the Class 1 Historic Resource designation of the property located at 1850 Smoke Tree Lane (Rock 6 4L at the end of Ranch House Road) in Palm Springs, California, by the city of Palm Springs. The Palm Springs Preservation Foundation is assisting in the preparation of the required nomination paperwork.

Sincerely,



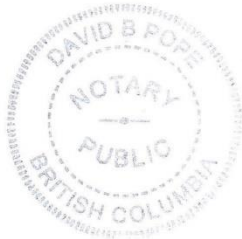
Linda Douglas  
Trustee of the Smoke Tree Ranch Trust (2013)

*Declared before me at  
Mill Bay, British Columbia  
on February 16, 2023*



David B. Pope  
Barrister & Solicitor  
PO Box 83 Mill Bay, BC  
VOR 2P0 250-743-3245

COMMISSION IS NON-EXPIRY  
AS A SOLICITOR



NOTARIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Canada  
Province of British Columbia  
County of Nanaimo

On this 16<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2023, before me, DAVID BERNARD POPE,  
LINDA DIANNE DOUGLAS

Personally known to me (or 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.

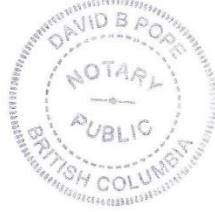
Witness my hand and official seal at Mill Bay in the Province of British Columbia,  
The 16th day of February, 2023.



Notary Signature

My commission does not expire, being a lawyer

David B. Pope  
Barrister & Solicitor  
PO Box 83 Mill Bay, BC  
VOR 2P0 250-743-3245



# APPENDIX II

## Grant Deed

DOC # 2013-0209121  
05/02/2013 03:08 PM Fees: \$21.00  
Page 1 of 3 Doc T Tax Paid  
Recorded in Official Records  
County of Riverside  
Larry W. Ward  
Assessor, County Clerk & Recorder

RECORDING REQUESTED BY:  
Orange Coast Title Company

AND WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO:

Linda Douglas, Trustee  
1143 Doran Rd  
North Vancouver, BC, Canada  
V7K 1M8

\*\*This document was electronically submitted  
to the County of Riverside for recording\*\*  
Received by: CMORRIS

THIS SPACE FOR RECORDER'S USE ONLY:  
Escrow No.: 25571-MS

Title Order No.: 1483944-10  
**TRA:OIL GRANT DEED**

THE UNDERSIGNED GRANTOR(S) DECLARE(S)  
DOCUMENTARY TRANSFER TAX is \$ *Not Shown pursuant*  
 computed on full value of property conveyed, or *to Sec 11934 R+T code*  
 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,  
**Bank of America, N.A., Trustee of the J. Cheney Wells Trust dated 6/17/1921**  
hereby GRANT(s) to:  
**Linda Douglas, Trustee of the Smoke Tree Ranch Trust (2013)**  
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: 1850 Smoke Tree Ln, Rock 6, 4 Left & APN 510-172-004 (View Lot located behind home to the South), Palm Springs, CA 92264  
AP#: 510-172-001-1 & 510-172-004

DATED April 23, 2013  
STATE OF Massachusetts  
COUNTY OF Suffolk  
On 26th April 2013  
before me,  
A Notary Public personally appeared  
Darlene MacDonald  
By: Bank of America, N.A., as Trustee  
Darlene MacDonald  
Darlene MacDonald

who proved to me on the basis of satisfactory evidence to be the person(s) whose name(s) I have 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 Massachusetts of California that the foregoing paragraph is true and correct.  
WITNESS my hand and official seal.

Signature: Darlene MacDonald (Seal)  
Notary Public, Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
My Commission Expires 2/28/2018



ESCROW NO.: 25571-MS TITLE ORDER NO.: 1483944-10

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

State of Massachusetts  
County of Suffolk

On April 26, 2013 before me, Wun Wa Ng

A Notary Public personally appeared Darlene MacDonald

\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_

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 Massachusetts that the foregoing paragraph is true and correct.

WITNESS my hand and official seal.

Signature Wun Wa Ng



**WUN WA NG**  
Notary Public, Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
My Commission Expires July 6, 2018

(Seal)

Order No. 210-1483944-10

**Exhibit "A"**

Lot 12 and 14 of Smoke Tree Ranch No. 2, in the City of Palm Springs, as shown by Map on File in Book 18, Pages 97 and 98 of Maps, Records of Riverside County, California;

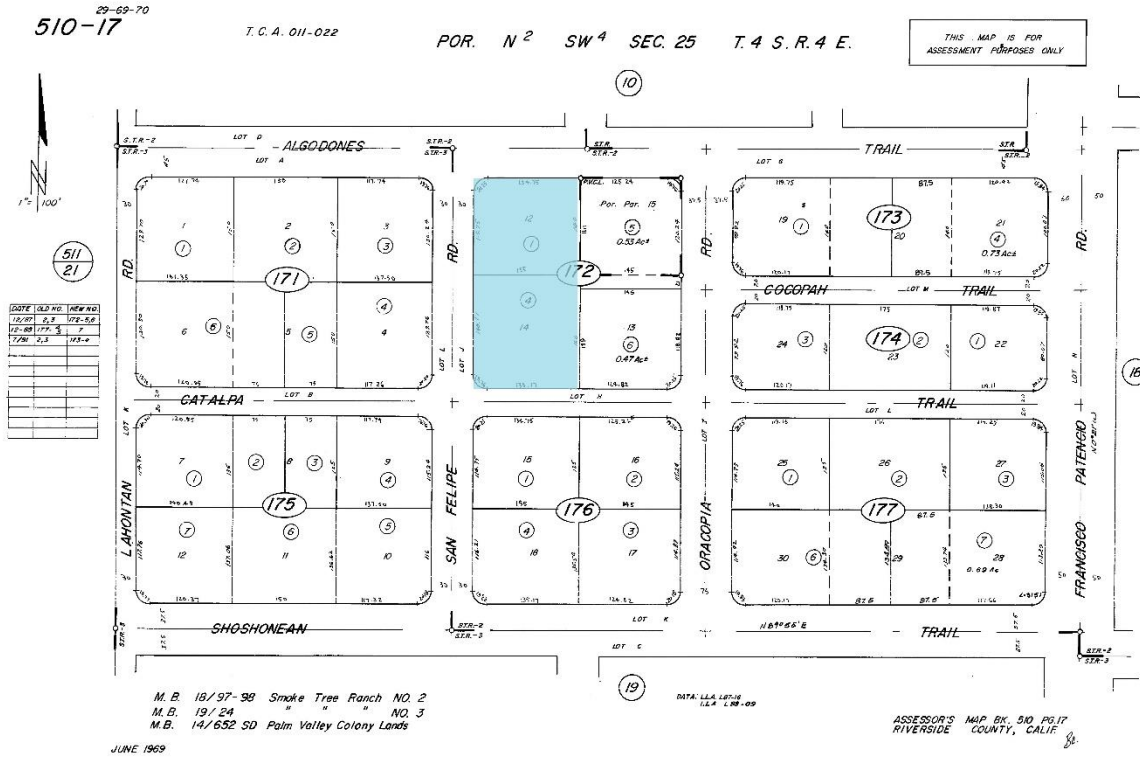
Excepting therefrom all metals and minerals, and all petroleum, natural gas and other hydrocarbon substances, and all surface deposits and subsoil products of any nature or character whatsoever, in, under or upon the land herein described and every part thereof.

