

**additional resources:**

Borrego Beginnings, Early Days in the Borrego Valley 1910-1960, Phil Brigandi,  
published by the Anza Borrego Desert Natural History Association.

the following web site contains additional information on Borrego Springs history:

Anza-Borrego State Park  
**[www.anzaborrego.statepark.org](http://www.anzaborrego.statepark.org)**

Borrego Springs Chamber of Commerce  
**[www.borregosprings.org](http://www.borregosprings.org)**

for information on other architectural tours and lectures:  
Save Our Heritage Organisation  
**[www.sohosandiego.org](http://www.sohosandiego.org)**

for books on Modern Architecture:  
**The SOHO Museum Shop**  
2476 San Diego Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92110

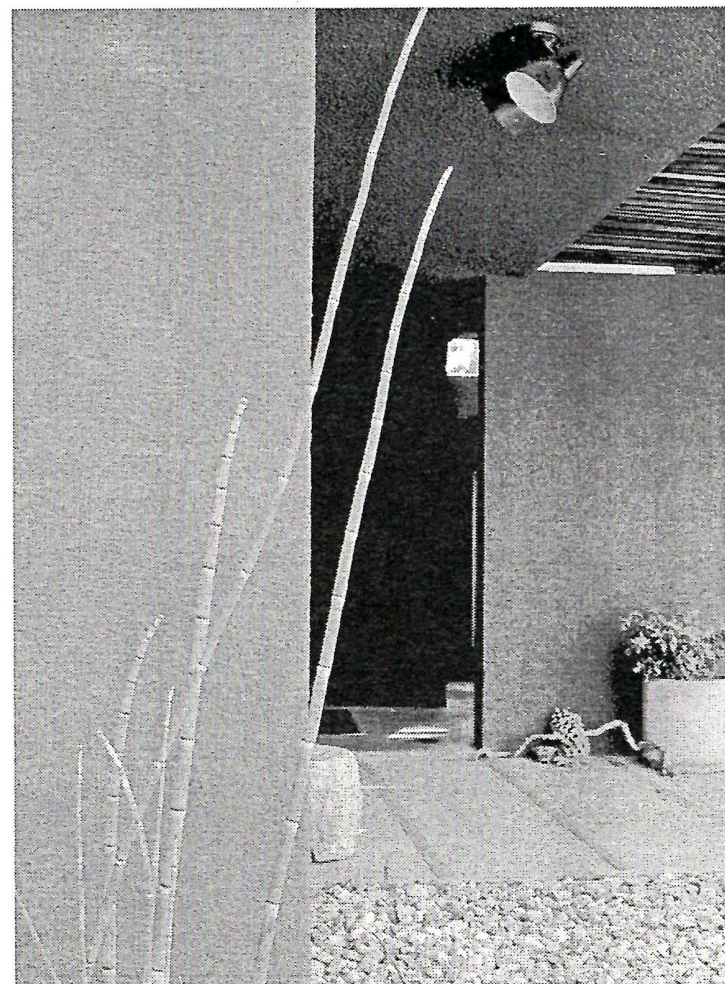


Save our Heritage Organisation (SOHO) is San Diego's only countywide organization dedicated to the preservation of architecturally significant structures, sites, and cultural landscapes. For more than thirty years SOHO has lead the community as a powerful catalyst for preservation through advocacy and education. We believe that the historic architecture and sites entrusted to this generation should be passed down to the next, so they too will know the unique character of San Diego county.

SOHO's San Diego Modernism Committee (SDMC) promotes the appreciation and preservation of local historic 20th century architecture and related cultural resources. Through tours, lectures and related educational activities, SDMC secures funding for research, advocacy and awareness of San Diego's contributions to 20th Century Modernism.

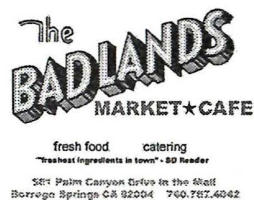
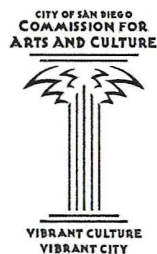
# SOHO modernism SAN DIEGO

## BORREGO SPRINGS A MID-CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL TOUR





contributors and sponsors:



## BORREGO SPRINGS MODERN

Save Our Heritage Organisation's Modernism Committee (SDMC) presents Borrego Springs Modern: an architectural tour featuring six private Borrego Springs homes designed by renowned modernist architects Sim Bruce Richards, Henry Hester, Cliff May, and Richard Zerbe.

