

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

# THE WILLARD DURHAM HOUSE 1954

73325 Grapevine Street, Palm Desert, CA



Photos courtesy of Redfin.com

Mr. and Mrs. Durham commissioned Walter White to design a Palm Desert residence in 1952. Original drawings were by Walter White with construction completed in 1954. The 3,381 square foot home sits on .91 acres with 3 bedrooms and 3.5 baths.

The current view of the home shows that the carport has been enclosed. As well, the original triangular wall design projecting on the right of the garage appears to have been removed.

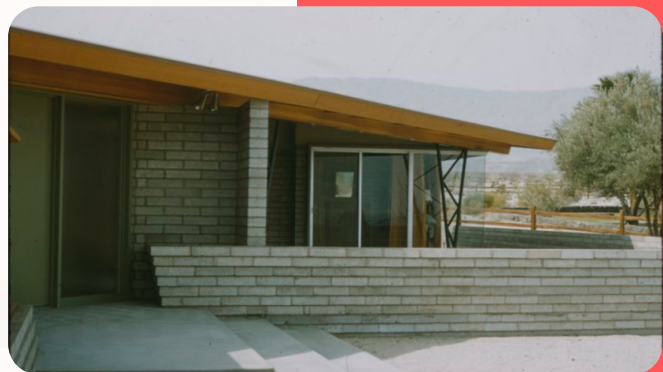
**ARCHITECT:**  
WALTER WHITE

**ORIGINAL OWNERS:**  
MR & MRS WILLARD  
HIGLEY DURHAM



**modernism week**

Official Modernism Week Event



# The House



Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara Archives

Walter White's thoughtful design for this home (plan above) details where the sun would be throughout the year (winter, spring, summer). White was well known for positioning his homes to capture the best light while reducing heat during the hottest times of the year. This often meant the home would sit at an angle on the lot, often a corner one. His use of expansive windows allowed a flow from inside to out. This home features an interior lanai to capture light and bring greenery into the home. It is interesting to note that Bedroom #3 (far left on the plan) is set at one end of the home. Many Palm Desert homes were built as winter retreats, this floor plan allowed guests to have their own private space while visiting.



## Construction 1953/4

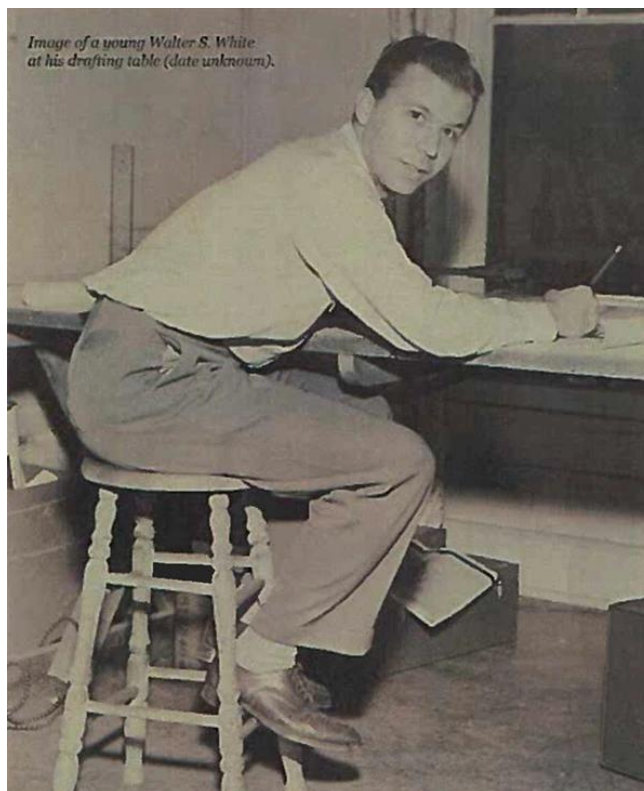


Construction photos 1953/4: UCSB Archives

Walter S. White was born in San Bernardino in 1917. Between 1933 and 1936 he attended San Bernardino High School. White learned how to build from his father, who owned a construction business in San Bernardino, California. He then honed his technical skills in a Southern California airplane factory during World War II; and worked in the offices of noted architects Rudolf M. Schindler, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Albert Frey. By the mid-1940s White was a designer, builder, and developer to the growing number of desert dwellers in California's Coachella Valley. With nearly 50 homes in Palm Desert alone attributed to White, he quickly became the "go to" designer for homes in the Shadow Mountain neighborhood.