Page 8

*Description: Riverside, CA Document - Year.DocID 2013.209121 Page: 3 of 3*  
*Order: JennyDarlene 510-172-001 Comment:*

# APPENDIX III

## Assessor Map



# APPENDIX IV

## Google Earth Image





# APPENDIX V

## Chain of Title

7-16-1936	MARDO Corporation to Ruth W. Burnham (Lot 12)
4-19-1944	Ruth W. Burnham to Homer R. Overly, Jr. and Gertrude Wells Overly (Lot 12)
<b>CHAIN OF TITLE GAP – No documentation was found showing transfer of the adjacent Lot 14.</b>	
4-9-1952	Homer R. Overly, Jr. to Gertrude Wells Overly (Lots 12 and 14)
6-27-1952	Gertrude Wells Overly to Walter H. Butler and Gladys R. Butler (Lots 12 and 14)
10-6-1964	Walter H. Butler (deceased) to Gladys R. Butler (Lots 12 and 14)
5-3-1977	Estate of Gladys R. Butler (deceased) to Stanley C. Lagerlof, Mary Louise Comly, et al* (lots 12 and 14)
	*58.85% undivided interest to Stanley C. Lagerlof, Executor of the Will of Gladys Reynolds Butler. 1/3 each of 41.15% undivided interest to Mary Louise Comly, decedent's daughter, Elbert Reynolds Butler, decedent's son & Walter Hughes Butler, Jr., decedent's son.
3-23-1978	Stanley C. Lagerlof to Mary Louise Comly, Elbert Reynolds Butler & Walter H. Butler, Jr. 1/3 each of his 58.85% undivided interest in Lots 12 and 14.*
4-18-1978	Walter Hughes Butler, Jr. to Mary Louise Comly (his undivided 1/3 of Lots 12 and 14.)
4-25-1978	Elbert Reynolds Butler to Mary Louise Comly (his undivided 1/3 of Lots 12 and 14.)
3-12-1984	Mary Louise Comly to Frances Elaine Wright Trust (1/2 interest in Lot 12 and Lot 14)
7-2- 1991	Mary Louise Comly Trust and Frances Elaine Wright Trust to the J. Cheney Wells Trust (Gertrude Wells Brennan) (Lot 12 and Lot 14)
4-26-2013	Cheney Wells Trust to Smoke Tree Ranch Trust (2013) (Charles Bentall and Linda Douglas)

# APPENDIX VI

## Building Permit Summary

As the home was built prior to incorporation of the city, it was not possible to find any official building data. Additionally, a search was made with the city of Palm Springs for post-1938 permits. In spite of using different search criteria including parcel, lot number, APN, etc., the city was unable to locate any permits earlier than 2012. NOTE: The 2012 permit was taken out by former owner Gertrude Brennan. The remainder were taken out by current homeowner Charles Bentall.

Date	Permit No.	Work	Architect	Contractor
03/14/2012	2012-674***	Re-roofing	N/A	Dew Roofing
07/16/2015	2015-2462	Master bedroom addition (314 sq. ft.), unspecified remodel, 2 patio trellises	Charles Bentall (However permit application notes Jose Garcia as designer.	D.W. Johnson
05/31/2016	2016-1985	Gunite swimming pool and spa	N/A	Alternative Energy Concepts
6/22/2016	2016-2296***	200 LF of 6' high block wall	N/A	D.W. Johnson

\*\*\*These permits are marked with the notation as having expired. "No inspection called. Permit expired. File closed." However, the work does appear to have been completed.

# APPENDIX VII

## Owner Biographies

### 1936-1944 – First Owners - Ralph French Burnham and Ruth Wilson Burnham



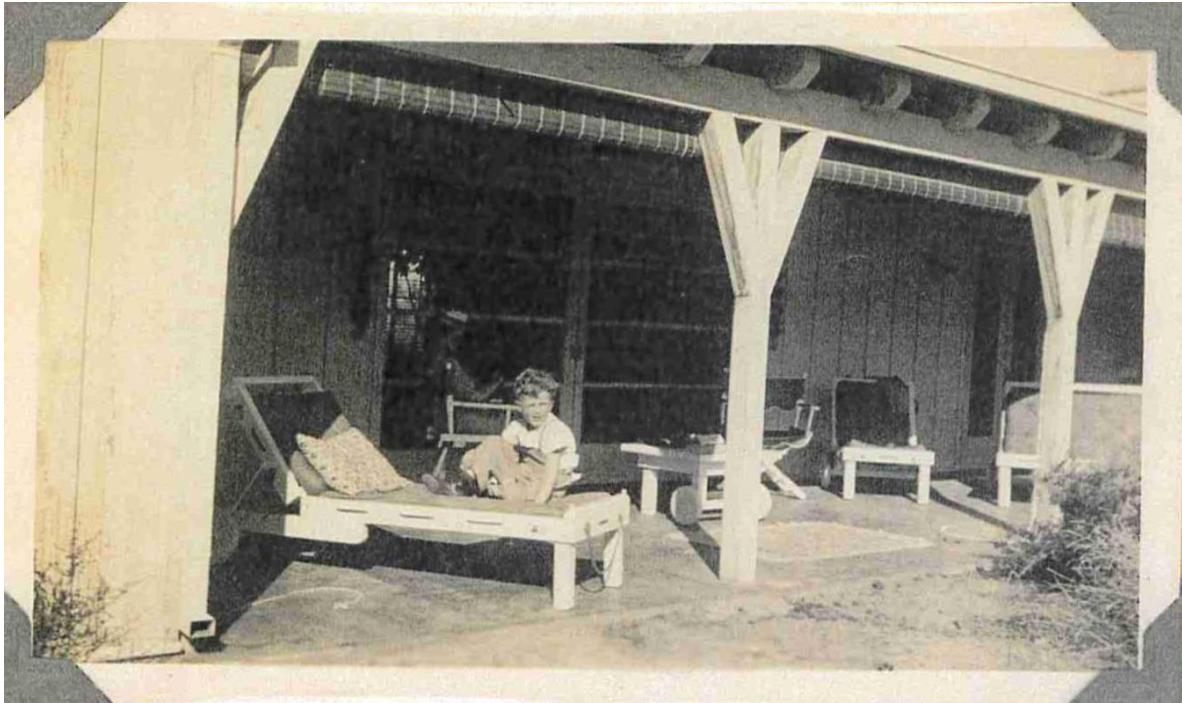
**Ralph Burnham's lifetime association with the California citrus industry began in his youth at his father's extensive ranch in Orange County.**  
(Courtesy Orange County Public Library and History Center)