### acknowledgements:

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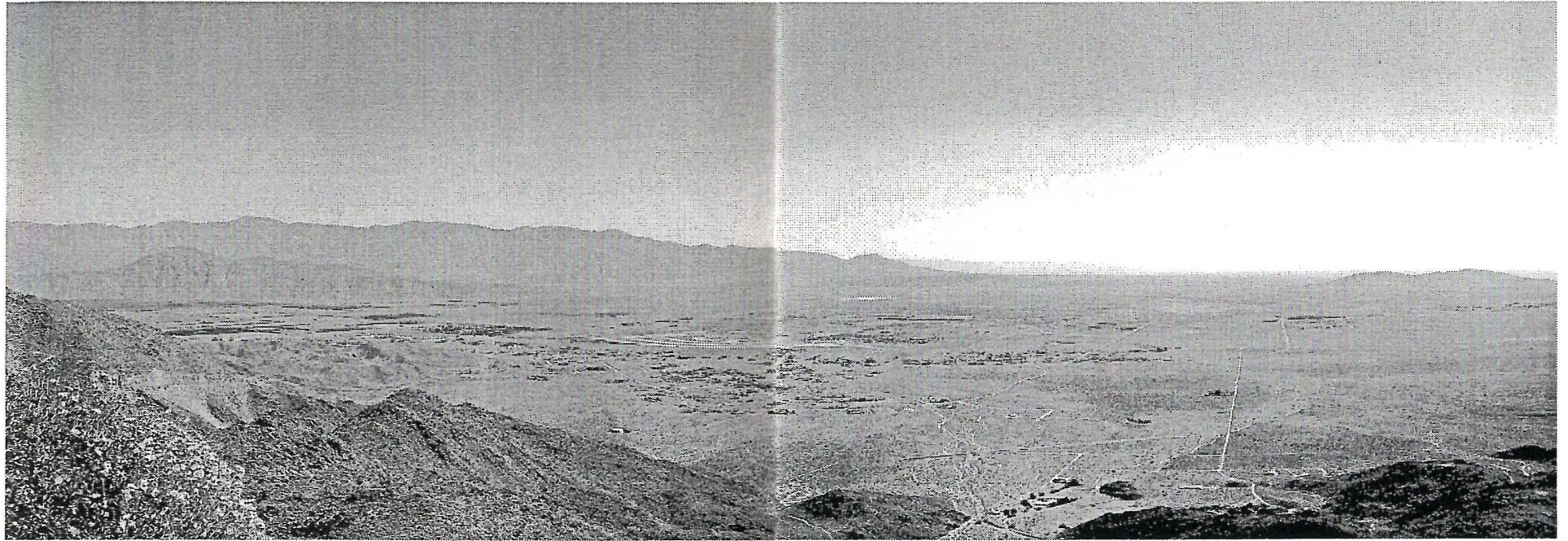


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a brief history of:

# borrego springs

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Borrego Springs is located 85 miles north east of San Diego in the Borrego Valley. The community is surrounded by the Anza Borrego Desert State Park which encompasses 650,000 acres making it the largest state park in the contiguous United States. The geological features seen today are the results of a half billion years of activity. The area was once the floor of an ancient seabed. Volcanic activity was also prevalent in the region and helped define the present landscape.

For thousands of years the Borrego Valley supported the Kumeyaay Indians. The first record of a European in the Borrego Valley was 1772, when Lieutenant Pedro Fages of the San Diego Presidio came in search of deserters.

A century later, cattlemen would enter the valley and begin homesteading. In the years before the 1930s the Borrego Valley was one of the most isolated areas of the County. The first well was dug in 1926, supplying a reliable source of water. The discovery of Borrego's underground aquifer would be the catalyst for the agriculture industry. Valley farms provided early crops to San Diego, and the country. Grapefruit and other citrus is the main crop in Borrego today.

The presence of the Army and Navy in the Borrego Valley during World War II brought electricity and telephone service. Following the war, local developers began to market Borrego Springs as a desert resort community in an effort to capitalize on the tourism generated by the Park. 1950s Borrego Springs was a favorite hideaway for Hollywood stars, including Marilyn Monroe, Bing Crosby, Leo Carrillo, Burgess Meredith, Gale Gordon, Will Rogers, John Wayne, James Arness and Frank Morgan.

By 1960 Borrego Springs had blossomed into a desirable vacation spot complete with an airfield and all the amenities of modern living. With much of the development centered in the mid-20th Century, the architecture is strongly rooted in the Modern style, with many fine examples still remaining. It is this era of Borrego Springs' history that we examine, through the work of 5 architects, who helped develop Borrego Springs into a modern desert oasis.



## de Anza Fairway Cottage #12

1545 Fairway Lane

architect-builder: Richard Zerbe  
year built: 1958-1959

The **Fairway Cottages**, designed by architect Richard Zerbe, were built and originally used by the developers of de Anza Country Club to provide lodging for potential investors in the club. The Borrego Golf and Improvement Association sold leases, with a term of 50 years and the units were managed by the club for short and long-term rentals. In 1975, the Club and leaseholders came to an agreement whereby the leases were terminated and the cottages and land were sold. The original cost for the land, building and common areas amounted to \$4200 per lot.

There are 3 sets of 4 cottages, each surrounding its own large pool. The pools and associated pump-houses were also designed by Richard Zerbe. This unit (#12) has been well maintained and is in superb original condition. It features original paneling, Youngstown Steel kitchen cabinets, sliding accordion closet doors and terrazzo floors, bath, and surrounds. The fireplace hearth, painted black, is also of pink terrazzo. This unit also features a wonderful view of the Santa Rosa Mountain range and is within walking distance of the clubhouse and first tee.

When one defines the architectural design of 1950s and 1960s Borrego Springs, it is the work of architect **Richard Zerbe** that is prominent both in style and number. The architect and builder created a San Diego Mid-Century Modern design that takes into account the unique nature of the desert. He helped transform Borrego Springs into a modern oasis.

Nearly every large development project in Borrego Springs carries Zerbe's mark. Among his projects: the de Anza Desert Country Club; the Borrego Springs Shopping Center known today as "The Mall"; "El Patio" Retail Stores and the Hacienda del Sol Motel, all four on Palm Canyon Drive. He was also the architect of extensive remodels and additions in the 1960s to the original "Desert Lodge" now known as La Casa del Zorro and dozens of private residences in Borrego Springs.

