



MAD FOR MIDCENTURY

There's only one week a year you can get inside Palm Springs' iconic celebrity homes.

Meet Palm Springs Modernism Week. BY ERIN BERESINI

Robert Imber slows his silver Honda Odyssey to a stop in front of a one-story white slump stone wall perched in the foothills of Palm Springs. This, he says to me and two other passengers, is a classic example of mid-century modern architecture—think *Mad Men* style. “This is minimalism at its finest,” Imber says. “It’s all about symmetry and balance. Constraint.”

Imber, 65, is the city’s premiere architectural aficionado. He’s been hosting this three-hour, 35-mile minivan tour since 2001. His enthusiasm and stories are captivating. I just didn’t realize there’d be so many walls involved.

Not long after seeing the white wall, Imber will stop the van in front of a similar brown wall. It’s the front of a home

that I’ll admit, I find less than inspiring. A large front lawn, some hedges and palm trees soften the bricks up a bit, but it’s a plain brown wall nonetheless—or so it seems.

With the help of iPad photos and the gusto of a magician performing sleight of hand, Imber reveals the walls are not in fact just walls; they are an expertly planned architectural element concealing two of the world’s most exquisite mid-century modern homes.

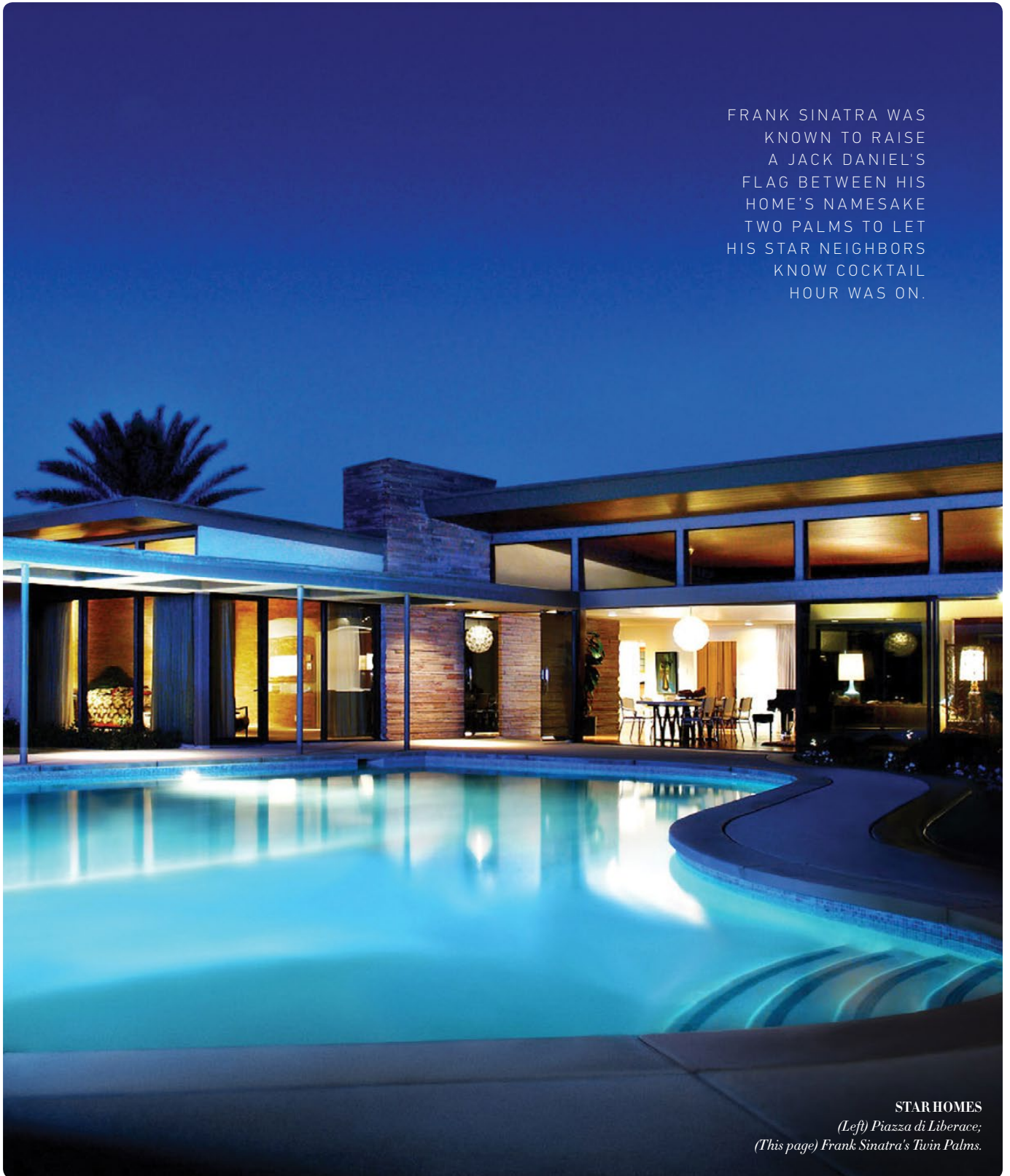
“The no windows in the front is a privacy thing—it’s a celebrity home,” Imber says. “In addition, it’s a statement. It’s the angularity of it; it’s the situation. It’s about the allure, the sense of arrival and expectation, and [he pauses] the drama. And, of course, when you get through the doors, it’s an endlessly large glass house!” ➔



PALM SPRINGS

NANCY BARON

FRANK SINATRA WAS
KNOWN TO RAISE
A JACK DANIEL'S
FLAG BETWEEN HIS
HOME'S NAMESAKE
TWO PALMS TO LET
HIS STAR NEIGHBORS
KNOW COCKTAIL
HOUR WAS ON.