Ralph French Burnham (1883-1952), was born in Batavia, Illinois, but was to spend most of his life in Southern California. His father, William H. Burnham, Sr. (1851-1934), who had made a fortune in banking in Illinois, was a pioneer winter resident of Orange County where he became heavily involved in the region's burgeoning citrus industry. In 1891, he built "Su Casa," one of Orange's early showplace residences, which would serve as the headquarters for his growing citrus operation.

Burnham graduated from Throop College (later California Institute of Technology) and in 1905, he married Ruth Louise Wilson (1881-1969), a member of a prominent Chicago family. The marriage would be an enduring match and they would ultimately have four children together.

In 1911, Burnham took over the operations of his father's extensive citrus holdings in Riverside, the La Colina Ranch. Throughout the remainder of the decade and into the 1920s, both Burnham and his wife would become notable figures in Riverside society, active in civic and social affairs. Burnham would be one of the city's leading polo enthusiasts at a time when the sport was very popular with Riverside's elite.

When not at the Riverside ranch, the Burnhams stayed at their estate overlooking the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. During this time, Burnham shifted his activities from orchardist into stocks, bonds and oil. After his father's death in 1934, Burnham's wealth increased even further and he largely retired from active business. It was during this time, Burnham discovered the pleasures of Palm Springs and in 1936, he and Ruth decided to build a permanent winter home there.



**Little Peter Sears poses out on the rear patio of the Burnham-Wells Residence in 1941. The woman behind is likely his mother, Eleanor Bissell Sears. Note, the custom-designed sliding doors John Porter Clark added to bring light and air into the house.**  
(Courtesy Chuck Bentall)

The Burnham family would enjoy their desert retreat for nearly a decade-and-a-half with the couple's names associated with various Smoke Tree Ranch and Palm Springs social events during the late 1930s-early 1940s. However, during World War II, they appear to have leased the home to others, at least for a part of the time. Recently, photographic documentation has surfaced showing that in 1941 the home was leased by Melville R. Bissell II (1882-1972) and Olive E. Bissell (1884-1964) of Grand Rapids, Michigan. At the time, Bissell was president of the Bissell Carpet Sweeping Co.

It was Bissell's father, Melville Bissell, Sr., who patented the Bissell Carpet Sweeper in 1876. It was an enormous success and by 1890, the company was producing 1000 carpet sweepers per day. The company later expanded into vacuums and carpet steaming. Today, the company now known as Bissell, Inc. is considered the leading floor care company in North America. The 1941 stay by the Bissells brought the families of the country's two leading floor cleaning families together at Smoke Tree Ranch with Earl and Dorothy Hoover of Hoover Vacuum Cleaner fame, residing at Rock 7.



The Bissells were joined at Smoke Tree Ranch by their daughter Eleanor Bissell Sears (1915-2007) and her son Peter Macgregor Sears (1935-2021). It was Peter who appeared in the series of photos reproduced in part in this nomination which show various scenes of the house in 1941.

### **1944-1952 – Second Owners – Homer Overly, Jr. and Gertrude Overly**

In 1944, the Burnhams sold their home to Homer Overly, Jr. and his wife, Gertrude Wells Overly. A family relative of the Burnhams, Gertrude had been living a short distance away with her father J. Cheney Wells in the Albert Frey-designed home they constructed in 1942. While it is unknown for certain why Gertrude moved from her newly-built home on Rock 12, she may have desired a home of her own and her growing family under their own roof rather than sharing the home with her indomitable father, one of the heads of the American Optical Co.

Gertrude Alice Wells (1919-2011) was the youngest of three children born to J. Cheney and Florence Wells. She grew up in Boston and in Southbridge, Massachusetts attending private schools or privately tutored in the Wells home. Later she attended the Bancroft School and Westover, from which she graduated in 1936. Gertrude made her debut during the 1937-1938 social season and was a member of the Worcester Junior League. In 1939, she married Homer Roy Overly Jr. (1916-1998), a recent graduate of the Harvard Business School and the Wharton School of Finance. Together, the couple would ultimately have three children, Lisa, Peter and Christopher.

At the time of her purchase, both she and Homer had been deeply involved in the war effort with Homer joining the U.S. Navy in 1942. Around the same time, Gertrude became involved in an exciting new program known as the Women's Aviation Service Pilots (WASP). This was a civil aviation program that was attached to the U.S. Army Air Corps. The purpose was to free male pilots and crew for more critical combat missions by having women take on the tasks of testing, ferrying and towing aircraft to their needed locations around the U.S. and to combat zones. They also were used as instructors to train other pilots. More than 1,000 women were involved in the program, 38 of whom lost their lives including one who went missing while en route to the base at Palm Springs.

The WASP program was of critical value during the war, but it faced opposition from male civilian pilots who feared post-war competition. Gertrude and the other WASPs were denied veteran status and the program was ended in December 1944. Decades later, the WASPs were finally given their due with veteran status and in 2009, President Barack Obama signed a law honoring the WASPs with a special Congressional gold medal. The 90-year-old Gertrude was among those in attendance.