Zerbe was born in 1913 and raised in Pittsburgh. He studied aeronautical engineering at Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1933, he hitchhiked to California with his brother, came to San Diego and began work at Consolidated-Vultee, the forerunner to Convair. Following service in World War II, Zerbe became disenchanted with aeronautical engineering, reportedly feeling that the aircraft industry was becoming a weapon of war. He then went to work doing architectural drawings for developers in Del Mar. At the same time, he studied and passed the exams to receive his architectural license. Zerbe moved to Julian and started his own construction company to build many of the designs he created. During the 1950s and 1960s he was one of a handful of architects practicing in the far eastern county and specialized in Borrego Springs and Julian. Much of his Borrego Springs work carries elements that come from his aeronautical background. A signature roofline is reminiscent of an airplane wing. Interior ceiling beams break through exterior walls uniting interior and exterior. The beams are tapered, again suggesting



the ribbing in early airplane wing design. Zerbe used extensive glass in many of his designs, opening them to the sun and view, yet providing large overhangs to provide refuge from the heat. He experimented with various methods of building insulation to deal with both the heat and cold of the desert.

For nearly a quarter century, Zerbe also served as the volunteer architectural consultant to the Borrego Springs Community Association. He reviewed plans for buildings and homes, and fought for designs that were compatible with the desert. Zerbe died in 1999. His work today remains a symbol of the period when Borrego Springs boomed.



# 2

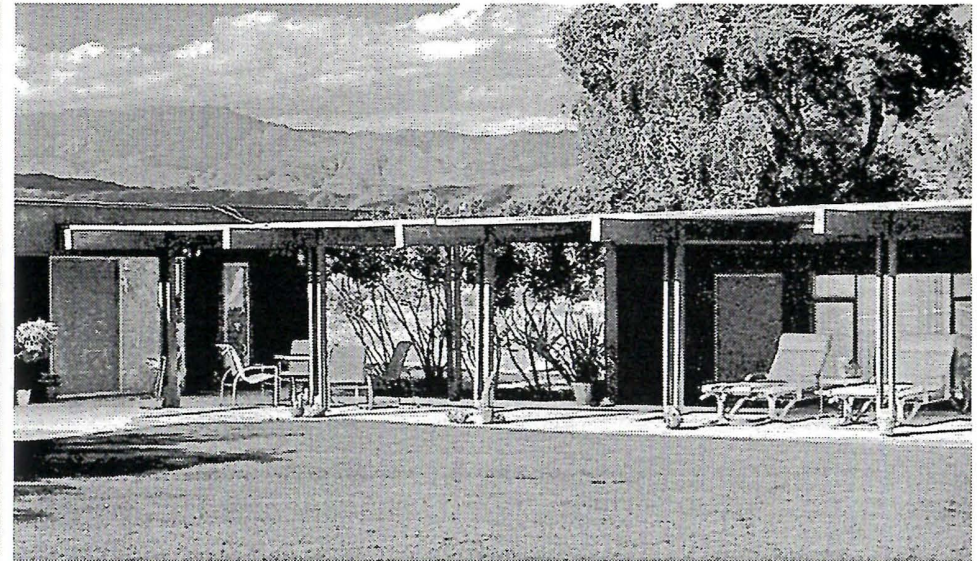
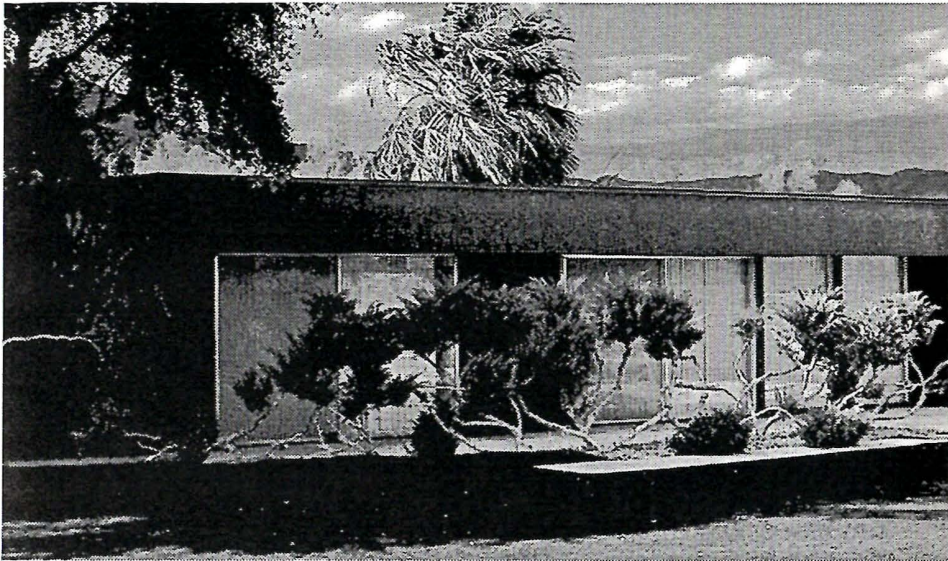
## Givler Residence

329 Catarina Drive

architect: Henry Hester

builder: Richard Zerbe

year built: 1958



The **Givler residence** was one of a trio of "first" homes to be built at de Anza Desert Country Club. The home was built for David Givler and was used as a winter residence only. The winter months are Borrego Springs' "on" season. The home is painted its original black color, which was used to absorb the winter sun's warmth and radiate it back into the living space. The home is small in square footage with one bedroom and one bath, yet speaks volumes about the interaction between the interior and the exterior natural environment. The house is laid out in an "I" shape with kitchen on one end and bedroom on the other. A corridor of floor to ceiling glass becomes the central living space and is open to expansive views of the golf course on one side and the natural beauty of the desert on the other. The building also holds an interior courtyard shielded from public view. The main house is also joined on the property with a detached one bedroom, one bath, guesthouse that also features an interior courtyard.

