

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

# THE FAIRWAY COTTAGES 1961

Fairway Lane, Shadow Mountain Resort & Club, Palm Desert, CA



Photo: pscondo.com

This 54-unit development, built on the 11th and 18th fairways of the Shadow Mountain Golf Club, was one of the Wexler-Harrison firm's last commissions and was an immediate and resounding success.

The 2 bedroom, 2 bath, 1,715 square foot "cottages" are characteristic of Harrison's style, with his signature design elements of palm trees perforating a low-slung roof, creating a breezy delineation of the front door, and slump-stone fireplaces.

**ARCHITECTS:**  
RICHARD HARRISON, AIA  
WEXLER & HARRISON

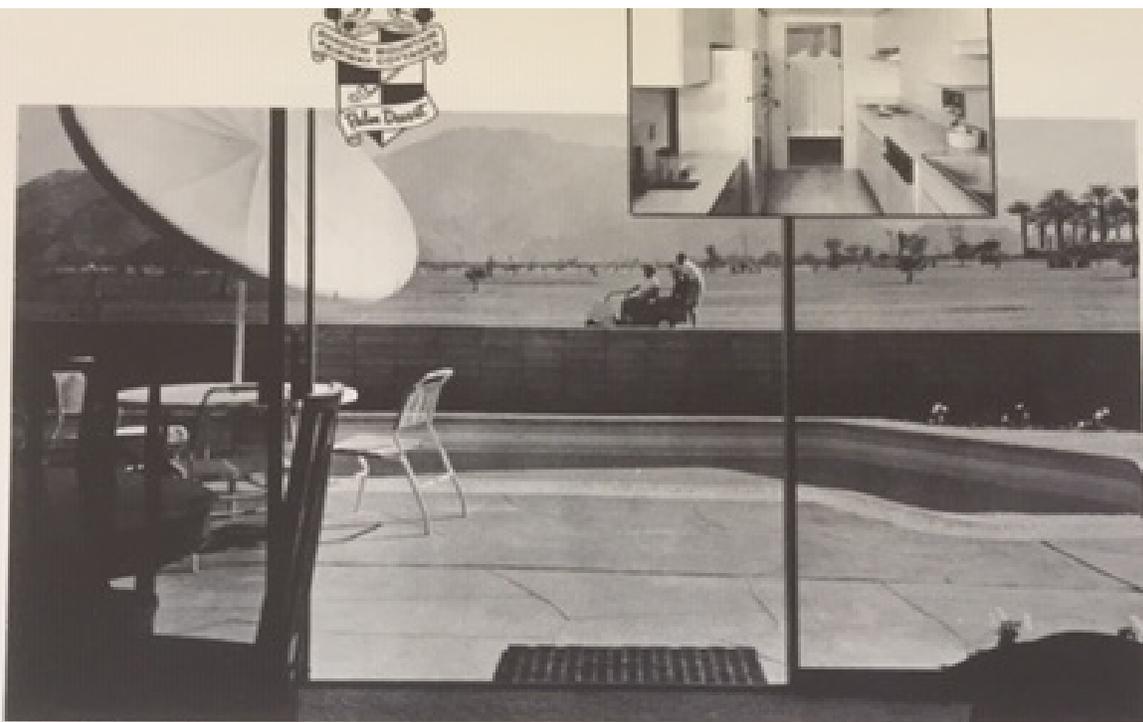
**BUILDER:**  
ADRIAN SCHWILCK



# The Fairway Cottages



Photos: [pscondos.com](http://pscondos.com)



## *Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages*

*for that feeling of luxurious care-free living*

OWN YOUR OWN GOLD MEDALLION ALL-ELECTRIC HOME



Located in Palm Desert on the beautiful Shadow Mountain Golf Course with breath-taking views in every direction. Your front lawn is the immaculately kept lush green golf course. The balance of the property is beautifully master landscaped and a resident manager will be there to care for your needs and relieve you of many annoying problems in maintaining your home.

All of this adds up to gracious, care-free living in a beautifully designed and appointed home with every comfort and convenience.

### FAIRWAY COTTAGE HOMES FEATURE:

- 1715 sq. ft. of living space
- Two bedrooms, den and 2 baths
- Luxurious dressing room
- Carpets and drapes
- Landscaped and maintained
- 495 sq. ft. covered patio
- 12' by 22' enclosed carport and storage
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- Heating and refrigeration for year-round comfort, 5 ton Westinghouse heat pump
- Underground utilities

You are invited to visit our furnished model decorated by Vinette Curtis, A.I.D., of Nicholson's of Palm Springs

PRICED FROM \$33,850 to \$39,500  
TERMS IF DESIRED

## SHADOW MOUNTAIN FAIRWAY COTTAGES

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## Richard Harrison (1924-1999), AIA

Richard Arnett Harrison, AIA was born in Los Angeles. Harrison studied aeronautical engineering in the Navy and went on to study architecture at the University of Southern California. Harrison worked for William F. Cody from July 1951 to February 1953, where he worked with his soon-to-be partner Donald Wexler. Wexler and Harrison went on to build custom homes and several tract home developments in Palm Springs. The Fairway Cottages were designed by Harrison in the final year of their partnership which dissolved amicably by 1961, as Harrison preferred to concentrate on residential projects and Wexler was interested in civic projects.



Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison, Source: US Modernist

# Fairway Cottages' History

Tracy Conrad

Special to The Desert Sun

Jan 24, 2021

Sometimes architectural history is planned, and sometimes it just happens. One such story is a twisty tale of an unlikely alliance featuring three desert characters who, without aiming to, nonetheless created architectural history in south Palm Desert. The three characters were businessmen and developers Adrian Schwilck, Cliff Henderson and architect Richard A. Harrison.

Schwilck's career in real estate development had always followed the one-man-band-approach. While others might bow to accredited architects or proven engineers, Schwilck relied on only himself to design, construct, market and sell, not just controlling but literally executing every phase in the development process. And why not? His approach led to his owning over 700 prime acres in south Palm Desert by 1956, Silver Spur Ranch.

After five years and only moderate success, he was forced to take on partners. Finding that intolerable, "he sold his share of the whole thing — acreage, the Ranch, all lock stock and barrel of it — to buy 64 substandard lots and a gift-wrapped vision from Clifford Henderson."

Henderson, the founder of Palm Desert, had a branding problem by the late 1950s. Before moving to the desert, Henderson lived in Pacific Palisades, along the pleasant coastline of Los Angeles County. The leafy town of large lots and custom-built homes was inspiration for Henderson's plans for Palm Desert, surrounding its signature centerpiece, the Shadow Mountain Club.

The area around the club was restricted in many ways to allow only the building of prestigious, one-of-a-kind homes on sprawling parcels owned by the gentry of the club's membership starting in the 1940s. A decade later, Henderson had bought for himself some 50 acres next to the club where he expected to build a lush 18-hole golf course dotted on its borders by cottages.

# Fairway Cottages' History, Cont'd.

And that was a big problem. Right across the street from his own neighbors and best customers, the people who had kicked in on his risky wager to build a showcase of a new desert town, Henderson imagined building multi-unit dwellings on lots that didn't meet the zoning code.

Richard Harrison would produce a solution. Harrison and Donald Wexler, another young desert architect, had a lot in common in the early 1950s. They met while working for William Cody's firm and found they were compatible in ambition, talent as well as in circumstance, both being at the start of their careers and their young families.

Leaving Cody's firm, together they established their own practice in 1952. During this time, they designed many projects in Palm Springs including El Rancho Vista residential tract, commercial buildings and the so-called Steel Houses built by Robert and George Alexander, when Harrison encountered Clifford Henderson and Adrian Schwilck.

By 1958, Cliff Henderson had completed Palm Desert's first 18-hole golf course, designed by Gene Sarazen. The next phase of his long-term plan — edging the Shadow Mountain Golf Course with small homes (or "apartment units" as they were called then) — would require a fight. Henderson faced the wrath of area homeowners, one calling the project "proposed barracks."

Adrian Schwilck cashed out his share of Silver Spur Ranch to buy Henderson's dream, land, plans and name, letting Henderson off the hook. In turn, Henderson guided Schwilck through the minefield of rezoning and approvals with one of his edicts being that Schwilck had to hire an architect of appropriate talent and prestige to ensure a development worthy of its neighbors.

# Fairway Cottages' History, Cont'd.

The Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages, one of the Wexler-Harrison firm's last commissions, was an immediate and resounding success. The cottages are characteristic of what can now be seen as Harrison's unique style, with his signature design element of palm trees perforating a low-slung roof, creating a breezy delineation of the front door.

By 1961, Wexler and Harrison were amicably going off on their own and Harrison's solo practice was partially launched by Schwilck. And Harrison's spectacular designs created such success for Schwilck, he was able to buy back Silver Spur Ranch. He further hired Harrison to adapt the multi-unit designs of the Shadow Mountain Cottages into duplexes and houses for Silver Spur, filling in every undeveloped lot and building an entire street of Harrison-designed homes on Feather Trail.

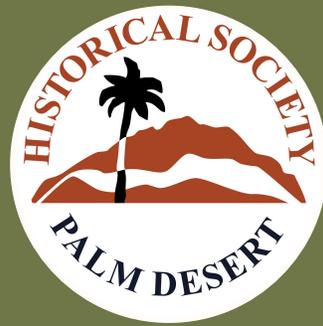
Harrison's roof cutouts are recognizable throughout the Coachella Valley from the Wexler-Harrison design of Alan Ladd's home in Palm Springs to the Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages through family homes on Feather Trail in Silver Spur Ranch to his later work for Bermuda Dunes Colony.

Further, Harrison incorporated shade with generous overhangs, he specified slump stone on walls interrupted by inset columns of breeze block, luxurious Italian glass-tiled showers, and regularly included a high horizontal window in the master bedroom allowing homeowners to sleep under the gentle cool of the desert evenings.

Harrison's connection to the Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages and Silver Spur Ranch had been unknown until Susie O'Hair and Luke Leuschner began delving into the history of O'Hair's Harrison-designed house. Their scholarship unearthed a remarkable architectural heritage of some 170 houses in south Palm Desert, with Feather Trail being its own veritable historic district. Designed by master architect Richard Harrison, built by developer Adrian Schwilck as first imagined by Cliff Henderson, this historic enclave in south Palm Desert is the result of their alliance.

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

One in a series of monographs created by the Historical Society of Palm Desert's Architecture and Design Committee celebrating the many architecturally-significant homes in Palm Desert.



## Museum Address:

Located in the Old Palm Desert Fire Station  
72-861 El Paseo Drive, Palm Desert

Open Friday - Monday October through May  
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Free Admission

## Mailing Address:

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