



# DESTINATION DESIGN PALM SPRINGS MODERNISM WEEK

By: *Karen LeBlanc*  
*@designtourist*

Palm Springs, in its hey day, was the desert playground for 50s-era Hollywood cool kids and the cradle of an emerging style of postwar architecture known as modernism. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, Elvis Presley, Debbie Reynolds, Dinah Shore, and Bob Hope were among the celebrities and socialites seeking weekend getaway homes in the architecture de rigueur, known as Desert Modernism.

Palm Springs' many public and commercial buildings also embraced this midcentury modern lexicon championed by architects including Albert Frey, Donald Wexler, John Lautner, Richard Neutra, William Krisel and George and Robert Alexander.

Known as "StarArchitects" of their time, collectively, they produced a concentration of varied modernist iterations in Palm Springs, unmatched by any other U.S. city. From the futuristic works of John Lautner including Bob Hope's spaceship estate and Lautner's Elrod House, appearing in the James Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever*, to The International Style influences evident Richard Neutra's glass and steel Kaufmann House or his protege, Donald Wexler's prefab Steel House, modernism in the California desert morphed into its own expression that drinks in the arid and mountainous landscape.

Emblematic of the style is modernist master Albert Frey's personal residence, the Frey House II, built in 1963 on the side of the mountain with sweeping views of Palm Springs. The Swiss born architect, a protege of Le Corbusier, designed his corrugated steel roof residence with a large boulder embedded in the interiors.

One of Frey's earliest works, The Aluminaire House, is relocating to Palm Springs, where Frey lived and worked from 1935 until his death in 1998. Frey and architect A. Lawrence Kocher designed the three-story house as a case study, building it in just ten days as the first all-metal prefabricated house in the U.S. In an act of preservation, The Aluminaire House was dismantled and transported from its original site in New York City to Palm Springs where it will be open to the public.

Once a year, Palm Springs celebrates its architectural treasures and a reverence for retro in an 11-day festival known as Modernism Week, drawing midcentury modern fans and a new generation of hipsters, architecture aficionados and design enthusiasts discovering the architectural vocabulary of cantilevered construction, rectilinear planes and walls of glass and steel.

*Top Photo: Dinah Shore Estate*

Modernism Week, held February 16-26, 2017, highlights midcentury modern architecture, art, interior style, landscape design and vintage culture in Palm Springs with tours of iconic homes throughout Coachella Valley including architectural walking, biking and double-decker bus tours. The event also hosts film screenings, talks and the annual Palm Springs Modernism Show & Sale.

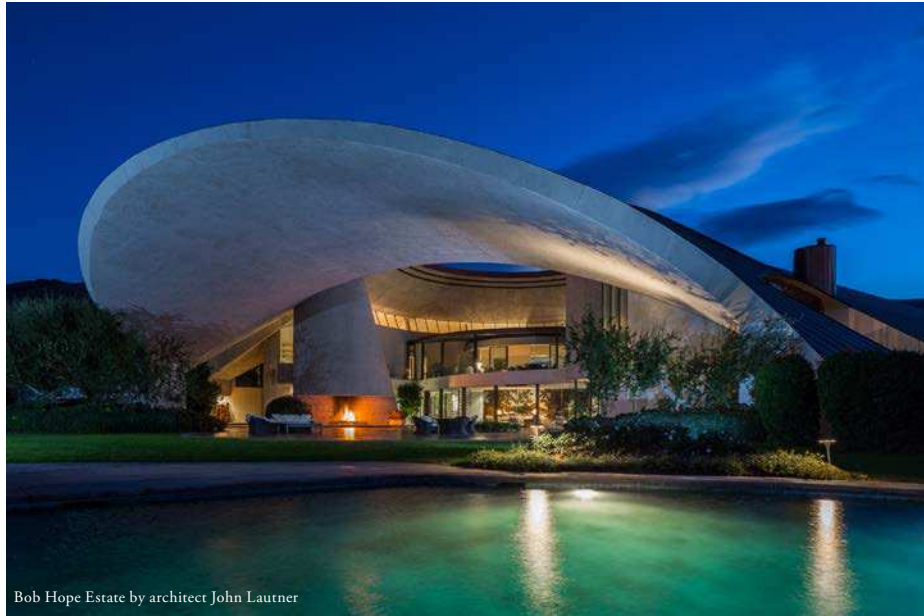
During Modernism Week, several showhomes swing open their doors to the public including the Christopher Kennedy Compound at Villa Golightly, a decorator showcase featuring twenty of the nation's most prominent tastemakers creating uniquely designed rooms.

The West Elm House, a 1958 renovated home designed by architects Dan Palmer and William Krisel, became a "living showroom" designed to inspire and guide in the art of modernizing a midcentury home for 21st century living.

Also on tour, the Social House, a concept space set in a newly completed Desert Eichler home, a modernized version of an original Eichler house designed by Claude Oakland. Celebrity designer Bobby Berk collaborated with furniture company Carl Hansen & Son on the interior styling featuring heritage midcentury furnishings, contemporary art, accessories, and design objects.

If you missed Modernism Week, not to worry, many of the city's celebrated midcentury modern properties remain on tour. On the must-see list is the "Movie Colony" neighborhood, home to Rat Pack era celebrities including Frank Sinatra who commissioned architect E. Stewart William to design and build his Twin Palms estate in 1947. Sinatra's party pad and weekend getaway has a pool shaped like a baby grand piano and few dings on the walls from fights during his tumultuous marriage to Ava Gardner. Celebrity curb appeal also includes the postwar modernist homes of Tony Curtis, Cary Grant, Marilyn Monroe, Al Jolson, Dinah Shore, Van Johnson, Gloria Swanson and Jack Benny and it appears that a new generation of Hollywood celebs are discovering Palm Springs' midcentury modern charm. Leonardo DiCaprio recently purchased the former home of Dinah Shore, designed by Wexler in 1964 with clean lines and glass walls.

For more information, check out [www.modernismweek.com](http://www.modernismweek.com)



Bob Hope Estate by architect John Lautner



The Aluminaire House, photo credit: Michael Schwarting