With the end of the WASP program, Gertrude looked for other ways to help in the war effort and in December 1944 she completed her training as a Red Cross nurse at Torney General Hospital, where she worked for the duration of the conflict.

The Overlys would remain at the Burnham-Wells Residence until the couple's divorce in 1952, but it would ultimately not be the end of Gertrude's association with the home.

### **1952-1978 – Third Owners – Walter H. Butler and Gladys Reynolds Butler**

Upon the departure of Homer Overly and Gertrude Wells Overly, the Burnham-Wells Residence was purchased by the Butlers, who would make it their desert retreat for nearly a generation. Walter H. Butler (1885-1962) was a prominent figure in business, serving as the president of E.W. Reynolds Co., a wholesale jewelry distributor founded in San Francisco in 1888 with the slogan “Everything You Need.” Butler’s association with the company began with his marriage to Gladys Florence Reynolds (1886-1976), daughter of the company’s founder, Elbert W. Reynolds (1853-1934). During this period, the company continued to grow until it became “the largest of its kind west of the Mississippi.”

The Butlers had three children – Mary Louise Butler (1916-1990); Elbert Reynolds Butler (1918-1995); and Walter Hughes Butler, Jr. (1925-2001). Butler retired from leadership of the company in the 1950s, but remained a director of the Citizens National Bank in Beverly Hills. When not in Palm Springs, the Butlers resided at 709 North Linden Drive in Beverly Hills.

After Butler’s death in 1962, Gladys continued coming to Smoke Tree Ranch along with her now-married children, their spouses and children.

### **1978-1991 – Fourth Owners – Jack and Mary Louise Comly**

Gladys Reynolds Butler died in 1976 and the Burnham-Wells Residence was inherited by her daughter Mary Louise and her husband, Jack Clifton Comly, Sr. (1915-1980) of Beverly Hills and Hermosa Beach. The Comly’s were active throughout their lives in the region’s civic and society circles. Mary Louise was particularly involved with the annual Las Floristas Children’s Christmas Party. The couple had three children, Jack Clifton, Jr. “Jay,” Christy & Caren.

### **1991-2013 – Fifth Owner – Gertrude Wells Brennan**



**A snapshot taken at the end of Gertrude Wells Brennan’s ownership shows how little the house had changed over the years.  
(Courtesy Chuck Bentall)**

In 1991, the Burnham-Wells Residence changed owners, but the purchaser was unusual in that it was the home's second owner, Gertrude Wells, who had sold the house to the Butlers nearly 40 years earlier.

After selling the house in 1952, Gertrude had left Smoke Tree Ranch and Palm Springs and relocated to Brentwood, Los Angeles, with her new husband, music executive Frank Michael (Mike) Brennan (1913-1982). The couple had met at Smoke Tree Ranch when they were living across the street from each other. Mike lived with his mother and step-father in the Albert Frey-designed Fred D. Johnson house and Gertrude at the Frey designed J. Cheney Wells house with her father. After her divorce from Homer Overly, Mike and Gertrude's friendship grew into romance, with the couple marrying in 1952. The pair had two children, Michael Joseph and Mary Elizabeth "Molly" Brennan.

Interestingly, Mike and Gertrude's marriage would not be the only Smoke Tree Ranch romance in the family. In 1971, Gertrude's daughter Lisa (with Homer Overly) married Dr. Charles Markham, son of Smoke Tree Ranch owners Fred and Mazie Belle Markham. Although she lived in Los Angeles and later, San Diego, Gertrude never lost her love of Palm Springs and Smoke Tree Ranch. In 1966, she and her husband purchased another house on the ranch, the 1941 Knight Residence at Rock 15. Upon moving in, she engaged Albert Frey to do an addition. At the same time, the couple engaged Frey to do an addition at their retreat in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In 1970, they sold their Smoke Tree Ranch house and moved full time to Jackson Hole. Gertrude remained in Wyoming after her husband's death in 1982, but over time, she again longed for Palm Springs and Smoke Tree Ranch.

In the late 1980s she began to keep an eye out for potential openings at the ranch. After exploring but rejecting several possible candidates, Gertrude was given a unique opportunity to repurchase her former home of 40 years earlier. She was delighted as the home had many pleasant associations. Even before completing the purchase, she brought in Albert Frey to update the house by doing minor alterations/additions. The Albert Frey files at the Palm Springs Architecture & Design Museum contain a number of letters between Gertrude and Frey that indicate he was not only her architect; he was a warm and trusted friend. Frey would do work on the house from 1991 until 1995.

The home was to remain Gertrude Wells Brennan's principal residence until her death at 92 in 2011.

### **2013-Present – Sixth Owners – Charles S. "Chuck" Bentall and Julie Bentall**

In 2013, the home was sold to Charles S. and Julie Bentall who are today's current residents. Chuck Bentall was well familiar with Smoke Tree Ranch before purchasing the home. His parents, Clark and Phyllis Bentall, were the former owners of the Ed and Virginia Janss Residence on Rock 10 between 1991-2000.

Bentall is a noted Canadian architect and both he and his wife are deeply interested in preserving the home's historic integrity and the additions/alterations they have made since moving in have been done with an eye on maintaining the look and spirit of Clark's original design.

# APPENDIX VIII

## John Porter Clark, AIA



**John Porter Clark, AIA (1905-1991)**  
(Via Clark Family Ancestry.com)

### The Perfect Partner By Steve Vaught

John Porter Clark is considered an iconic master of Palm Springs architecture and hailed as one of the progenitors of “Desert Modern,” a unique hybrid of Midcentury Modern tailored to meet the climactic and geographic conditions of the Coachella Valley. The aesthetic and practical success of this style has helped draw international attention to Palm Springs as a hub of excellent Midcentury architecture much in the same way Art Deco has done for Miami Beach.



Yet, as important a figure as Clark is considered to be, his current legacy is defined not by his own individual vision but rather as a component of the joint efforts between himself and longtime partner Albert Frey. Together (as well as with a third partner, Robson Chambers), they produced some of Palm Springs' most well-known and well-regarded structures. As the Historic Resources Group Survey has noted, their 20-year partnership "would permanently alter the course of architecture in the Coachella Valley" with an oeuvre that ranged from houses, schools, a fire station, churches, shopping centers, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, and apartments.