BEAUMONDE VILLAS

STAR HOMES
*(Left) Piazza di Liberace;
(This page) Frank Sinatra's Twin Palms.*



BE PERSISTENT. SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR EVENTS TEND TO SELL OUT QUICKLY, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE TOTALLY OUT OF LUCK. "I WAITED FOR 45 MINUTES AND GOT IN TO SEE FREY II WHEN A COUPLE OF PEOPLE DIDN'T SHOW UP," HARGRETT SAYS. "I WAS SO HAPPY I DID, IT WAS SUCH A HIGHLIGHT OF MY TRIP."



GO MODERN

(Left) Bus tours; (right) Edris House. (Opposite) Frey House II; David Bowie Tribute Party; CAMP Modernism, the week's central hub.

This house in particular belongs to one Leonardo DiCaprio, who, much to Imber's delight, has restored that brown wall with adobe bricks matching the originals used in 1964, when the house was built for Dinah Shore. The white-walled home? That was Max Palevsky's, the late billionaire tech pioneer. It still houses what's left of his storied art collection.

If you want a peek behind those private, dramatic walls—a taste of the well-preserved desert lifestyle that has lured Hollywood stars and dignitaries for more than half a century—you could park in the driveway, ring the front doorbell and hope for the best. ("Private homes, public streets," Imber says. "I can count on one hand the number of gated communities in Palm Springs.") Or you can come back when the owners of midcentury gems like these open their doors to the public—and double-decker tour buses roll in for a better vantage point—during Palm Springs Modernism Week, February 11–21, 2016.

The event had humble beginnings 15 years ago as a furniture sale. Since then, it's exploded into an 11-day annual celebration of all things midcentury modern, now attracting more than 60,000 attendees from all over the world. The double-decker bus tour is a must, but that's just one of more than 180 official events. There are also lectures, retro cocktail parties (costumes highly encouraged), antique furniture and car sales—even a Kodachrome slide-assisted humorist—all celebrating the designs of the mid-'40s to the late '60s. And then there are the

home tours. Epic home tours, including a look at Frank Sinatra's infamous Twin Palms estate (complete with original twin palm trees), and, when President Obama isn't staying there as he did in 2013 and 2014, the Sunnylands Estate in nearby Rancho Mirage (its pink roof matches the color of the sunset on the nearby foothills).

"It's people who are having a good time and love to revel in all of the classic design," says Daniel Salzman, a Manhattan Beach, Calif.-based green home builder and Modernism Week devotee of the past six years. "Take some of these iconic figures, the designers, builders and architects, the landscape and the Hollywood lore of it all, and it makes for some pretty awesome storytelling."

The tales of silver screen stars and the blooming of Palm Springs' iconic architecture are, in fact, intertwined. "Some of the big stars—and there were hundreds of them, some big names—they had a 100-mile clause in their contract; they weren't to be more than about 100 miles from Hollywood," Imber says. "So in case Mr. Mayer need them for a lunch or something they wouldn't be off in Africa on a safari. So they came here just to party and hang out." (Some celebrities who've owned houses in Palm Springs: Bette Davis, Gene Autry, Sammy Davis, Jr., Elvis Presley, Howard Hughes, Bob Hope, Liberace and Frank Sinatra.)

Midcentury modern designs were going up all over the country, Imber says, "but Palm Springs was such a moneyed and

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: GREGG FELSEN (2), DAVIDE A. LEE, DAVID DIXON



social place that it was particularly abundant.” Architects who were drawn to Palm Springs for its dramatic landscape—10,833-foot Mount San Jacinto looms in the background of the Sonoran desert—were given the financial freedom to experiment.

Bob Hope’s John Lautner-designed estate is perhaps one of the best examples of star money creating something spectacular. The hillside 23,366-square-foot manse was designed to resemble a volcano, though to many it looks more like a spaceship or a giant mushroom. “The dome sheath in copper was painted over because it was blinding the airline pilots,” Imber says.

Architects not working on star homes found the plentiful and cheap desert land offered them creative freedom as well. “The early modernists are the original green builders,” Salzman says. “The topography and weather necessitated a totally different approach to home building.” The 15 or so architects now called the “desert modernists” championed the idea of incorporating the local landscape and bringing the outside in, whether by designing homes around trees and boulders, or crafting disappearing walls for unobstructed views. They also promoted energy efficiency through proper positioning of windows, walls and brise-soleils.

