

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

SHADOW MOUNTAIN RESORT AND CLUB 1946-2021

45750 San Luis Rey Avenue, Palm Desert, CA



Except where noted, all photos courtesy of the Historical Society of Palm Desert Archives

It all began in 1944 when General Patton dismantled his WWII training camp responsible for preparing troops for desert warfare. The site of the *Palm Village Motor Pool* once again became an enormous empty desert space. This vacant tureen was noticed by an entrepreneurial group of affluent and influential businessmen.

1946:

Leading the pack was Clifford Henderson, fondly know as “The Father of Palm Desert” along with Edgar Bergen, Harold Lloyd, Leonard Firestone, and Phil Henderson, among others, who jointly established the Palm Desert Corporation. They purchased 1,620 acres at a rumored \$26 an acre. It was Cliff Henderson’s vision and his belief that he could find a way to provide utilities to this large undeveloped desertscape and build a thriving city.

ARCHITECTS:

RESORT:

HENRY EGGERS,
KAUFMANN,
LIPPINCOTT, & EGGERS
A. QUINCY JONES
JOHN OUTCAULT

FAIRWAY COTTAGES:

RICHARD HARRISON,
WEXLER & HARRISON

FAIRVIEW COTTAGES:

RICHARD DORMAN

GOLF COURSE DESIGN:

GENE SARAZEN
GEORGE VON ELM

THE FOUNDERS:

CLIFFORD HENDERSON
EDGAR BERGEN
HAROLD LLOYD
LEONARD FIRESTONE,
RANDALL HENDERSON
PHIL HENDERSON



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Clifford Henderson (1895–1984)

Born in Iowa, Henderson graduated from the University of Southern California with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1917. He served in the 35th Ambulance Unit, in France during World War I, then transferred to the 101st Aero Squadron.

After the war, Henderson settled in Los Angeles and was chairman of ground arrangements for the Army. In 1928, he served as the first manager of the Los Angeles airport system.

With his brother Phil, Henderson built the Pan-Pacific Auditorium in 1935. The landmark Streamline Moderne convention center, designed by Los Angeles architects Wurdeman & Becket, was the region's primary indoor venue with 100,000 square feet of exhibition space and seating for up to 6,000.

During WWII, he was involved in planning the Burma Hump air route, and also served as military governor of Dakar in North Africa.



Truck dumping the first commercial dirt in July 1946.