The present owners are the home's third and are adapting the space and their lifestyle to the addition of their first child. The home is now their year round residence. When built, the home did not contain air conditioning, which has been added. The owners have taken great care to not interrupt the lines of the home to add this necessity of year round desert living. They also subscribe to the philosophy of living with the space, and getting to know it and honor it before attempting any changes. The kitchen is original although in the 1980s new flooring was added. The home's

previous owner had the original oven and cook top restored and are in use today. Several of the home's original Danish modern style furnishings are retained by the present owners, who describe living in the home as: "Truly an exercise in minimalism. The best part is it offers floor to ceiling contact with the outdoors. It allows you to enjoy acres of golf course. It encourages you to enjoy all the land around it, not just the interior. It feels like it is a huge house because of the connection to the outdoors."

If you are a fan of mid-century design in San Diego you are most definitely a fan of **Henry Hester**. His striking structures utilize proportion and geometry in creating some of the best examples of this period. His designs for multi-family, single-family and commercial buildings can be found throughout San Diego County. His talents are clearly visible in the wonderful balconies of the recently rehabilitated Salomon Apartments in San Diego, and the wonderful integration of site and structure on the extensively published Gleich Residence in San Diego.

Although his work in the 1950s and 1960s has received much acclaim in recent years, much about the man himself remains unknown. In spite of early collaborations with San Diego greats Fred Liebhardt and Robert Jones, Hester remained a maverick; however, his intriguing designs reveal a sensitive and extremely talented designer.



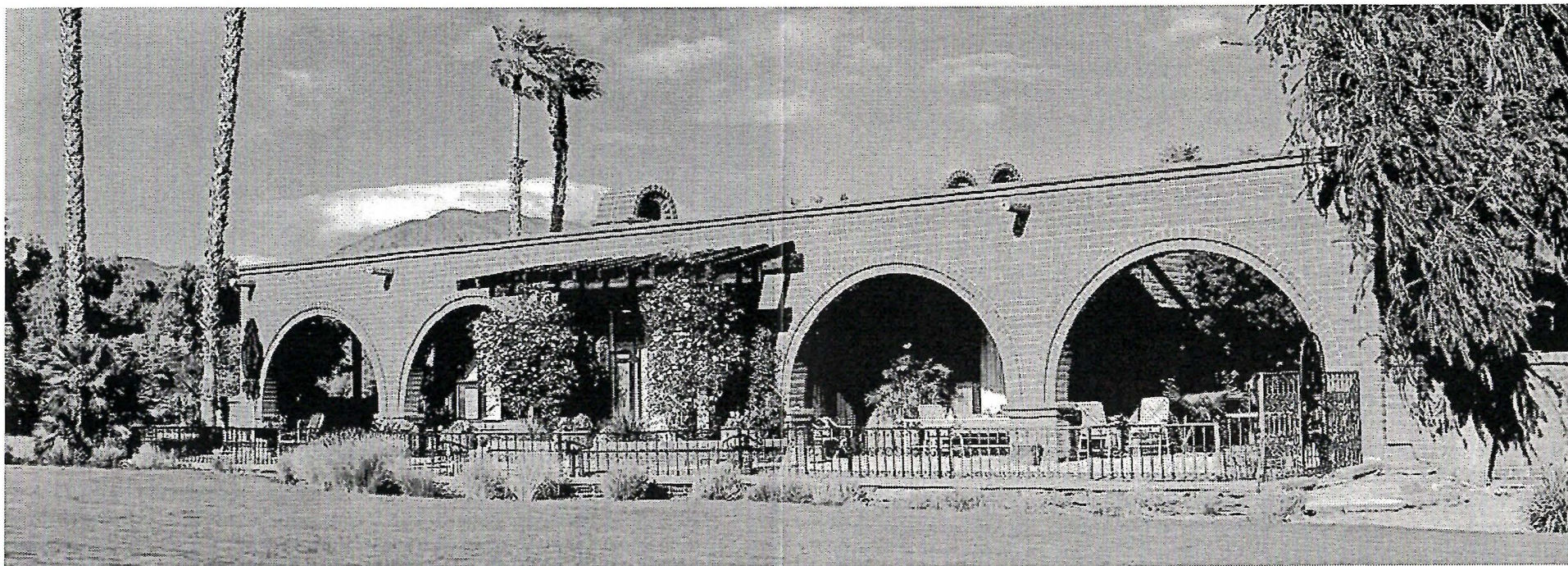
**McGuire Residence**

1471 Borrego Springs Road

architect: Sim Bruce Richards

year designed: 1969

year built: 1975



The **McGuire residence** was designed for the McGuire family in 1969, but it wasn't until 1975 that the home was built by Weir Brothers Construction, noted for its work in Ranch Santa Fe. The initial sketches for this home, done by Richards' own hand, are now housed in the archives of the San Diego Historical Society.

The walls are made from adobe and treated at the foundation to retard moisture. The courtyard, its reflecting pool and entrance were all designed by Sim Bruce Richards. The home contains three bedrooms and three baths. The living room and master bedroom feature a fireplace accessible to both rooms. The tiles are from Mexico and are specified on the construction drawings as being supplied by the owners. Many of the entry doors and decorative tiles, along with other decorative elements were purchased in Mexico and brought to the site. The plans call for the owner's tile to be installed in the fireplace and other areas. Note the interior short adobe walls that separate the space, yet do not block the light or movement of air. Arches in the living room and master bedroom frame the view to the west of Indian Head. The adobe wall surrounding the home defines the space and creates privacy; fountains provide visual and aural interest.