Stunning examples of these concepts abound, both private and civic. Architect Albert Frey is the mastermind behind about 200 Palm Springs buildings, including City Hall and Frey House II. Frey fashioned his 1,100-square-foot personal home around a hillside boulder in the mid-’60s. “He left it to the art museum with the stipulation that people live there from time to time,” Imber says. As a sometimes residence, it’s rarely open to the public—except during Modernism Week, when Frey II becomes a tour highlight. As does Vista Las Palmas, an entire neighborhood filled with butterfly roofs, breezeways and backyard pools—all still largely intact thanks, in part, to a period during the ’80s and ’90s when Palm Springs fell out of favor with elite seasonal residents.

“FOR ME THE MOST ENTERTAINING PART IS THE COSTUMES,” VOSSLER SMITH SAYS. “PEOPLE BRING THEIR FAVORITE VINTAGE ITEMS AND LIVE THE DON DRAPER LIFESTYLE WHILE THEY’RE HERE.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: GREGG FELSEN, DAVID A. LEE (2)



A RARE SIGHT
The living room of Frank Sinatra's former residence, Twin Palms.

"The McMansion is the enemy of midcentury architecture," says Lisa Vossler Smith, Modernism Week's executive director. People seeking larger, more opulent homes in those decades began building in less developed Coachella Valley cities. But being unpopular for a while turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it left thousands of Palm Springs' midcentury modern buildings alone. The city is now home to the world's highest concentration of midcentury modern architecture, a veritable treasure trove rediscovered—and restored—over the past decade.

"People have been living the midcentury modern lifestyle for a long time," Salzman says; "clean lines never really go out of style." But since *Mad Men*, AMC's show set in the 1960s advertising

world, came out in 2007, "it's just pervasive." Furniture store Design Within Reach began reissuing classic modern designs, like the famous Eames chair, making the look more attainable for the masses, while baby boomer nostalgia, Imber says, also played a role in modernism's resurgence.

As a testament to the style's revival, other cities, including Tucson and Detroit, now host modernism weeks. But ultimately it's the "extreme terrain, natural light and resort lifestyle," Vossler Smith says, that continue to make Palm Springs the premiere destination for modern design, inspiring architects, builders, decorators and anyone with an eye for style. Or a Zillow obsession. The laid-back attitude, Miami-based collectible designer Lina Hargrett adds, is another big draw. "The beauty of Palm Springs is that it's so chill," she says, after visiting for the first time during the 2015 Modernism Week.

While the week is certainly an open, fun celebration for all ages, it's not all parties and tours and costumes and hanging out at base CAMP (Community and Meeting Place), the hub of all daily activities. It's also an opportunity to give back to the city and the people working to preserve its unique features.

Though there are more than 20 free events, the average activity costs \$25. Revenue from 2015 tour ticket sales alone "generated more than \$463,000 for the neighborhood organizations and HOAs to fund improvements such as landscaping, new signage and common area restoration," Vossler Smith says. The non-profit organization also awards scholarships to high school graduates going on to study architecture and design.

There's just nothing quite like Palm Springs, Imber says, from its friendly locals to the dramatic landscape to, of course, the special party-slash-architectural education that is Modernism Week. "Everywhere you go is something quite amazing," he says. "Quirky, one-of-a-kind and amazing."

Los Angeles-based freelance writer **Erin Beresini** is the author of *Off Course: Inside the Mad, Muddy World of Obstacle Course Racing*. Her work appears in the *New York Times*, *Outside Magazine* and *Entrepreneur*.

INSPIRATO RECOMMENDS



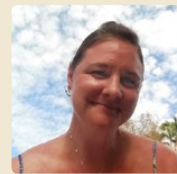
Palm Springs

Members can choose from three large Inspirato Residences in the Coachella Valley, each with its own pool and luxurious indoor/outdoor spaces.

The Residence Club at PGA West contains the Ocotillo and Saguaro homes, each with 3,365 square feet, three bedrooms and views over the golf course's lush fairways.

The 3,500-square-foot Villa Rejuvenation comfortably sleeps eight in four bedrooms in a convenient hillside location on the northwest side of Palm Springs with grand views of the valley and minutes from downtown.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR INSPIRATO RESIDENCES IN PALM SPRINGS/ COACHELLA VALLEY, PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 163.



Kealy Twede's picks
Inspirato Destination Concierge

SPEED FREAKS: Get behind the wheel of a BMW sports car at the Thermal Club racetrack, home to the **BMW Performance Center West**.

SHOPAHOLICS: The valley's premier shopping destination is **The Gardens on El Paseo**.

STAR TREATMENT: The historic **Ingleside Inn** serves a dose of Hollywood glamour at Melvyn's Restaurant and Casablanca Lounge.

March 7-20, 2016

BNP PARIBAS OPEN
Stadium tennis takes over the valley as the world's best compete in one of the biggest tournaments of the year, one which bills itself as the 5th Grand Slam.

April 15-17, 22-24, 2016

COACHELLA MUSIC FEST
A must-see-and-be-seen event for fashionistas, pop-culture mavens and music lovers, Coachella has drawn headliners such as Jack White, Drake and AC/DC.