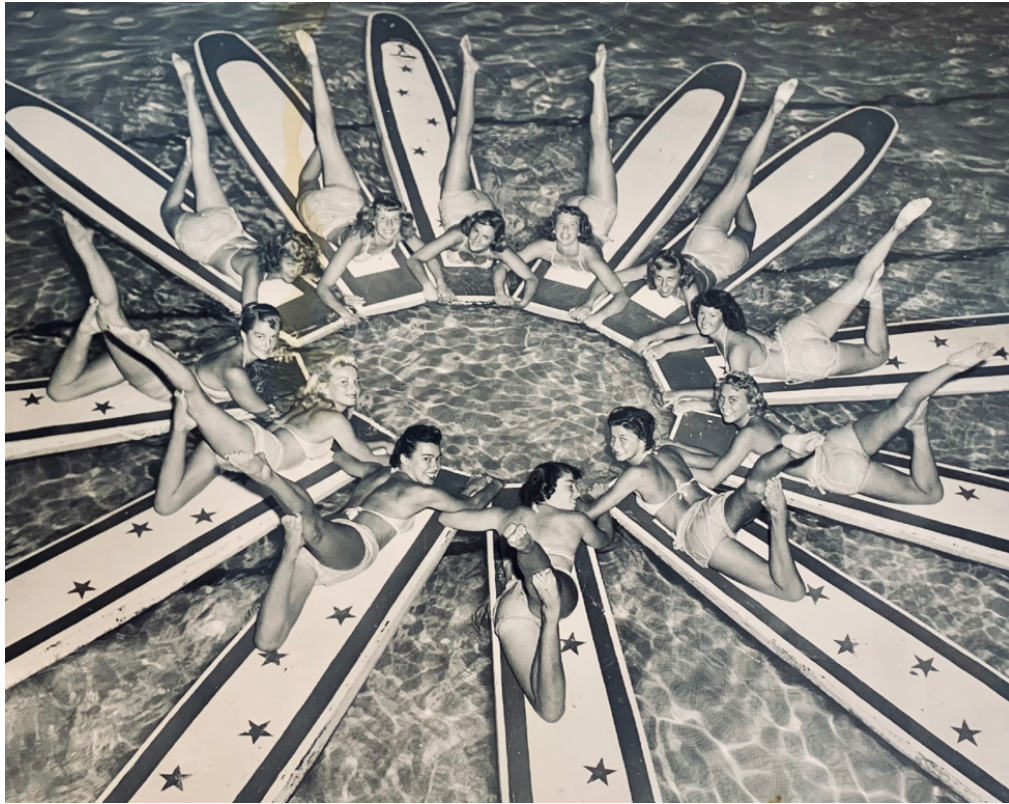


Shadow Mountain was one of Cliff's first desert dreams he made come true. Kaufmann, Lippincott, and Eggers were the original architects for this mammoth project. Kaufmann was famous for designing the La Quinta Inn and the Hoover Dam. Shadow Mountain work started in 1946 with the construction of a large 600 foot long lake.

1947:

Eventually, the Shadow Mountain complex featured a lake with rowboats, ducks and trout, a bar with a waterfall and tropical birds, a merry-go-round and children's snack shack, nine-hole golf course, a quarter-mile racetrack, an outdoor auditorium for concerts, the first outdoor movie screen for community movie nights, polo grounds and a landing strip for airplanes.





In 1947 an enormous 130 foot long, 350,000 gallon, figure 8 shaped pool with olympic height diving platforms and very tall water slides were added. Members and guests enjoy Janet Dee's water ballet troupe which performed regularly on white surfboards as seen in the photo above.

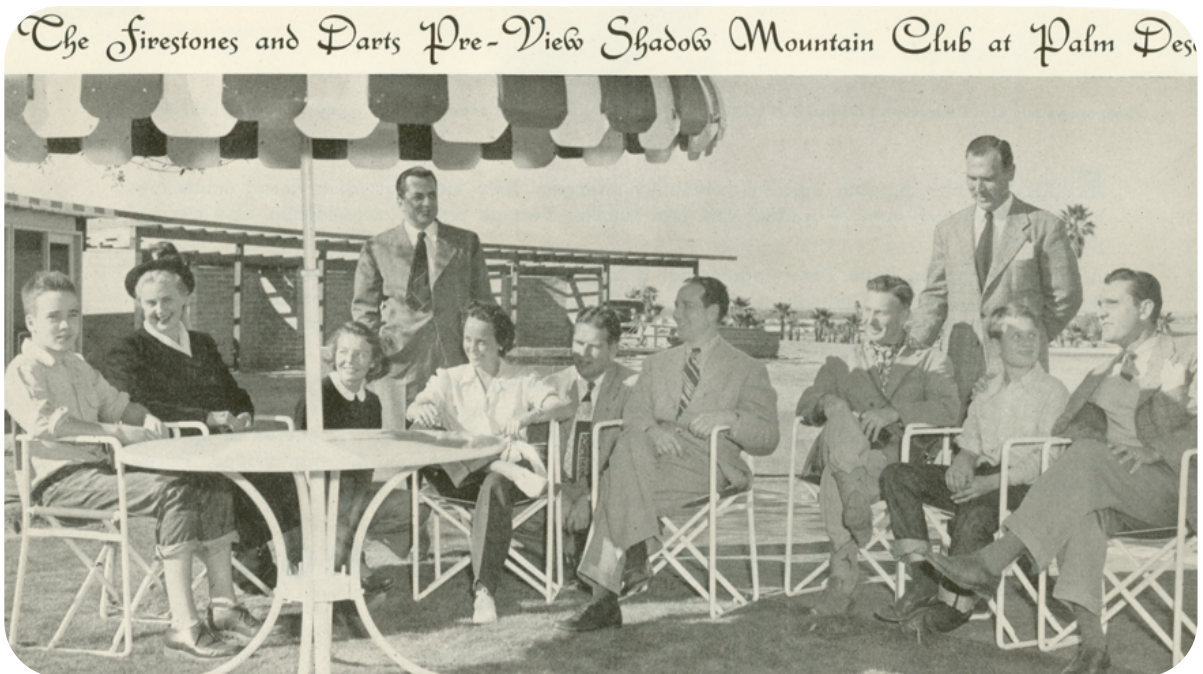


1948:

In 1948 an International Style clubhouse, dining room and pro shop was designed by the architect Tom Douglas. From the beginning the club was filled with celebrities and sports personalities. Shadow Mountain Club had everything: stables, race track, model train house, high diving, rainbow trout fishing, movies, theater, parties and more. It truly served as the social center for the young community. This club probably played the largest role in the early development of Palm Desert.

During the Club's Grand Opening, there were extravagant shows including aquatic events, water ballet and diving exhibitions, which continued to entertain members. According to the Desert Sun:

FOR FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS, hundreds of men and women of the First Families of society not only from California but all points of the nation foregathered to rub shoulders with world-noted leaders of the arts, sciences and professions for the formal opening of fabulous Shadow Mountain Club at Palm Desert, founded by Clifford W. Henderson, just 12 miles southeast of Palm Springs.



Seen above from left to right: son of Mr. & Mrs Leonard Firestone, Hazel Wray Davey, Mrs. Justin Dart, Mr. Davey, Mrs. Leonard Firestone, Mr. Justin Dart, Leonard Firestone, Clifford Henderson, Carl Tamm, son of Mr & Mrs. Firestone, and Fred Renke

The affair was strictly invitational, with formal dinners, tea dances, a buffet dinner, a spectacular aquacade in the Club's huge pool, a rodeo, boating on the lake in the desert, an Old West parade, flag raising ceremonies with aerial bomb salutes, fireworks and huge searchlights sweeping the desert skies.

Society columns featured a cavalcade of high-profile captains of industry who chose to holiday in the desert, invariably led by Leonard Firestone of the eponymous tire company. Tycoons such as R.B. White, President of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, and Clarence Woolley the founder of American Radiator Co., William P. Lear, founder of Lear Inc., subsequently the Lear Jet Corporation, Earl Gilmore of Gilmore Oil and Stadium, H.F. Johnson of Johnson Wax, and Earl H. Hoover of the vacuum cleaner empire, were all noted as visitors as early as 1950.



Upper left: Randall Henderson, Mrs. Tommy Tomson, Cliff Henderson, Mortimer Snerd (puppet), Edgar Bergen, and Hedda Hopper (left to right)
Above: Kathy and Bing Crosby
Lower left: Gloria and Jimmy Stewart

Celebrities like Jimmy Stewart, Dick Powell, Robert Montgomery, Loretta Young, Greer Garson, Bette Davis, Jeanette McDonald, Ann Southern and Harold Lloyd were active members or visitors, and had migrated eastward from Palm Springs. Jimmy McHugh even wrote a special song named for the club.

Entertainments featured top headliners like Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Rudy Valee, William Boyd (Hopalong Cassidy) and Edgar Bergen.

More recent celebrity visitors included James Franciscus, Robert Stack, Farah Fawcett, Rosie Casals, Billie Jean King, and Michael Chang.

The adults looked forward to themed parties like the Aladdin's Ball, a Monte Carlo night, and tropical luaus, but the formal Shadow Ball was the most important social event of the season.



Henry Eggers, also the architect for the Firecliff Lodge, focused on the clubhouse design. The massive stone fireplace topped with a huge copper hood is a memorable feature of the resort that can still be enjoyed today.

Tracy Conrad from the Desert Sun shared, “ Luke Leuschner and Susie O’Hair of the Historical Society of Palm Desert explain that A. Quincy Jones was also hired during the early building phases and likely altered the original plans. Luke says that Walter White was hired to redesign the club in 1955 but his concept was never built. And architects Harold Bissner and Robert Pitchford also designed an unrealized cocktail lounge addition.”

Julius Shulman, (1910-2009) was commissioned by Clifford Henderson to take photos of the Club restaurant and lounge.