The kitchen has been remodeled, with an interior half-wall of cabinets removed to create a dining space and open the kitchen to the living area.

An artist in every sense of the word, **Sim Bruce Richards** designed homes that would be defined as modern but were indeed far more. His buildings exhibit wonderful texture and tone. They integrate with their site as buildings seldom do, creating a sense of comfort and style.

Richards was an art student at UC Berkeley when he was asked by Frank Lloyd Wright to join him as a student at Taliesin West in the Arizona Desert. Here Richards refined his art and learned its application in architecture. In San Diego, he established a regional style that used the principles promoted by Wright fused with his own talents to design wonderful homes of wood, stone and other earthen materials. His career spanned four decades. His homes often featured the work of some of San Diego's most talented artists. The glass, metal and woodwork of James Hubbell and the ceramic detailing of Rhoda Lopez played supporting roles in the lovely homes that Richards designed.



# 4

## Hauser-Chambers Residence

331 Verbena Drive

architect: Cliff May  
year built: 1950

The **Hauser-Chambers residence** was one of the first homes built by Cliff May following World War II, and is one of two May-designed private residences in Borrego Springs. In the closing chapter of the book, *Sunset Western Ranch Houses*, published in 1946, it was shown in detailed drawings and Cliff May descriptions as a projection of the post-war ranch house. "In this house," the editors noted, "Cliff May brings his ranch-house thinking up to date."

As described in the 1958 sequel, *Western Ranch Houses* by Cliff May, "...this house departs from the others (predecessors) in that it gains special significance. Two changes are particularly noteworthy. First, glass is used more abundantly than in pre-war houses. Second, the living room and corridor which were attached in previous houses are separated, thereby creating an additional patio...One of the most interesting innovations is a canvas sky-shade that can be drawn across the patio as needed. During the day this sunshade filters the sunlight and the porch offers shade. At night, the canvas sails are illuminated by concealed lights that impart a soft glow to the patio."

This home was built for Rupert Hauser, an Oregon timber magnate who used it as his winter residence. It was later purchased by architect Robson Chambers, who knew May from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Chambers is known for his work in Palm Springs, partnering with architect Albert Frey in the design of the Palm Springs City Hall, and the iconic Tramway Gas Station. This was the first of May's designs to use sliding glass doors. Due to severe deterioration, the sliding glass doors have been replaced. The patio where the fountain is currently located was originally designed with electric radiant heating in the concrete to further blur the lines between indoors and out, and make the area usable on cool desert nights.

San Diego born **Cliff May** is considered by many to be the father of the modern "ranch-style" architecture. May began his career designing Monterrey-style furniture. During the 1930s, he designed small Spanish "Revival" style homes for speculative builders that were labeled by the academic architectural community as "kitsch". The designs recalled the early ranchos of California, made of adobe and wood, and featured rooms with corridors around a central courtyard. His work focused on bridging interior and exterior spaces and taking advantage of the San Diego and Southern California climate. Following a move to Los Angeles, May collaborated with a number of architects in the design of ranch style homes that further refined the style, that were built in suburban areas where land was plentiful. Much of May's success was the result of his collaboration with *Sunset Magazine*, which championed



an ideal life in the west, including examination of the ranch style home in articles both prior to, and following World War II. Along with numerous articles, *Sunset* published two books featuring ranch house design: the 1946 *Western Ranch Houses* featured May designs along with those of several other architects and the 1958 *Western Ranch Houses* by May. The foreword to the re-released *Western Ranch Houses* by May (1997, Hennessey + Ingalls) states:

He [May] was a builder and promoter as well as a designer, and he sold a style - the early California ranch house...What made Cliff May exciting to anyone interested in home building in those early days was this drive to perpetuate ideas of livability rather than form and façade. His passion was not so much architecture as the way people wanted to live.

