

A closer look at seven historic Palm Springs neighborhoods

Written by

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Keep an eye on the street signs as you cruise through Palm Springs and you'll notice distinctive toppers that identify areas like the Mesa, Sunmor Estates and the Movie Colony.

These neighborhood name plates are the brainchild of the Palm Springs Neighborhood Involvement Committee. The first signs went up in 2008 in the El Mirador and Movie Colony sections as a pilot program.

"We wanted to try them out," said Lee Bonno, director of Neighborhood and Community Relations for the city of Palm Springs.

Each individual neighborhood association comes up with its own logo, font and color scheme for the signs, and decides where to put them. They also pay to have them made. "I love seeing what each neighborhood comes up with," said Bonno.

The program is the most recent outgrowth of the 2005 city ordinance enacted to assist in organizing neighborhood associations for better communication between the city offices and residents.

"Being part of a neighborhood gives residents a sense of pride and ownership in the city," said Kevin Towner, chairman of the Palm Springs Neighborhood Involvement Committee. "They tend to take better care of their homes. It's not unusual to see people out walking, who stop to talk because they know who their neighbors are."

There are currently 28 defined neighborhoods in Palms Springs, with two more expected to be added before the end of the year.

Here's a closer look at seven historic areas:

Movie Colony East

History/origins: As Palm Springs grew in the 1930s, '40s and '50s, the Movie Colony expanded east from Palm Canyon Drive toward what's now Ruth Hardy Park and beyond. In contrast to the palatial estates in the Old Las Palmas area, this was where stars built smaller getaways. Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Frank

Sinatra all lived here.

Landmarks: Ruth Hardy Park, the Frey House I on N. Via Donna and Sinatra's E. Stewart Williams- designed home on Via Colusa.

Distinguishing features: A mix of styles, from midcentury modern to California ranch houses to walled estates. “We have more old movie stars than any other part of Palm Springs,” said Jim Franklin, former president of the Movie Colony East Neighborhood Organization.

Did you know: Filmmaker Cameron Crowe (“Almost Famous”) lived in Movie Colony East as a kid. Bob Hope owned two homes — one he kept as a guest house.

El Rancho Vista Estates

History/origins: This subdivision was developed by Robert Fey with 70 houses designed by Donald Wexler and Ric Harrison in the 1960s.

Landmarks: Gateway Park, on Gene Autry Trail and Vista Chino, was built next to El Rancho Vista Estates.

Distinguishing features: A collection of midcentury modern and California ranch homes on the east side of Palm Springs International Airport. Most retain their original profiles.

Did you know: Fitness guru Jack LaLanne's Palm Springs home was in El Rancho Vista Estates. Comic Andy Dick lived there, too.

Warm Sands

History/origins: Features historic homes that date back to the 1920s, long before the city was incorporated in 1938.

Landmarks: “Jungle Red,” a serpentine sculpture that sits at the entrance to the neighborhood at Ramon Road and Indian Trail.

Distinguishing features: An eclectic mix of small resorts, historic homes and the Ramon Mobile Home Park, which served as the neighborhood's social center for years.

Did you know: Past residents include screenwriter Howard Koch (Orson Welles' “War of the Worlds”) and artist Paul Grimm and activist Cleve Jones. Actor/producer Wesley Eure is a current resident.

The Mesa

History/origins: Originally subdivided by developer Edmond Fulford in the 1920s for his vision of a gated community in the south end of the city near the Indian Canyons.

Landmarks: The gatehouse built by Fulford at El Portal and S. Palm Canyon Drive was recently given new landscaping. Also, the Streamline Moderne Ship of the Desert house on Carmelita Way.

Distinguishing features: An eclectic collection of architectural styles, from Spanish and adobe houses of the '20s to the Donald Wexler “butterfly house” and Alexander midcentury moderns.

Did you know: Author Zane Grey (“Riders of the Purple Sage”), and actors Clark Gable and Carole Lombard had homes in the Mesa. Current residents include designer Trina Turk, actress Suzanne Somers, author Herman Wouk and singer Barry Manilow.

Tahquitz River Estates

History/origins: The Tahquitz River Wash gives this area its name. Most of the land was owned by Pearl McCallum McManus, daughter of the city's first permanent non-Indian resident, John Guthrie McCallum. In 1947, she partnered with L.A. developer Paul Trousedale to build the houses that make up the heart of the neighborhood.

Landmarks: Before the concrete-lined flood control channel was built, Tahquitz River would occasionally flood and take out the bridge that crossed the creek. The wash, bordering a park on North and South Riverside Drive, now has a permanent bridge.