Photos: J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10)



1953:

On July 1, 1953, a deal was struck between the members of the Shadow Mountain Club and Cliff Henderson, founder and president of the Palm Desert Corp. and one of the founding fathers of Palm Desert, that allowed members to purchase shares of common stock to raise money for future development. Henderson stipulated that the Palm Desert Development Corp. was a real estate organization that would retire from activity after the Shadow Mountain Club had been fully developed and sold to members. Plans to build a large wall around the Shadow Mountain community, construct new roads and place utilities underground as well as a new hotel and choice parcels around the development were funded by selling shares of common stock to interested members. The price of the land and buildings of the new proposed development was valued at \$560,000. Both preferred and common shares were sold. Members who did not elect to participate in the ownership corporation were to continue their membership without prejudice.

1958:

January 24, the Shadow Mountain Golf Course was incorporated. The Shadow Mountain Golf Course, founded by Monrad "Mon" C. Wallgren (the retired Governor of Washington State) was the first golf course in Palm Desert. The Club garnered 300 members by 1960. Legendary and famed golfers Gene Sarazen and George Von Elm envisioned the course to be the design of the future. Their design was focused on providing a balance between being player-friendly and not overtaxing golfers. The golf course location benefits from the Santa Rosa Mountains protecting the course from desert winds. Over 700 palm trees were trucked in from Long Beach.

The City of Palm Desert designated the Shadow Mountain Golf Club as an Historic Landmark in 2010.





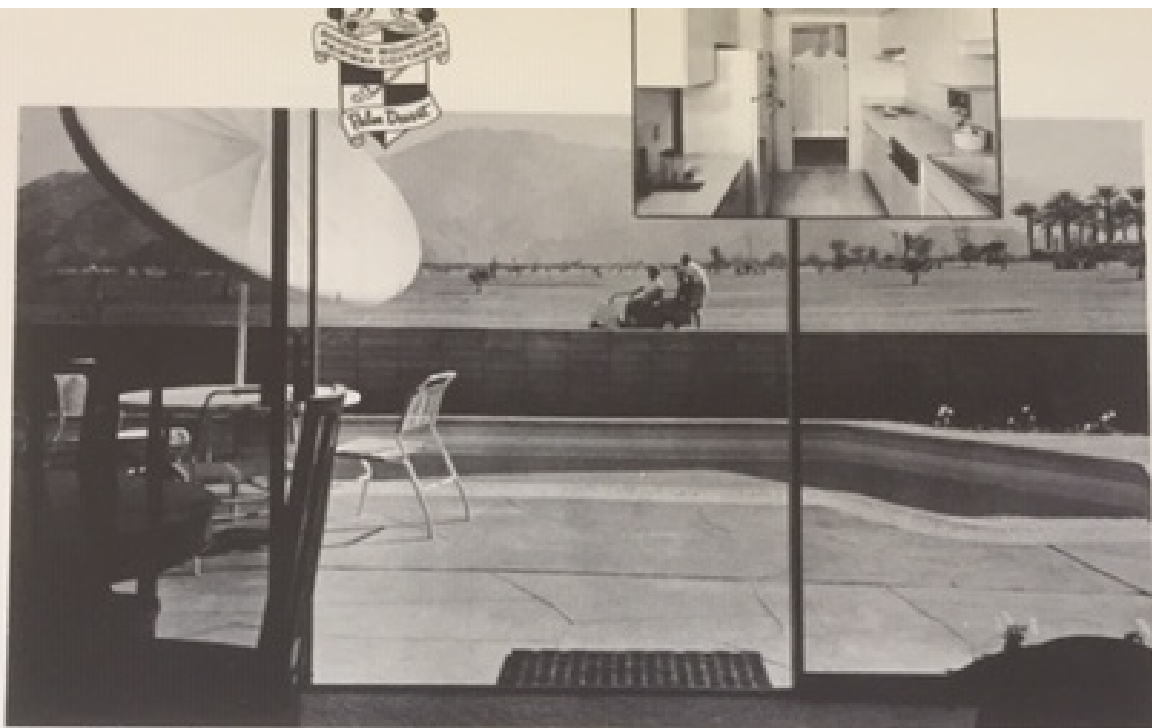
1960s:

The Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages, designed by architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison were built between the 11th and 18th fairways.