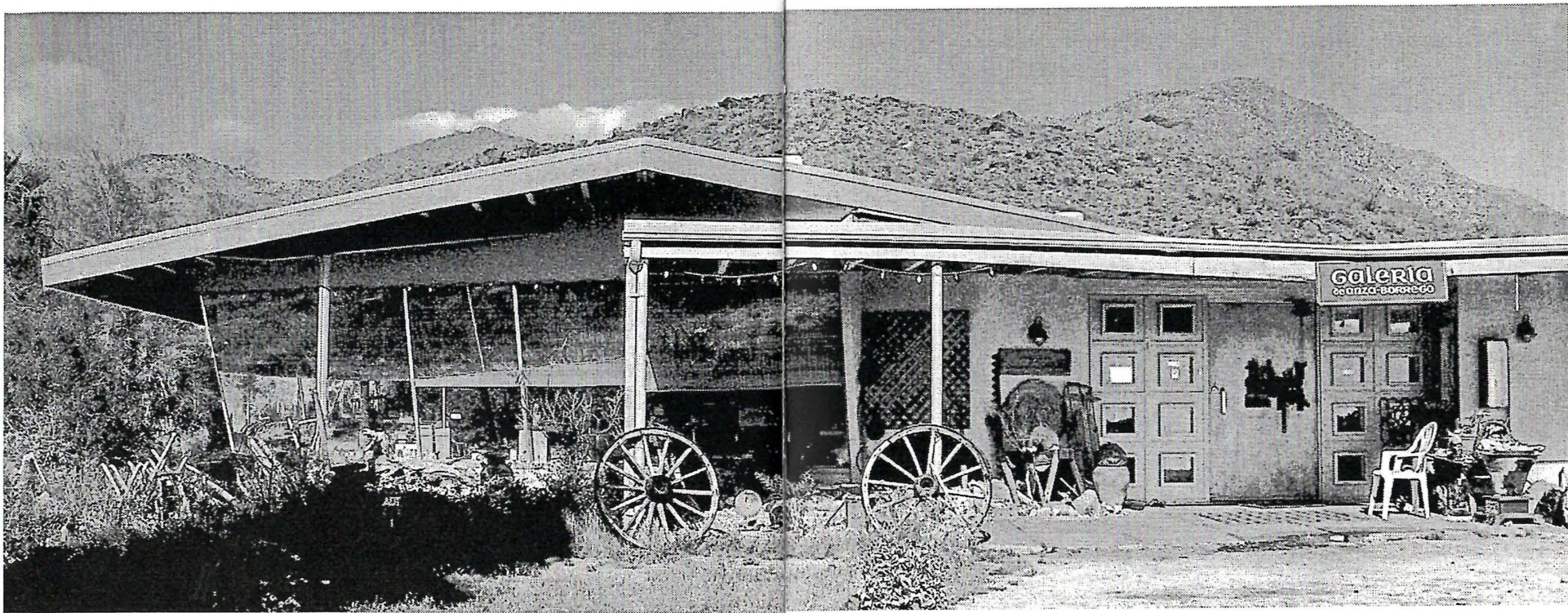
May's success was not confined to California; designs by the firm Cliff May Homes were built in more than 40 states. May had not studied architecture. It was not until much later in life that his accomplishments and success were recognized by the architectural community and that he was given an architect license. May once said, "It took real architects a long time to let me into the club."



## The Desert Club - Galeria de Anza Borrego

401 Tilting T

architect: unknown  
year built: 1950



The **Desert Club** was part of the vision of developer A.A. Burnand, founder of the Borrego Springs Community Association. Burnand, along with his partners, desired to create the ideal desert community, one that was "...protected from becoming a hodge-podge of desert shacks." To control growth and development, the Community Association initiated deed restrictions on properties that defined what could and could not be built, which was somewhat of a revolutionary idea in 1949. It was in many ways the most effective means of controlling development at the local level. Borrego Springs is an unincorporated area of San Diego County, so County regulations (or lack of them) also define development in the valley.

The Desert Club opened in 1950, and included as its members the most prominent citizens of Borrego Springs. While the Desert Club was the first golf course development in Borrego Springs, it would soon be eclipsed by the development of de Anza Country Club in the northern part of the Borrego valley. The Desert Club's course was never fully completed and membership waned following the opening of

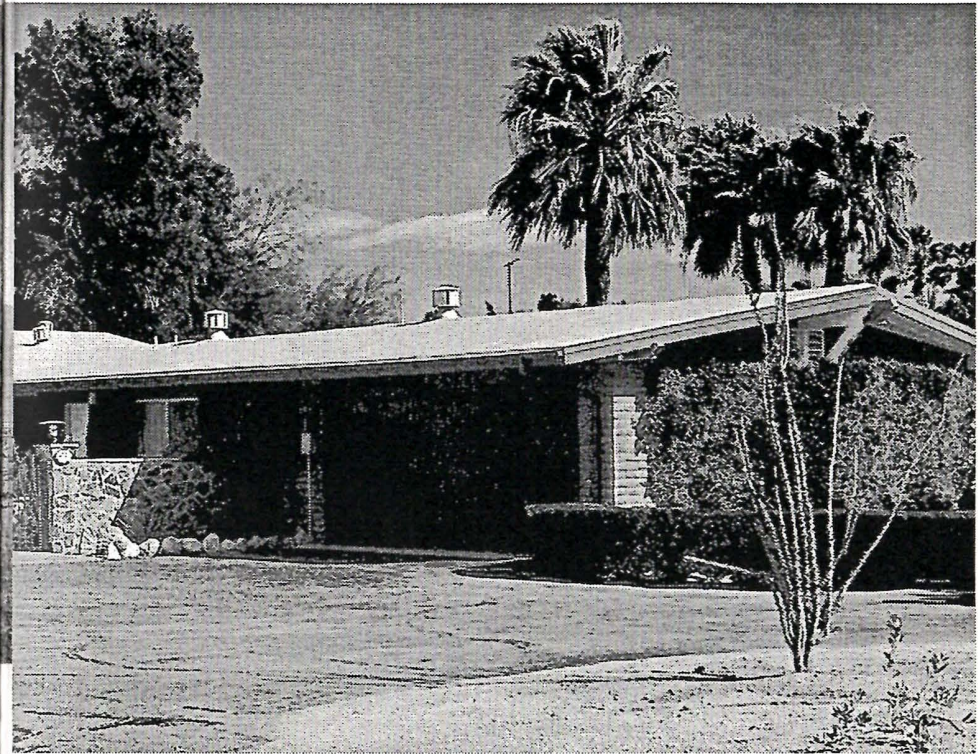
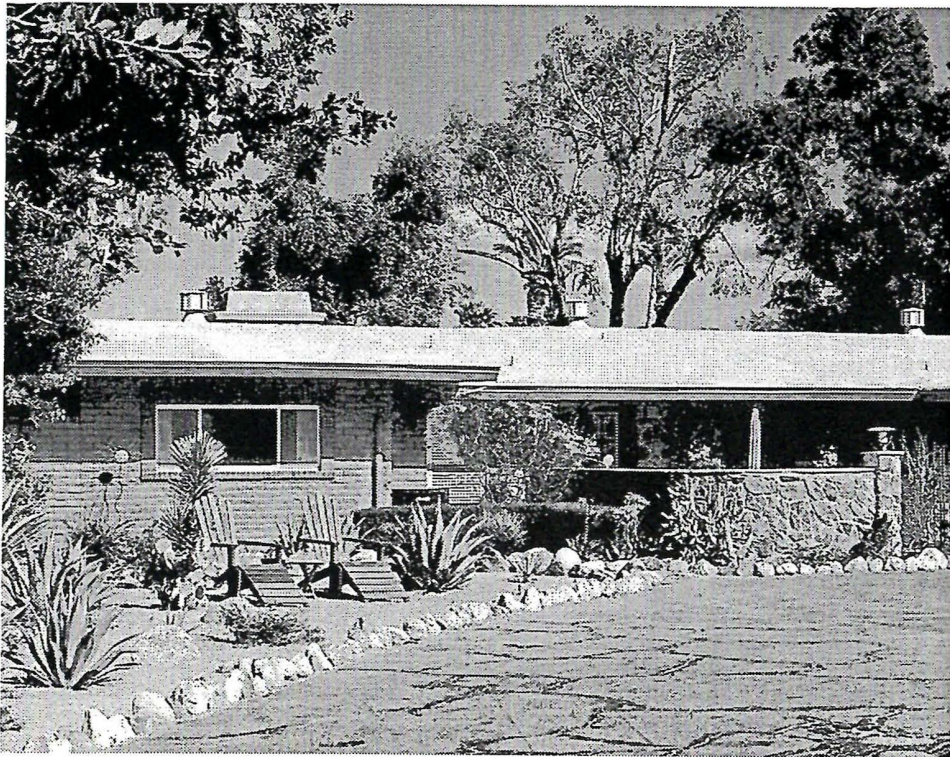
de Anza. The acreage set aside for future development of home sites would be sold off in 1964. In 1968 the three acres and building that had been the clubhouse were sold to Robert and Sophia Schepe who opened the "Galeria de Anza Borrego", an art studio that was in business for more than 35 years.

