

CALIFORNIA

In the heart of California's Sonoma desert, flanked by the shimmering outlines of the San Jacinto Mountains beneath azure blue skies, Palm Springs is an oasis of chic mid-century modernism and legendary Hollywood glamour. Forget the town's famously hip hotels (not always oases of calm) and channel the golden era in true 'Sinatra' style by renting one of these luxury modernist villas, the glamorous former homes of stars and intellectuals, with their impressive Palm Springs pedigrees. Cocktails by the pool, anyone?

DREAMING

Story MARGARET BARCA



TWIN PALMS
SINATRA ESTATE

TWIN PALMS SINATRA ESTATE

Staying at Twin Palms comes with serious bragging rights. The villa, an early and influential example of Desert Modern, was designed and built in 1947 for Frank Sinatra and his first wife, Nancy Barbato (Sinatra later lived here for several years with Ava Gardner). The villa's designer, E. Stewart Williams, became one of the most prolific and important architects in the Coachella Valley.

Twin Palms is typically angular and low-lying, a balance of stone and concrete, with dramatic full-length glass doors and open breezeways providing an elegant transition from inside to outside. Luxurious new and vintage designer furnishings, wrap-around sofas, a grand piano, open fires, fabulous light fittings and Sinatra memorabilia create a glamorous yet relaxed ambiance. Sinatra even recorded some of his albums here.

While totally of its era – there's some Don Draper flair – it also has a contemporary edge.

What we love: Knowing that Sinatra's guests at his desert retreat included the 'Rat Pack', Tony Curtis, Bob Hope and Marilyn Monroe. We also love the piano-shaped pool – so Hollywood!

Stay here: For up to eight guests: four bedrooms, 6.5 bathrooms, pool. Rates start from US\$2,600 (about A\$3,167) plus taxes, per night.

luxuryretreats.com;
beaumontdevillas.com



TWIN PALMS SINATRA ESTATE



ARTHUR ELROD

ARTHUR ELROD'S ESCAPE

The ultimate *Mad Men* pad, created as his own home by legendary Palm Springs architect and interior designer Arthur Elrod in 1962. The somewhat austere façade doesn't even hint at the treasures within – the house is a perfect time capsule, a stunning combination of luxurious and expansive spaces, distinctive colours (burnt orange, ochre's, smoky chartreuse) and an unexpectedly playful mix of furnishings. There are gilt-edged Regency mirrors, abstract artworks, faux bamboo chairs, over-the-top wallpapers, shuttered windows and 1960s chandeliers. There's a full kitchen and a prep kitchen (for preparing *hors d'oeuvres* perhaps?) and four uniquely decorated bedrooms, each with an en suite.

Outside, you can settle onto the canary-yellow sofa, watch the sun glint off the aquamarine pool, listen to the fountain and enjoy the garden. Bliss. Hidden behind hedgerows, Elrod's Escape is a superbly comfortable and secluded Palm Springs oasis.

What we love: The sunken bar with its retro cocktail accessories. Those curly wrought-iron chairs look uncomfortable – but we love them anyway!

Stay here: Sleeps up to eight guests: four bedrooms, 4.5 bathrooms, pool. Rates in low season start from US\$735 (about A\$895) plus taxes, per night.

luxuryretreats.com



ARTHUR ELROD



ALEXANDER MODERN

SKYFALL

A 1960s architectural gem tucked into the foothills of the dramatic San Jacinto Mountains, Skyfall feels at once like the ultimate James Bond hideaway and yet totally 21st century. The villa is a seductive blend of repeating curves, walls of glass, stunning views, crisp white finishes, period furniture and splashes of vibrant colour. The turquoise sofas and Pop/Op wall mural are era-perfect.

The villa wraps around a circular terrace, with water spilling from a raised spa into the crystal-clear pool. A smartly modernised kitchen overlooks the pool. Outside, a raft of chaise lounges, sofa and vintage Eero Aarnio fibreglass chairs offer a place to chill out while sipping a cocktail or simply daydreaming in this modernist masterpiece.

What we love: The outdoor misting system to cool off on Palm Springs' hottest days – total indulgence. The heavenly view from the pool – upwards to the desert sky, beyond to the mountains.

Stay here: Sleeps up to six guests: three bedrooms, 3.5 bathrooms, pool. Low season rates are priced at US\$850 (about A\$1,035) plus taxes, per night.

luxuryretreats.com



PALM SPRINGS

NEED TO KNOW
Palm Springs is about two hours' drive (traffic permitting) from Los Angeles. There is also an airport just a few kilometres from downtown. Life in Palm Springs and the desert towns in its orbit – including Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage, Indian Wells, Desert Hot Springs and La Quinta – moves at a leisurely pace but there's a surprising amount happening and a busy events calendar. When you tire of lazing poolside, there are galleries, art and cultural activities, architectural tours, the aerial tramway, spas, mineral-rich hot water springs, hiking trails and the most amazing number of golf courses (around 80). Not to mention great dining and a slew of cocktail bars. Architecture and design aficionados should download the self-guided tour app. psmod.com

WHEN TO GO
The sun shines 360+ days a year, but summer temperatures in Palm Springs can reach 46°- 47° Celsius, sometimes for days at a time. Autumn, winter and spring are the more comfortable options. visitpalm Springs.com
visitgreaterpalm Springs.com
eatdrinkpalm Springs.com



SKYFALL



ALEXANDER MODERN

ALEXANDER MODERN

A desert retreat with stellar literary and architectural connections, Alexander Modern was home to author Harold Robbins, renowned for his bestselling novel *The Carpetbaggers* (later a movie) and designed by architectural style-setters George and Robert Alexander. This is a sleekly modern, mid-century design with expansive windows that flood the house with light. Sliding doors and clever sightlines create a seamless link between indoor and outdoor living – the glittering pool seems to constantly beckon. The residence has cool flagstone slate floors, exposed pale timbers, masses of space to relax or mingle, an

oversized master bedroom and four other spacious bedrooms – some with their own patios. The handsomely renovated villa with its walled garden, towering palms and mountain views, provides a serene desert retreat. **What we love:** The garden's tabletop fire feature, master-chef barbecue and cool poolside bar. And the location – if you can tear yourself away – is just a few blocks to the buzz of Palm Springs. **Stay here:** Accommodation for up to 10 guests: five bedrooms, five bathrooms, pool. Rates are from US\$1,050 (about A\$1,279) in low season, plus taxes, per night. luxuryretreats.com; vacationpalm Springs.com

TAKE THE PALM SPRINGS LOOK HOME

TRINA TURK

High fashion for a chic clientele and laid-back lifestyle. The range has expanded to cater for Mr. Turk and a new residential range packs a punch with zingy colours. Plus some terrific art and design books. trinaturk.com

RAYMOND LAWRENCE

Witty, sometimes weird and often wonderful – design must-haves, technicolour homewares, jewellery, cool fashion (including some fun retro swimsuits). Browsing heaven! raymond-lawrence.com

ROUTE 66 WEST

A treasure trove of evocative, modern-vintage jewellery – bakelite bangles, carved bracelets, lucite handbags, vintage sunglasses and more. rubylane.com/shop/route66west

PALM SPRINGS MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN CENTRE

Tucked into the original bank vault of this stylish new gallery is an excellent shop with art books and clever gifts to take home. psmuseum.org/architecture-design-center

SHAG

Kooky and wildly colourful prints, artworks, handbags, cushions and more that shout Palm Springs. shagthestore.com

J. WILLOTT GALLERY

Head to ultra-ritzy El Paseo in Palm Desert for world-class art – the two gallerists from Maine, New York who run J. Willott show some of the best. jwillott.com