While the partnership has been celebrated as one of the most influential in the history of Palm Springs, critical analysis has been focused almost exclusively on only one of the partners – Albert Frey. And while this appears wholly justified as the talented and dynamic Frey was the driving force of the collaboration, it has unintentionally minimized the contributions of both John Porter Clark and Robson Chambers. Clark is generally dismissed as being the one who handled the traditional designs for the firm while Frey boldly worked in modern. While Frey was clearly the more visionary modernist of the pair, Clark proved himself more than capable as evidenced by several noteworthy modern designs including that of his own home at 1200 Paseo El Mirador (1939/1946). Further, much of Clark's ostensibly traditional work shows a modern flair with strong clean lines and minimal ornamentation.

Attempts to separate Clark from Frey in order to assess his individual vision have been stymied by Clark himself, who appears to have had his papers intentionally destroyed prior to his death in 1991. As such, a full determination of Clark's contributions to the partnership cannot presently be made. However, there is still enough available to give clear evidence of Clark's own talent and vision that elevates him well beyond that of the "junior" partner.

## **Early Years**

Clark was born in Fort Dodge, Iowa on August 14, 1905 to John and Mary Clark, both of whom hailed from Vermont. Their reasons for being in Iowa are not entirely clear, but it appears the elder Clark was involved in several local building enterprises. By 1909, however, the family made a major shift, relocating to the west and settling in Pasadena, California. Clark enrolled in local schools, graduating from Pasadena High School in 1923.

By the time of his graduation, Clark had already embarked upon his lifelong profession, gaining an entrée into the world of architecture as a junior draftsman at Marston & Van Pelt, one of the most, if not *the* most prestigious firms in the city. In 1926, he left the firm to enroll at the Cornell University School of Architecture in Ithaca, New York, considered among the finest architectural schools in the country. At the time, Cornell's curriculum focused on classic Beaux Arts design.

Clark studied at Cornell for 2 years, but in 1928 he returned to Pasadena without completing his degree. He was nonetheless welcomed back to Marston, now known as Marston, Van Pelt & Maybury, this time as senior draftsman. The young Clark appears to have particularly impressed Garrett Van Pelt and in 1930, when he left to go into independent practice, he took Clark with him. It was during this time that Van Pelt was involved in the Smoke Tree Ranch development and while it presently cannot be verified owing to a dearth of documentation, it is likely that Clark worked with Van Pelt on the original Smoke Tree Ranch designs.

Van Pelt had such faith in his young protegee that he entrusted him with some of the firm's important commissions. One of Clark's fellow draftsmen at Van Pelt was Robert E. Alexander,

FAIA, (1907-1992), who would later go on to an impressive career as an architect and city planner. According to Alexander, Clark was entirely responsible for the design of the imposing Bel-Air mansion of film star Loretta Young and her family on Sunset Boulevard although officially it was credited to Van Pelt.

### **Van Pelt & Lind**

By 1934, Clark had served as a senior draftsman at what was now known as Van Pelt & Lind for four years. In assessing the future, Clark could have possibly risen to partner at the firm or struck out on his own. But another opportunity would present itself that would alter not only the course of Clark's own life but that of the development of Palm Springs architecture as well.

Clark's employer, Garrett Van Pelt already had a well-established Palm Springs connection with Smoke Tree Ranch. He was not only one of the venture's original partners, he became its de facto in-house architect, responsible for either designing or approving plans for new homes in the enclave in the years following its initial opening in 1931. Further, L. Mac Blankenhorn, Smoke Tree Ranch's founder, had shifted his interests to developing a new community, Rancho Mirage.

Today, it remains unclear whether it was Van Pelt who sent Clark to Palm Springs or if it was Clark who proposed the plan. In either case, the idea made sense, if only for having a local representative of the firm overseeing work at Smoke Tree Ranch and Rancho Mirage. But the potential was far greater. Palm Springs was continuing to gain momentum as a winter resort. Opportunity was there, but local architects were not. This changed with the opening of the Palm Springs branch of Van Pelt & Lind in 1934, the very first full-time architectural firm in the village.

The theory that Clark was the driving force behind the venture rather than Van Pelt, is bolstered by just how much independence he had including his choice of a partner – Albert Frey. It appears that Clark first met Frey while he was in Palm Springs supervising construction of the Kocher-Samson Building. They quickly became friends with a mutual respect for the other's talent and a shared love of the desert. Clark proposed Frey to Van Pelt who approved the arrangement.

The Palm Springs branch of Van Pelt & Lind did not operate as one might normally expect of a satellite office. Rather, it appeared to run as an almost completely autonomous entity, with both Clark & Frey allowed to design whatever commissions they could gain in whatever style the client approved. As neither were formally licensed to practice architecture yet, this allowed them to work under the imprimatur of an established firm. While Garrett Van Pelt is a name virtually unknown in Palm Springs architecture today, he is greatly deserving of honor for being the one to launch the brilliant careers of two of Palm Springs' most talented and influential architects.

In the beginning, Clark was the public face of the firm. It was his name which appeared in the papers whenever new projects were announced. In fact, Frey's name does not even appear in the Desert Sun until 1936. Ultimately, their public roles would reverse over time, a situation that appeared satisfactory to both. By all accounts, Clark and Frey were personable and well-liked figures in the village and soon the young designers began securing commissions from a growing number of clients while building a shared reputation for excellence.

Although the Van Pelt & Lind collaboration lasted only two years, it proved to be an extremely fruitful time for Clark and Frey, giving them a chance to freely experiment and gain real-time experience in facing the unique challenges surrounding building in the desert. Frey was able to

bring 8 projects to completion during this time with Clark producing a similar amount. It is likely that even though one was a lead on a project, the other would help with designing details, checking plans, etc., a happy collaboration that would serve as a successful formula over the next decades.

Clark appears to have been the lead or even sole architect for the Van Pelt commissions involving Smoke Tree Ranch and Rancho Mirage during this period. The desert homes were designed in traditional styles using elements from Ranch and/or Spanish and generally featured shed roofs as part of their design, an element so common it became a hallmark of Clark's 1930s work.



*Open for Inspection*

Model desert home at Rancho Mirage  
designed by Van Pelt & Lind, architects.

