

JAMES SCHNEPF is a location photographer with an emphasis on people. He has photographed for a long list of America's leading corporations and publications, and these assignments have taken him to all parts of the world. In his travels he has always kept an eye open for a climate and community to balance the cold winters of his family's Midwest base. He and his wife, Christiane, found that place in California's Coachella Valley, where they own a 1959 William Krisel-designed home.

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PALM SPRINGS MODERN LIVING SCHNEPF



PALM SPRINGS JAMES SCHNEPF MODERN LIVING

FOREWORD BY
WILLIAM KRISSEL

PALM SPRINGS JAMES SCHNEPF MODERN LIVING

Palm Springs is as much a showcase for its unparalleled collection of Midcentury Modern architecture as it is for the unique people that designed and inhabit that architecture. With *Palm Springs Modern Living*, photographer James Schnepf has created a wonderful collection of photographs that document both the iconic architecture and fascinating people of this desert oasis. More than fifty modernists, artists, builders, and architects were interviewed, including such Midcentury Modern luminaries as Donald Wexler, William Krisel, and Hugh Kaptur, and their stories and anecdotes provide a perfect complement to Schnepf's insightful and authentic photographic approach. Together, they manage to bring Palm Springs to life in a way that most volumes of architectural photos could never hope to achieve.

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STEEL DEVELOPMENT HOUSE No. 2

(Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison, 1962)

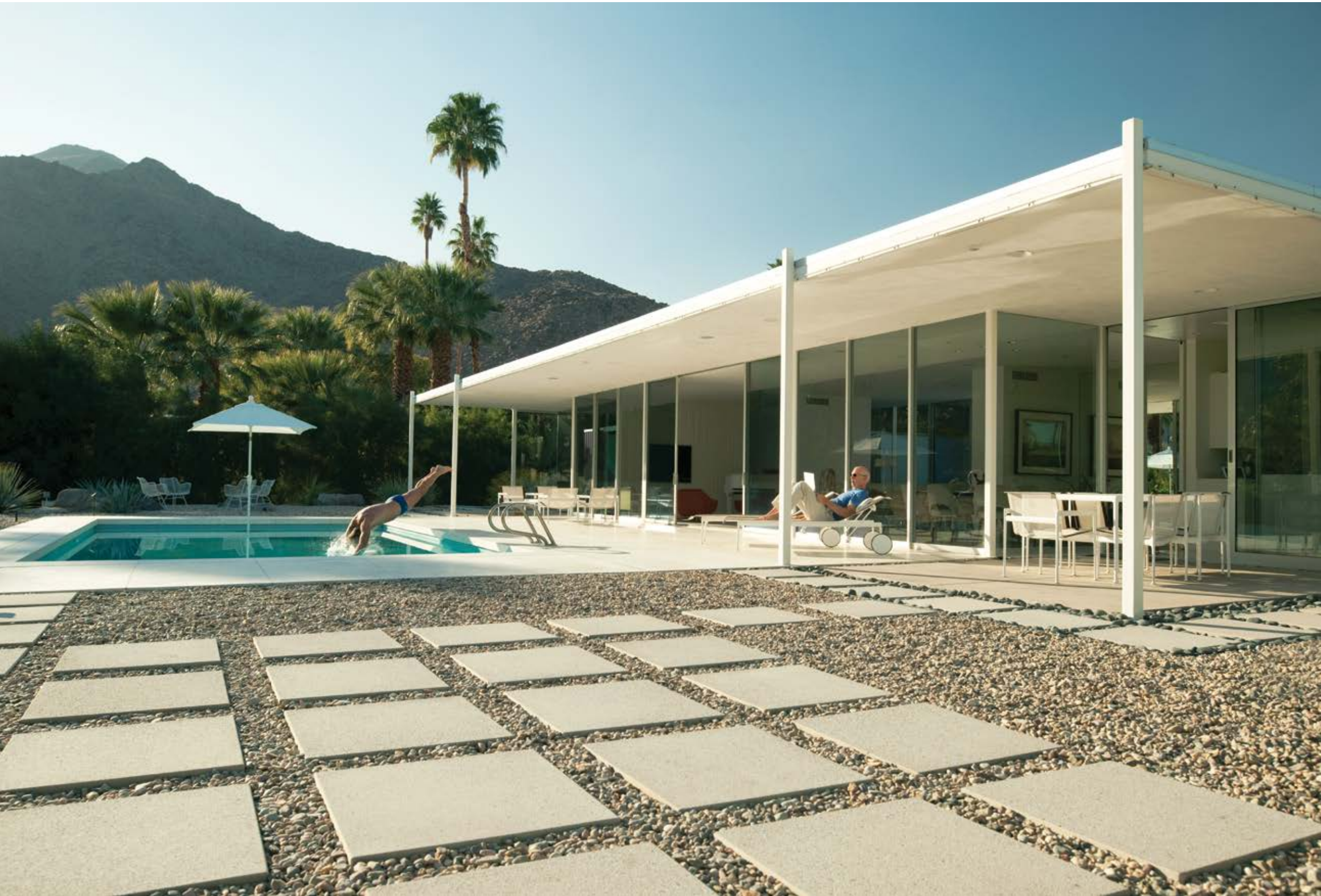
BRIAN McGUIRE

"I first came to Palm Springs in the mid-1990s as a tourist from the Los Angeles area. It was the dead of summer and the city was deserted. Much of Racquet Club Estates was boarded up and derelict. Palm Canyon Drive was lined with empty storefronts. Strangely, that was part of the attraction: a place with exuberant architecture but empty of people.