There have been few alterations over the years, although living quarters were installed in some of the club's offices and rooms. The building's signature corner glass windows remain with a sweeping view of the valley. The 1951 cocktail bar renovation by Richard Zerbe is also intact. Note the steel beam construction in the roof. The men's and women's lockers remain although a portion of the area was turned into a garage. The new owners plan a complete restoration of the building and grounds, including the pool with its spectacular views, and may return portions of the clubhouse to public use.



**Burgener-Gurr Residence**

1541 deAnza Drive

architect: Everett Abrams  
year built: 1959

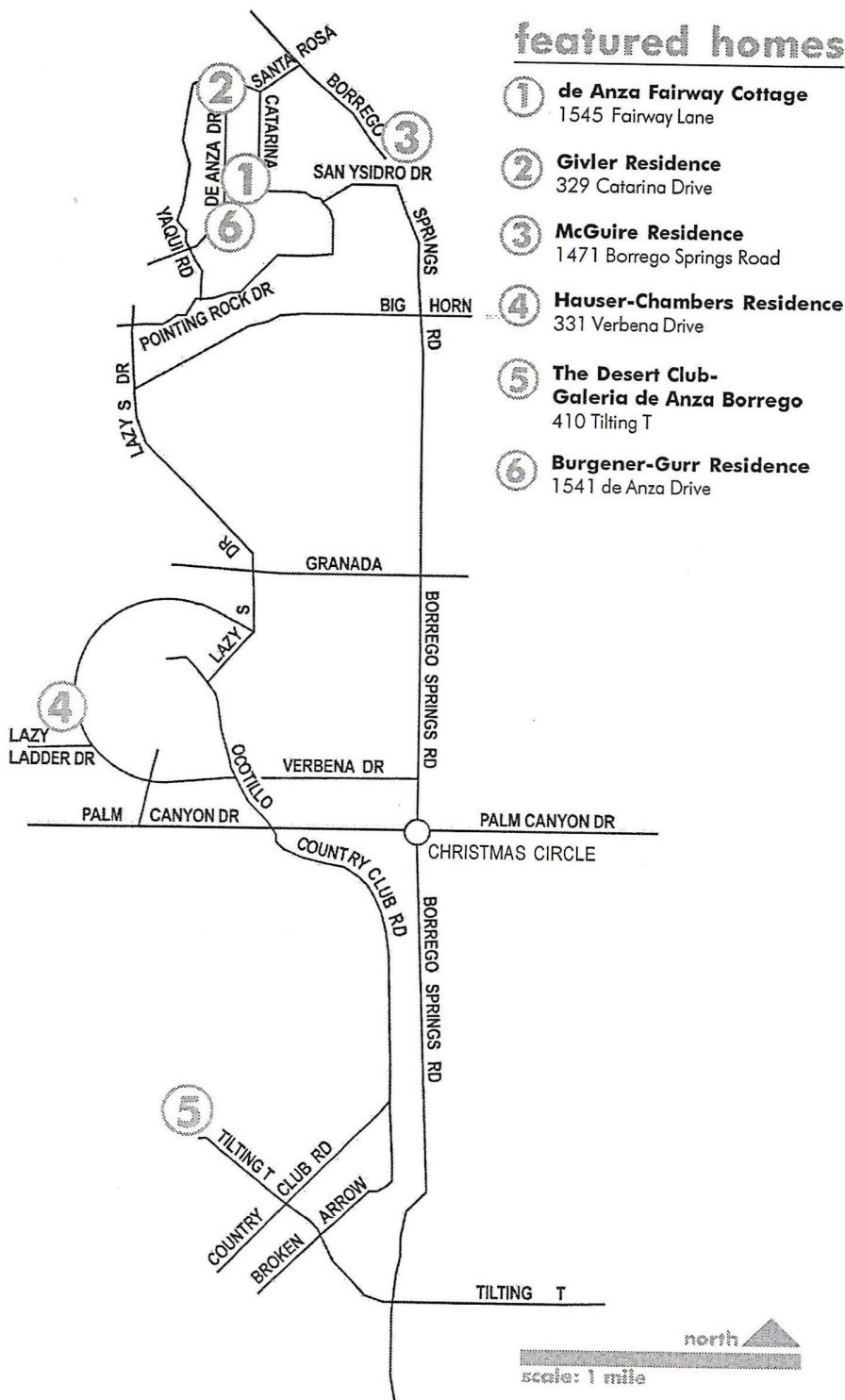
Built by San Diego developer Lou Burgener, the **Burgener-Gurr residence** was designed with entertainment in mind. Burgener, along with Carlos Tavares, created San Diego's largest and most innovative post-war suburban community: Clairemont. Among the architects who designed Clairemont was Harold Abrams. The plans of this Borrego home list the architect as Everett Abrams whose practice was in La Jolla. At present we have not been able to link the two architects, although we suspect the two are related. The home features a large master suite and a separate "children's wing" off the kitchen. In 1974, Burgener's cousins, Verl and Afton Gurr, purchased a half interest in the home. Gurr would become president of de Anza Country Club in 1985.