FOR SALE

RECREATIONAL PROPERTIES INCORPORATED

Rancho Mirage

Los Angeles

— or —

LOUIS McLAUGHLIN BLANKENHORN

(Owner)

338 E. Green St., Pasadena

---

Almost from the start, the talented young designers caught the attention of architectural critics and their work began appearing in both regional and national publications including *California Arts & Architecture*, *The Architectural Record* and *The Architectural Digest*. Sometimes the work was credited as Van Pelt & Lind, but other times it was credited directly to Clark. Several Clark designs were singled out during the Van Pelt & Lind period that showed the range of his talent. While the Rufus Chapman House (1934) was a typical Spanish design with signature Clark shed roof, the H.U. Brandenstein House, completed the same year was thoroughly modern, with sleek, cubic massing stretching out across its expansive lot in a diagonal pattern, “like a flower to the sun” in the words of *California Arts & Architecture*.



**John Porter Clark showed his ability at modern desert design with the home of Mr. & Mrs. H.U. Brandenstein in 1935. Clark designed the main house, while Frey did a separate study.**  
(*California Arts & Architecture*. 1937)

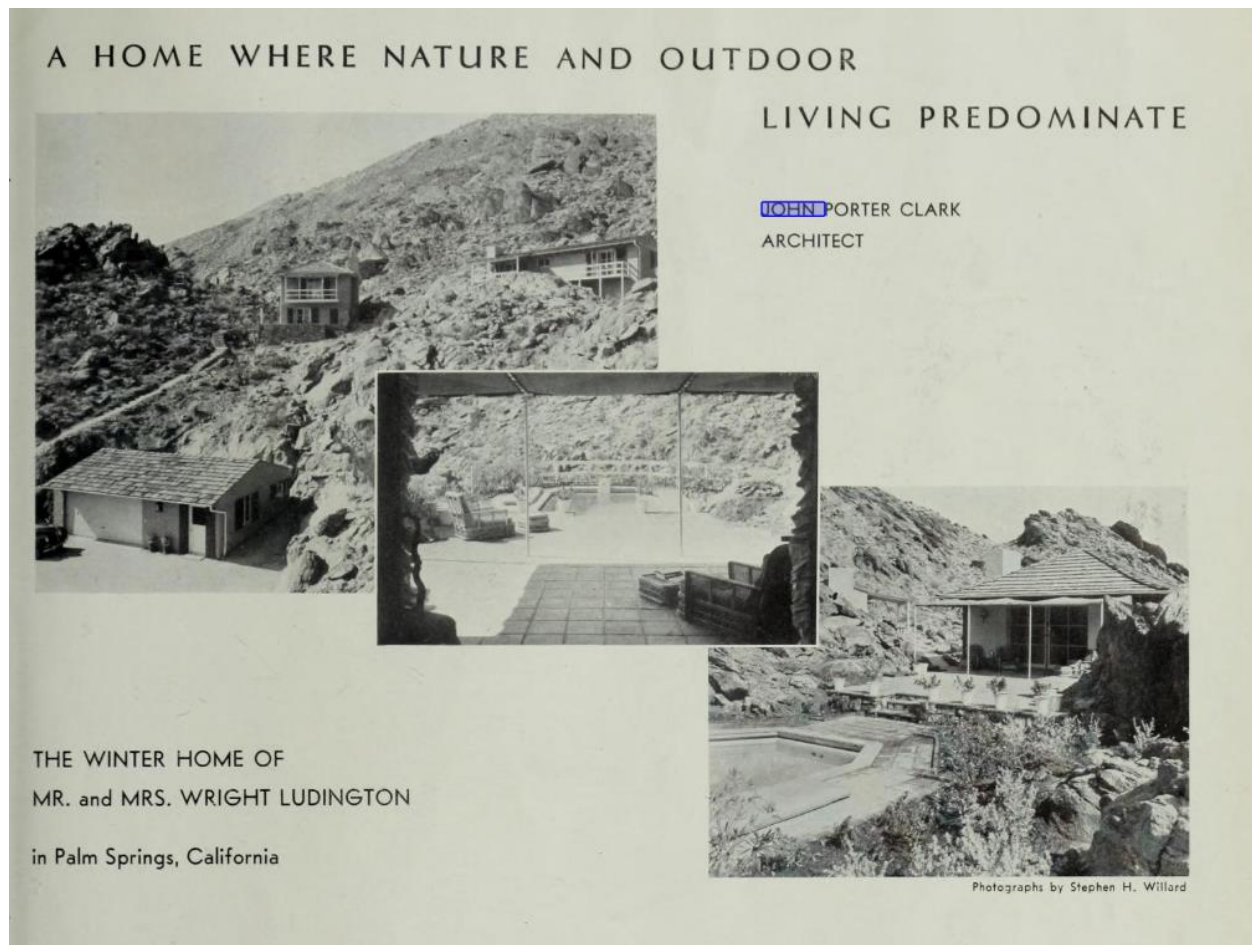
Although both partners were busy, their clients were mostly interested in traditional designs, something that frustrated Frey. So, when an opportunity arose for Frey to work on a project for the Museum of Modern Art in New York with Phillip L. Goodwin and Edward Durrell Stone, he readily accepted, returning to New York in the spring of 1937. While Clark was sorry to see Frey go, he understood his friend's reasons and wished him the best on his new venture.

### **Independent Practice**

With Frey gone, Clark continued operating under the Van Pelt & Lind banner, although he was becoming such a fixture in the village, his work was more and more identified directly as his own. In January of 1938, after having received his California architect's license, Clark left Van Pelt & Lind to go into practice on his own.



During his brief period of independence, Clark worked steadily, becoming, in the words of the Desert Sun, "Palm Springs' busiest and best-known architect." Some of his commissions included homes for prominent villagers such as J.J. Kocher, Wright Ludington, John and Fannie Hamrick, future Palm Springs mayor Florian Boyd, a guest house for James E. "Dad" French, a home and dental office for Bacon Clifton (attributed), the El Rincon Apartments (now part of Casa Cody) for Francis Crocker, the La Paz Guest Ranch, and some of the first designs for the proposed Palm Springs Aerial Tramway.