The Fairway Cottages are an example of mid-century architecture. This development, designed by Richard Harrison, was one of the Wexler-Harrison firm's last commissions and 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 elements of palm trees perforating a low-slung roof, creating a breezy delineation of the front door.



Photo: www.pscondos.com



Shadow Mountain Fairway Cottages

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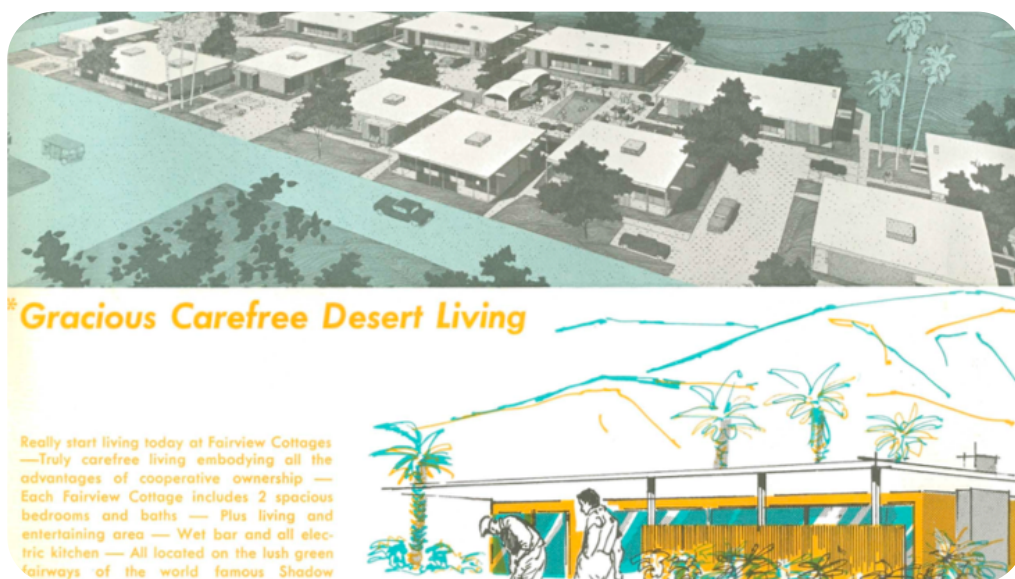
1960-1965:

Architect John Outcault was involved in the Shadow Mountain Club Restrooms and Dining room additions. Around the same time, he was also involved in the Shadow Mountain Gift and Apparel Shop addition.



1963:

Fairview Cottages were built. Located off Portola Ave near Hwy 111, Fairview Cottages is a Mid-Century Modern 20 unit small development designed by architect Richard Dorman. The developer was Monte Wenck. Fairview Cottages were part of a much larger development scheme which was never realized.



1964:

Architect, John Outcault was involved in the Shadow Mountain Club 40 Hotel-type units.

1965:

John Outcault was involved in designing the Shadow Mountain Golf Cart Storage.

1968:

The Shadow Mountain Golf Course and Resort were split and members had the choice to belong to one or the other. Upon separation the golf course received part of the structure to provide a clubhouse, pro shop, and enough land for a parking lot and access to Ironwood Street.

1970's:

The perimeter of the golf course was developed. An eclectic assortment of private homes, cottages and apartments were built.

The Club House interior was redecorated and a small kitchen, the "Pantry Kitchen", was added for short order lunches.

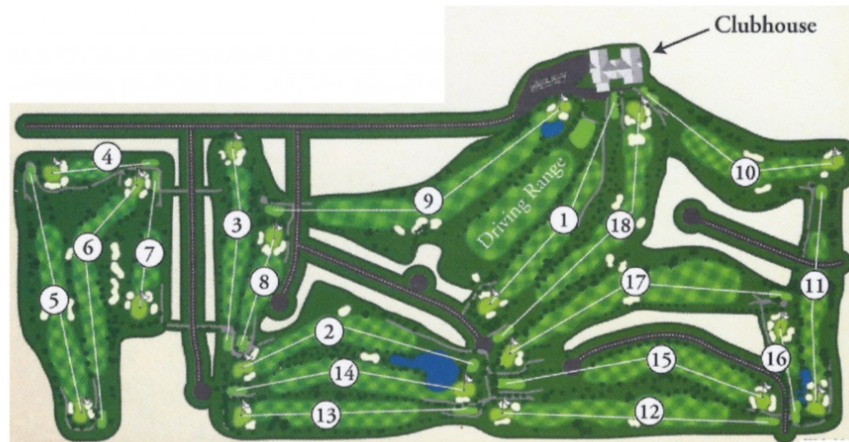
1976:

Heavy rain broke a dam support off HWY 74 sending boulders, sand and debris down the mountain ravaging the golf course and surrounding areas. The Shadow Mountain Golf Course members rolled up their sleeves providing needed labor and fund raising to repair the damage to the course.



1987:

The Filmer Mansion, that occupied a large parcel in the middle of the golf course was purchased and demolished making way for the lengthening of the 15th, 17th, and 18th holes.



2021:

Lindi Biggi, a local business woman and current owner of Venus De Fido, purchased the Shadow Mountain Golf Course and Clubhouse in August 2021:

“I knew it when it was successful. When we joined 25 years ago, it was 350 members, and it was a hot spot,” Biggi said. “And that’s what I want to do now. I want to bring it back to its original splendor. I’m going to do it all mid-century modern and just try to play on its history.”



THE ARCHITECTS

Henry Eggers, FAIA, Kaufmann, Lippincott & Eggers

Shadow Mountain Club and Resort

Henry Lawrence Eggers was born in Denver, Colorado. Earning his bachelor's degree in Architecture from Cornell in 1933, Eggers lived much of his life in the Los Angeles area. During the years 1946-1948 he was a partner in the firm Kaufmann, Lippincott and Eggers. In addition to partnering with Walter W. Wilkman in the firm Egger and Wilkman, Architects (1956-66), he ran his business from his home in Pasadena. In addition to his work at Shadow Mountain in Palm Desert Eggers designed the 1957 White Shadows House in Thunderbird Heights, Rancho Mirage.

A. Quincy Jones, FAIA

Shadow Mountain Club and Resort

Los Angeles architect A. Quincy Jones, studied at the University of Washington and worked for a number of eminent Los Angeles architects, including Paul R. Williams. Jones taught architecture at the University of Southern California from 1951-1967 and returned as Dean of the School of Fine Arts in 1975. Jones and Frederick E. Emmons founded Jones & Emmons in 1951. They utilized new building technologies that decreased costs and production time, and favored structural innovations including lightweight post-and-beam construction with pre-assembled parts. It is believed that Jones was retained by the Palm Desert Corporation to review and amend the original Shadow Mountain Club and Resort plans.

John Outcalt, AIA

Shadow Mountain Club and Resort Additions plus 40-unit Hotel

John Filer Outcalt, AIA, was a Palm Desert-based architect. After obtaining his degree from USC, Outcalt worked as a draftsman in the New York office of Alfred Easton Poor before becoming a draftsman in the Palm Springs office of Clark & Frey. Outcalt's work included residential, commercial, and institutional buildings throughout the Coachella Valley. He is best known for the Virgil Pinkley House (1960) in Palm Desert, Sea View School (1967) in Salton City, and the Indio Civic Center (1967-1968) in Indio.

THE ARCHITECTS

Richard Dorman, FAIA

Fairview Cottages

Dorman was born in 1922 and raised in Los Angeles. After flying 35 missions over the Pacific as a WWII B24 pilot, Dorman used the GI Bill to attend the USC School of Architecture. Upon graduation in 1951, he joined the design department at Welton Becket and Associates where he served until 1956, when he left to start his own firm. Dorman's best known works include the Ivory Tower Restaurant in Santa Monica (demolished), which won an AIA Honor Award in 1961; Los Angeles International Design Center (1962); the Malibu United Methodist Church (1965); and the Beverly Hills National Bank Building (1965) in Brentwood, which was featured in Architectural Record in 1967.

Richard Harrison (1924-1999), AIA

Fairway Cottages

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. They dissolved their partnership amicably by 1961, as Harrison preferred to concentrate on residential projects and Wexler was interested in civic projects.

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www.hspd.org