"I was drawn to the clean, crisp lines and the light transparent feeling of the house I later acquired in 2005. It was one of seven houses in a never-completed tract of thirty-eight all-steel houses designed by architects Donald Wexler and Ric Harrison in 1961. These steel houses were impervious to heat, warping, rotting, swelling, termites, earthquakes, and fire. Long neglected and forgotten in an unfashionable part of the city, the seven steel houses were granted Class 1 Historic Site status in 2001 by the City of Palm Springs. In 2012, Steel Development House No. 2 became the first Midcentury structure in Palm Springs to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The nomination was my gift to Don Wexler. Given Wexler's amazing vision in designing affordable, mass-producible, and indestructible houses for the middle class—sustainable before that was even a concept—it seemed inevitable that his work would achieve national recognition.

"I think one of the tenets of Modernism is that an uncluttered, uncomplicated living space is a metaphor for a simple, meaningful life. Success should not be judged by the amount of 'stuff' one has accumulated, nor should the individual be defined by what one has, but by what one gives. These principles today resonate in a world of diminishing resources and conscious attempts to minimize our 'carbon footprint.' What better way than to live in a steel house?"





PALM SPRINGS GLASS HOUSE

(William F. Cody, 1967)

WILLIAM F. CODY

DAVID ZIPPEL / MICHAEL JOHNSTON

TONY AWARD-WINNING LYRICIST AND SONGWRITER / AWARD-WINNING
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER AND FILM SET DESIGNER

“My partner, Michael—well actually, he’s my husband now—has been coming out here since he was a kid, when his parents took him to the Riviera resort in the late ’50s. I met Michael when he was living in L.A. about twenty years ago. He was working as a production designer for movies at the time. The first time I came to Palm Springs was in the mid-’80s. To be honest, it didn’t seem like there was much to do, and I just didn’t get it. As Michael revealed the desert to me, I discovered it’s not only beautiful, but very few places in the world have such an interesting mixture of people, and in such an exotic setting. There’s intellectual activity here, there’s culture. I think it’s a magnet for talent. I do a lot of work in the desert. I’m not the most spiritual person you’ll meet, but it is inspiring here. The beauty is just breathtaking and every morning I wake up here and I’m amazed at how beautiful it is.

“Michael and I have been going back and forth between New York City and Palm Springs—but nowadays we probably spend more than half our time here. About five years ago we bought the architecturally significant William F. Cody–designed ‘Palm Springs Glass House’ in the neighborhood of [Vista] Las Palmas. The house was in pretty much original condition and needed a lot of loving care. Michael is also an architectural designer, and completed what turned out to be an award-winning renovation of the house. He added on a seamless extension, and restored the 1967 house to its original all-white interior/exterior motif. He even added a few more windows, which is hard to imagine in a house with this much glass!” —David Zippel

RACQUET CLUB GARDEN VILLAS

(William F. Cody, 1960)

JOE AND KIM ZAKOWSKI

FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE PALM SPRINGS ART MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN CENTER

“Midcentury Modern architecture is an expression of living at one with nature, the light of the sun, the blue of a swimming pool, the emerald green grass, the rose-tinted mountain, and cocktails with friends in a home warmed by a fire at night. We love the people here, the feeling that is indescribable to an outsider or tourist just looking in. The dreams of friends and the cast of characters have helped to create an incredible fantasy that is Palm Springs!

“We looked at multiple Midcentury neighborhoods in Palm Springs, but the moment we stepped behind the gates of the Racquet Club Garden Villas [adjacent to the historic celebrity retreat the Racquet Club] we knew it was really something special and rare. The villa we were standing in was one of a kind. It had a pedigree. It was designed by architect “Wild” Bill Cody in 1959, and we love all things Cody. He is without a doubt the best and most eloquent architect. The villa was owned by the developer Paul Trousdale as his own personal residence. The Racquet Club Garden Villas had been somehow unknown to us and most of the outside world. That would all change with Patrick McGrew—the Cody expert with the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation—urging us to buy this ‘Baby Cody.’

“We unveiled our Baby Cody and the community to the Palm Springs Art Museum’s Architecture and Design Council in January 2013 with a tour for a hundred people. Kim became president of the Racquet Club Garden Villas Homeowners Association, we signed up on every subcommittee, and then we began the process of historic district designation with Patrick McGrew. Sadly we lost Patrick suddenly, but the Racquet Club Garden Villas did become the City of Palm Springs’s Historic District #3 in November 2013. This was our crowning achievement, a labor of love for Patrick McGrew and Bill Cody.”



