

Famous Residents Create History of Old Las Palmas **By Sharon Apfelbaum**

Palm Springs' first and oldest neighborhood, Old Las Palmas, dates from the mid-1920s when it was developed by New York builder Alvah Hicks and his son, Harold. Its 300 or so homes sit in a boundary squared north and south by Sevens and Ajejo roads, and east and west by Palm Canyon Drive and Via Monte Vista.

The scenic Dry Falls canyon and the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument stand sentry over the eclectic architecture and storied residents who helped make Palm Springs history.

The residents' diverse professions – movie stars, Hollywood moguls, musicians, industrial tycoons, designers and entertainment producers – mirror architectural styles that meander from Spanish Colonial to Palm Springs modern. These early residents brought glamour, professionalism and creativity to a bucolic community imbued with colorful Indian heritage.

In the early 1930s New York builder Alvah Hicks built Our Lady of Solitude Church and some of the first high-quality houses, including an iconic Spanish-style home at Alejo and Belardo roads where the Hicks family lived until 1936 when Realtor Muriel Fulton purchased and enlarged the property, turning it into The Cloisters, a bed and breakfast inn. Its next iteration as Casa de Liberace came after the legendary pianist purchased and remodeled it in opulent style, living there until his death in 1987.

Pioneering meteorologist Irving Krick's forecasts predicted weather conditions for the Allies' World War II landing in Normandy. His home on Mountain View Place was the final residence of Gene Autry, Hollywood's singing cowboy and smart investor. **(Pictured is Rancho Autry, one of the private residences in the Old Las Palmas neighborhood. It is the home of Jackie Autry, widow of the "singing cowboy" Gene Autry.)**



Entrepreneur Kirk Kerkorian traded TransAmerica, took over MGM, bought United Artists, and played tennis with Charlton Heston at his Prescott Drive home.

On nearby Mountain View Place lived Carl Lykken, who in 1914 established the first mercantile store with the town's only telephone line and became its first postmaster. The street was also home to theater owner Homer Curran, creator of Broadway's "Song of Norway," and producer Glen Larson ("Magnum P.I.," "Knight Rider").

“Flying Grandmother “ Zaddie Bunker, the first woman pilot to break the sound barrier in 1969, lived on Hermosa Place.

Merito Place is a pocket of more modern success. Here lived singer Lena Horn and actress Lily Tomlin and where Lawrence Harvey developed “Villa Serena.” Nearby lies Warner Brothers co-founder Jack Warner’s (Merrie Melodies and Looney Tunes) rolling estate. What once was actor George Hamilton’s home is perched on the rocky cliff above.

Best-selling author Sidney Sheldon created a compound on Via Lola after purchasing actress Andrea Leeds’ and Winthrop Rockefeller’s homes. The property includes a large, naturally landscaped lot devoted to desert conservation.

Sheldon’s long-time neighbors, Kirk and Anne Douglas, purchased their Mid-century modern home in 1957 from investor Bob Howard, whose family owned the race horse Seabiscuit.

“Violinist of the Century” Jascha Heifetz lived in a modest home on Via Sol, not far from the Via Norte home where ventriloquist Edgar Bergen raised his young daughter, Candice. Mary Martin lived close by, on Camino Norte.

A snapshot of Old Las Palmas reflects the history of Palm Springs as well as the diversity and early successes of America.

For more information about the City’s 28 organized neighborhoods in Palm Springs or for details about organizing your neighborhood, visit www.palmspringsneighborhoods.com.