**In 1938, Clark designed an unusual desert compound of Mr. & Mrs. Wright Ludington in the Mesa, that was a modern take on classic Monterey situated in such a way to maximize views, privacy and a minimal disturbance of the natural topography.**  
(California Arts & Architecture. February 1939)

Interestingly, when it came time to design his own home, he went modern with an innovative design that anticipated future expansion to be almost seamless. The original (1939) portion of the house was comprised of the same type of low-cost industrial materials Frey would use in his own home such as corrugated aluminum, plywood, steel casement windows and concrete. The original home was basically a cube, but Clark took it to a new level literally by elevating it above the desert on steel poles and across projecting wing walls. The space on ground level served as a semi-enclosed patio for outdoor living. In 1946, with a growing family, he would expand the house as

originally planned, with minimal expense and alteration to the original structure. The design was well-received and published in several major publications including *House & Garden*.



**The first section of Clark's own home (1939) used the same materials and design philosophy Albert Frey applied to his own house, Frey House I, the following year.**  
*(If You Want to Build a House by Elizabeth Mock. 1946)*

The late 1930s and beginning of the 1940s proved to be a very busy time for Clark on a personal and professional level. He had been active in civic affairs since his arrival in the desert and in 1938, when Palm Springs achieved cityhood, Clark was appointed the first chairman of the Planning Commission. Soon, however, he switched to vice chair, but his involvement with the commission would continue at various times for nearly 20 years with his last term in 1959.

In 1940, he married Louisa Margaret Lentz (1916-1980) and together they would have a son, Alan Porter Clark, (1946-2018). It was Alan's birth that would trigger the already-planned expansion of the Clark family home at 1200 Paseo El Mirador.

It was also during this creative period that Clark completed two of what would become his best-known designs – the Palm Springs Woman's Club and the Welwood Murray Library, both 1940, and today, treasured Palm Springs landmarks. The Welwood Murray is particularly striking, dominating but not overwhelming its prominent corner location. Ostensibly Spanish in style, the structure nonetheless bears an unmistakable modern feel that bridges the gulf between Palm Springs' historic Spanish past and anticipating its modernist future.





(Courtesy of Barbara Marshall, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation)

### **The Return of Albert Frey**

By the time these projects were completed or nearing completion, Albert Frey had returned to Palm Springs. He had come at the behest of Clark who broached the idea of a partnership now that he was fully-accredited as a California architect. Frey happily returned and began the nearly 20-year association that would prove to be one of the most influential architectural teams ever to practice in the desert.

At first, as it had been during the Van Pelt & Lind period, Clark was the leading public face of the team, largely owing to the fact Frey was not yet licensed. The firm still operated under Clark's name alone and would continue to do so until Frey obtained his license in 1944. Prior to the war, as would be the case throughout their partnership, they took on a diverse range of projects that ran the gamut from residential to civic, even producing a skating rink. The Cathedral City Elementary School in 1940 marked the beginning of a long association with school designs that would cover the length of their careers both together and individually.

The coming of war changed the trajectory of their professional and personal lives, but Clark was better prepared than most. He had long been involved in the military starting with the R.O.T.C.

during his Pasadena school days and, from 1928-1933, serving as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. in the Army Reserve. When war did break out in December 1941, Clark was anxious to do his part. Initially, he assisted with the wartime conversion of the El Mirador Hotel into the Torney General Hospital. Frey also worked on this project and continued after Clark formally joined the U.S. Army in September 1942. Clark began his service at the rank of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. in the Army Corps. of Engineers stationed at Minter Field near Bakersfield. By the time he was mustered out at war's end, he had risen to the rank of captain.

Returning to civilian life at the end of 1945, Clark entered what was to become the heyday of both his own professional career and the modernist movement in Palm Springs of which he and Frey were to play starring roles.

### **Clark & Frey and Clark, Frey & Chambers**

Post-war Palm Springs saw a population boom and a change in attitudes towards modern architecture. More and more clients were interested in going modern and Clark & Frey, with years of desert designing experience, were in a prime position to deliver. Over the next decade, the firm, which, after 1948 included Robson Chambers (who became a full partner in 1953), produced a series of designs for a wide range of structures, many of them in Modern style, which placed them in the vanguard of the Desert Modern movement. As Joseph Rosa wrote in his book, *Albert Frey, Architect* (Rizzoli, 1990), "Clark and Frey's buildings, both before and after World War II, were important contributions towards placing Palm Springs architecture on the map as a new frontier for the modern spirit."

While they continued to produce numerous residences, including such masterworks as the Raymond Loewy Residence, their range was extensive including schools, hospitals, museums, restaurants, office buildings, churches, hotels, apartments, fire stations, and government buildings. A small sampling of their post-war work includes bungalows for the Racquet Club; Villa Hermosa apartments; Dollard Office Building; San Geronio Pass Memorial Hospital; Katherine Finchy School; Desert Bank; Lyons House at Smoke Tree Ranch; Banning Public Library; Valley Station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway; Palm Springs Fire Station; Cree Houses I & II; Cahuilla Elementary School; Social Sciences and Humanities Building, University of California, Riverside, and the Doll House restaurant; among many others.

Frey is credited as the lead architect behind all of these projects, and it is presently unknown to any degree of certainty the extent of Clark's (and Chambers) contributions to any particular design. However, perhaps the very fact that it can be so hard to separate the individual contributions of the partners is proof of how well they worked together.

### **Independence and a New Partnership**

At the end of 1956, Clark, who had become a member of the AIA in 1953, left the partnership amicably in order to devote his energies in the pursuit of larger commercial and institutional projects. He built an office for himself at 169 Luring Drive and went into independent practice. One of his biggest commissions was the Palm Springs Police Department headquarters on Tahquitz Way in 1959. But Clark was not destined to remain solo for long. In 1963, he began a long and successful collaboration with E. Stewart Williams and Roger Williams of Williams and Williams. Another of Palm Springs' most iconic architectural firms, Williams and Williams had numerous commissions from the County of Riverside, City of Palm Springs, Desert Hospital