Many of the home's original details remain. In the main entryway, Abrams designed the decorative detailing in an oriental style. The home features some unusual and exotic elements. The bar and lounge paneling is of "pecky-wood" cypress from

Florida. The room also features a built-in audio entertainment center. Marble counter tops are standard in the baths. The master bedroom features a spacious dressing area with built-in storage and bath which includes a custom built-in vanity. The living room fireplace is of rock collected on site and in the surrounding desert. The home's custom sofa and massive cocktail table with pull-out seating are original.

The present owners are the home's third. The kitchen is in its original layout with original cabinets. The countertops and flooring have been replaced. Note the built-in pink Chambers Stove and cook-top, which are both electric. de Anza Country Club was touted as being a "modern" community, and modern meant electric. De Anza Golf Estates, the development around the country club, took steps to install underground utilities in 1969. The home has a sweeping view of the 10<sup>th</sup> fairway and is next door to the first two homes built in de Anza Country Club.





## points of interest

While you are in Borrego Springs we recommend you visit the following points of interest:

### Hoberg Desert Resort - The Palms at Indian Head

1044 Hoberg Road

1958, architect: unknown

Originally opened in 1949, the Hoberg Desert Resort, now known as the Palms at Indian Head, has played an important role in the economy of the Borrego Valley. The mid-century design is the result of rebuilding following a fire in 1958 that destroyed the original resort. In the 1960s the resort closed and the building was used as a school. In 1977 the property was sold and reopened as a private resort known as Earth Station II. After several additional owners, the property sat vacant before the present owners purchased the property and reopened the resort as the Palms at Indian Head.

### Hacienda del Sol

610 Palm Canyon Drive

architect: Richard Zerbe

The first "motel" in town. The original building was constructed in 1948; the Hacienda del Sol of today is the work of architect Richard Zerbe. The additions of the lobby and storefronts were completed between 1956 and 1960.

### Dana Burke's Ranch - The Desert Lodge - La Casa del Zoro

3845 Yaqui Pass Road

original adobe 1933

1960 remodel, architect: Richard Zerbe

In 1932, Los Angeles developer Dana Burkes purchased 13,500 acres of railroad lands with the goal of developing agriculture and resort living in the valley. The Depression changed Burke's plans, and in 1937 he sold the adobe ranch house to Noel & Ruth Crickmeyer who in 1939 opened Borrego's first hotel, The Desert Lodge. The Burnand family purchased the hotel in 1947 and in 1960 sold the Desert Lodge to MACOP, a corporation formed by Copley Press Owner Jim Copley. The hotel was renamed La Casa Del Zorro, and architect Richard Zerbe was hired to design an extensive remodel and expansion. Further changes and additions have been made over the years. Part of the original adobe is incorporated in the lobby.

### "Bud's Cafe" - The Red Ocotillo

818 Palm Canyon Drive

The first eatery in town, and the first enterprise of Borrego developer George "Bud" Khurts, who purchased 3 Quonset huts when he got out of the Navy. This one remains and has been an eatery since 1947.

### Borrego Springs Shopping Center - "The Mall"

Palm Canyon Drive in the Center of Town

1962, architect: Richard Zerbe

Local developer George "Bud" Khurts hired Richard Zerbe to design Borrego's first large scale shopping center. Note the fountains and built in benches and planters in the interior of the shopping center. According to one source the "rear" facade of the Mall faces Palm Canyon Drive (Borrego Springs' "Main Street") while the front facade faces what was supposed to become the main route off of Montezuma Grade, which never materialized. Montezuma Valley Road from Ranchita to Borrego Springs was started in 1954 and opened a decade later. Prison labor was used to construct the road.