
ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

The Design Lover's Guide to Palm Springs

The perfect desert escape, Palm Springs beckons winter-weary, design-savvy visitors with its sunny mix of chic shops, smart restaurants, and stylish stays

Palm Springs is officially - happening—again. The fabled Rat Pack retreat and cradle of midcentury California modernism has regained its prerecession vitality, riding a wave of energy and interest not seen since the city's postwar heyday. All the telltale signs of revival are there: new hotels, a vibrant culinary scene, intriguing cultural attractions, and shopping galore. In short, the joint is jumping.

AD100 designer Michael S. Smith, who recently set up house in a spectacular Mayan-accented residence by architect Howard Lapham in neighboring Rancho Mirage, marvels at the changes he's seen in the area. "I never really appreciated just how great the desert could be until I worked on the visitor center at the Annenberg family estate **Sunnylands** a few years ago," he says. "Now I see all these young restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, and other creative people doing amazing work here." No reservations are necessary for Sunnylands Center & Gardens, but advance booking is required for a (highly recommended) tour of the actual home, a landmarked 1960s collaboration between architect A. Quincy Jones and decorators William Haines and Ted Graber.

In the run-up to the 2015 installment of Modernism Week—Palm Springs' signature celebration of midcentury design and its contemporary descendants, held February 12–22 this year—the buzz among the local cognoscenti is focused on the **Palm Springs Art Museum's new Architecture and Design Center**, known as the Edwards Harris Pavilion. Located in a 1961 savings-and-loan building crafted by pioneering desert architect E. Stewart Williams and renovated by the Los Angeles firm Marmol Radziner, the 13,000-square-foot venue serves as the hub for the museum's broad range of design-related programming.

On the accommodations front, the 244-room **Ritz-Carlton Rancho Mirage** has returned, reopening after years of ownership turnover. Perched on a 650-foot-high bluff with breathtaking views of Palm Springs and the surrounding valley, the resort encompasses the original 1988 Ritz-Carlton premises—extensively redesigned and updated—along with two new buildings that house guest suites, a luxury spa, and **the Edge**, the hotel's steak-and-seafood restaurant, which debuted in December.

For a more bohemian take on the Palm Springs getaway, L.A. designer Vance Burke suggests the 20-room **Sparrows Lodge**. Built as Castle's Red Barn in 1951, the property still maintains many of its vintage structures, including the hallmark barn, all elaborately redone in a style one might call nouveau rustique (or, in Burke's words, "Adirondack with sunstroke"). Among the stalwarts of Palm Springs hospitality, the 28-room Moroccan-flavored **Korakia Pensione** and the bearded-hipster paradise that is the **Ace Hotel** (173 rooms) continue to draw loyal followings, while two smaller places, **the Desert Star** and **the Amado**—each just five rooms—offer a more private experience amid settings in tune with the popular image of classic local style.

Amado owner Jaime Kowal has teamed up with designer Chris Pardo of Elemental Architecture to open **Ernest Coffee** and **Bootlegger Tiki**, side-by-side cafés with decidedly different vibes—urban cool for the former and Hawaiian kitsch for the latter. Pardo also created the interiors for the **Hacienda Cantina & Beach Club**, a chic swim club by day and a swinging restaurant and bar by night.

As for the gastronomic scene, Smith favors **Workshop Kitchen + Bar**, featuring tantalizing American cuisine with a contemporary twist, as well as **Cheeky's**, a perennial hot spot for breakfast. L.A. interior designer Alison Palevsky—whose late father-in-law, Max Palevsky, commissioned influential modernist architect Craig Ellwood to devise the family's desert retreat—raves about the fresh Italian fare at **Birba**, particularly the salami, chili pepper, kale, and Fontina pizza: "If you've got to have kale, this is the way to have it," she says.

Brooks Hudson Thomas, a decorative-arts curator who relocated from L.A. to the desert two years ago, says that the hunt for rare vintage furnishings has become more challenging as tourism has increased, but there are still treasures to be found. He recommends the cluster of small design shops at the **Palm Canyon Galleria** in Palm Springs as well as **Modern Spaces**, a boutique in the multivenue Perez Art & Design Center in nearby Cathedral City. **Modern Way**, one of the oldest midcentury-modern dealers in Palm Springs, is another of his favorites. "Even with all the construction and activity, Palm Springs still has a wealth of midcentury houses that have never changed hands," Thomas says. "When those homes do hit the market and their contents go up for sale, it feels like you've stumbled across the Dead Sea Scrolls of modernist design."