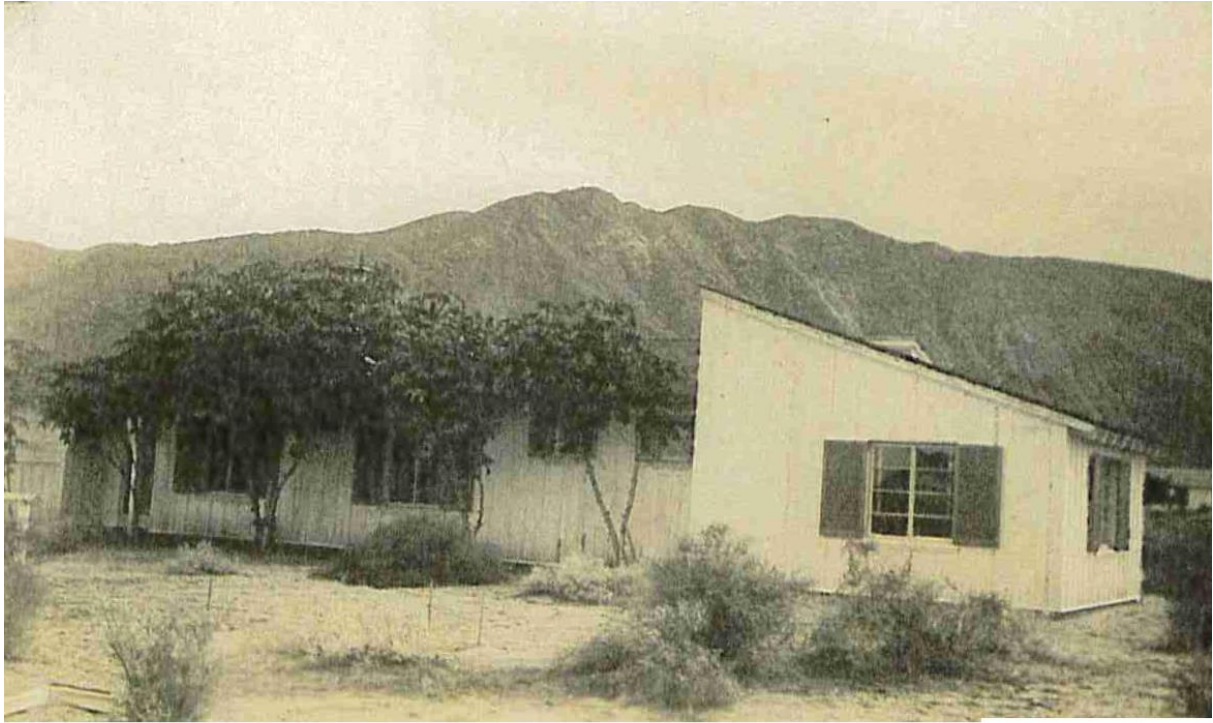
District, Coachella Valley Savings & Loan, and others, just the type of bigger projects Clark was looking for. In 1971, Clark was elevated to full partner in the firm of Williams, Clark & Williams. He continued working on major projects including the College of the Desert, city and county offices, banks and offices until his retirement in 1990 at the age of 85. It marked the end of an impressive and influential career, which began as a junior draftsman at Marston & Van Pelt 67 years earlier. He passed away the following year.

# APPENDIX IX

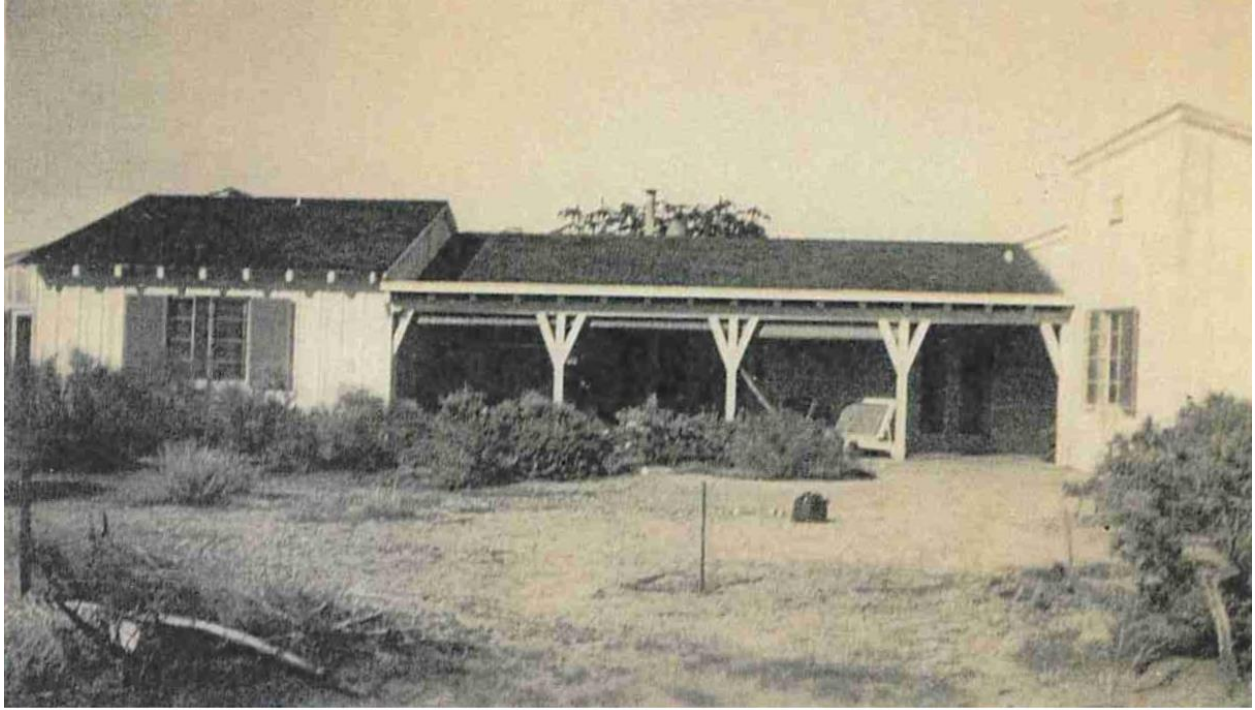
## Historical and Modern Photo Comparisons 1941 and 2023















# APPENDIX X

## Current Imagery



**General view as seen from street looking south showing garage and kitchen porch.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)



**View of Albert Frey's kitchen porch addition**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)





**View looking westward across front porch.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)



**Across north facade.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)





**North façade showing porch and shed roof.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)



**Looking eastwards towards front entrance.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)





**View through breezeway into rear porch.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)



**View from porch across towards pool.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)



**Pool from guest wing.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)



**Reversed view looking back at guest wing.**  
(Author Photo. February 2023)





**Porch at rear of guest wing.  
(Author Photo. February 2023)**



**View of south façade with new master bedroom on left.**