## Walter S. White

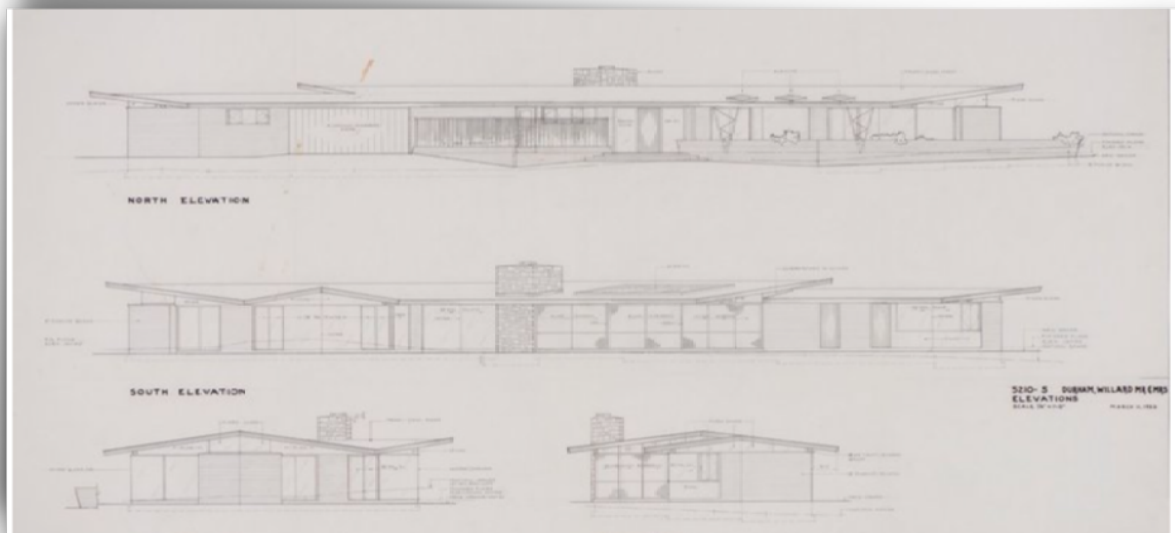
After moving to Colorado Springs in 1960, White designed many of the private residences in the exclusive Kissing Camels Estates. In the 1970s he established a reputation for designs that relied on passive solar energy.



White's career is notable for three major areas of focus: inexpensive, even DIY architecture; innovation in construction and materials; and concern for nature and sustainability. Just after World War II, White focused on designing minimal and small, inexpensive houses. These include his affordable wooden cabins for returning G.I.s, small concrete-block houses in the desert, and prefab steel and wood cabins for mountain sites. White had an abiding interest in the construction of buildings and was fearless in his experimentation. He held patents for innovative construction methods, including one for hyperbolic-paraboloid roofs. White's concern for the local landscape and the earth's environment led him to design buildings that took advantage of their natural settings while also caring for nature and sitting lightly on the land. The efficiency of his buildings and their effect on man's energy consumption became a focus of his practice.

Walter S. White died in 2002, at the age of 85.

Source: Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara



The Willard Durham House  
Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara Archives

# Willard H. Durham



Photo: findagrave.com

Willard Higley Durham was born in 1883 in New Haven, Connecticut. He graduated from Yale university with a Doctor of Philosophy degree and joined the faculty. While teaching at Yale, he wrote and edited "Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century" published by Yale University Press.

He became an English professor at University of California Berkeley in 1921 where he remained on faculty until his retirement in 1954.

It appears likely that this house was a retirement residence for the Durhams'. Mr. Durham only lived 6 months after the home was completed. He died in 1955 after a long illness.

Historical Society of Palm Desert  
[www.hspd.org](http://www.hspd.org)