Distinguishing features: The Spanish Revival houses of Palos Verdes Estates along Palm Canyon Drive were built in the early 1930s. The Trousedale Tahquitz River Estates are midcentury modern homes on large lots with walls of glass to take in the views of the San Jacinto Mountains.

Did you know: Dr. William Scholl, the famous foot doctor, owned a 10-acre estate in the old Palos Verdes Estates between Sonora and Morongo Roads.

Sunmor Estates

History/origins: The earliest mention of Sunmor Estates appeared in the October 1955 Palm Springs Villager magazine. The first houses were built by Robert “Bob” Higgins. The Alexander Construction Company took over building

out the neighborhood when Higgins' project went belly up.

Landmarks: In World War II, most of the Sunmor neighborhood was the western side of Palm Springs airport, which was used for the Ferrying Division of the Air Transport Command. Sixty-foot diameter concrete pads, or tie downs, dotted the area to keep planes at the ready to take off in case of another Pearl Harbor-style attack. The last remaining of these tie downs on Easmor Circle is a Class I historic site.

Distinguishing features: Most of the homes were built in the 1950s through early '60s. Designers include William Krisel, Donald Wexler and Charles DuBois.

Did you know: Former Palm Springs Mayor Frank Bogert lived in the Sunmor Estates home he purchased for about \$16,000 for more than 50 years before he died in 2009.

Historic Tennis Club

History/origins: This is one of the city's most historically significant neighborhoods. Nestled up against the San Jacinto Mountains, this neighborhood was part of the land owned by John Guthrie McCallum, who tried to develop Palm Springs into an agricultural area. Early residents included Harriet and Harold William Cody (Buffalo Bill's cousin), who built the Casa Cody Inn, and painter Gordon Coutts, whose 1924 Dar Marroc estate lives on as Korakia Pensione.

Landmarks: Actress Marion Davies' Mediterranean-style villa has been completely restored and is now known as The Willows Historic Palm Springs Inn. It sits across Tahquitz Canyon Way from La Vallauris restaurant in the house built by George Roberson, son of Palm Springs pioneer Nellie Coffman. And of course, the Palm Springs Tennis Club on Baristo Road, founded by Pearl McManus in 1937.

Distinguishing features: Architecturally rich, the Tennis Club neighborhood includes the Ojo del Desierto, built by Nellie Coffman for oil tycoon Thomas O'Donnell. The Ingleside Inn occupies the 1920s estate built by the Humphrey Birge family and turned into an inn by Ruth Hardy in the '40s.

Did you know: Several of the inns in the neighborhood provided respite for famous visitors. Albert Einstein stayed at Marion Davies' house; Winston Churchill is rumored to have been a guest of Coutts, as were early film stars Rudolph Valentino and Errol Flynn. Charlie Chaplin frequented Casa Cody.

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Photos by **Jay Calderon**, The Desert Sun



THE MESA: The El Portal gatehouse marks the entrance to the Mesa neighborhood in Palm Springs



THE MESA: Distinctive street sign toppers mark many Palm Springs neighborhoods.



THE MESA: The Ship of the Desert House on Carmelita Way is a landmark in the Mesa neighborhood



WARM SANDS: The "Jungle Red" sculpture by artist Delos Van Earl is a vibrant marker of the Warm Sands neighborhood.



HISTORIC TENNIS CLUB: The Del Marcos Hotel is an example of midcentury modern architecture in one of the city's most historically significant neighborhoods.



MOVIE COLONY: Palm Springs' first neighborhood street sign toppers went up in 2008 in the Movie Colony and El Mirador neighborhoods as a pilot program that's since been expanded.



SUNMOR ESTATES: This historic circle in the middle of the street in the Sunmor neighborhood on Easemor Circle was a tie-down or "hardstand" area for aircraft during World War II.



SUNMOR ESTATES: This plaque commemorates the historic circle in the middle of the street in the Sunmor neighborhood on Easemor Circle, which was a tie-down or "hardstand" area for aircraft during World War II.



SUNMOR ESTATES: The Sunmor Neighborhood has its own sign designation in Palm Springs



EL RANCHO VISTA ESTATES: Homes in El Rancho Vista Estates were designed by Donald Wexler and Ric Harrison in the 1960s



EL RANCHO VISTA ESTATES: A home on East Paseo Barbara is seen in the El Rancho Vista Estates neighborhood of Palm Springs.



EL RANCHO VISTA ESTATES: This sign marks the El Rancho Vista Estates neighborhood in Palm Springs.



TAHQUITZ RIVER ESTATES: A pair of hikers cross under the pedestrian bridge in the Tahquitz River Estates neighborhood



MOVIE COLONY EAST: The Irwin house in the Movie Colony East neighborhood is filled with sculptures.