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# DESERT AWAKENING

*A neglected house in a neighborhood with a star-studded past gives a longtime fan of Palm Springs the chance to turn his dream of the ultimate desert getaway into sexy, swanky reality*

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The garden of the  
House, California, is  
designed by California  
architects. The site  
is located in the area  
of the former location of  
the original, and the  
house is designed by  
Robert J. Taylor. The  
house is located in the  
Palm Springs area.  
The house is located in  
the Palm Springs area.





**LONG BEFORE** Southern California's Coachella Valley became a wintertime magnet for suntanned retirees (and more recently, the home of its eponymous neo-bohemian music festival), the desert getaway was a swanky destination for Hollywood's elite. In the 1950s, stars like Frank Sinatra and Marilyn Monroe flocked to the area's glamour capital, Palm Springs, as well as nearby communities like Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage, where the San Jacinto Mountains form a stunning backdrop.

For Paul Boschetto, a San Francisco business executive who started going there in the '70s, the area's midcentury mystique is exemplified by the Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage. "It has a star-studded past," he says. "Everyone from Bing Crosby to Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz used to come here, along with all these executives from Detroit; that's how they got the name for the Ford Thunderbird."

Founded in 1951, the club famously hosted the valley's first 18-hole golf course. Bob Hope liked the club so much that he built himself a hillside house overlooking the links. Soon, Lucy and Desi, Sinatra, and Hoagy Carmichael joined him, commissioning weekend homes here in the modernist style that was all the rage. The luxurious gated enclave was given an official name: Thunderbird Heights. The decades that followed were not always kind to the homes; some were overly renovated, others cried out for repairs. But for Boschetto, the allure never faded. "I love history," Boschetto says, "and this is such a storied place."



A pair of Robert Kuo lacquered drum stools and a painting by Charles Arnoid in the hall; the plantings in the garden beyond include an olive tree, barrel cacti, dasyliion wheeleri, and micracantha. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** In the living room, vintage Barcelona chairs, back-to-back sofas by William Haines, an Arco lamp by Achille Castiglioni, and a floor lamp by Dragonette; the wall is sheathed in Venetian plaster, the ceiling is cedar, and the floors are poured-in-place terrazzo. Louie, a French bulldog, in front of a custom cocktail table by Joseph Jeup; the fireplace wall is original. For details, see Resources.



The breakfast room's Saarinen table and chairs are by Knoll; the painting is by Martin Sniper, and the light fixture is by Artemide. **OPPOSITE, FROM TOP:** The kitchen range, hood, and refrigerator are by Viking, the sink fittings are by Grohe, the cabinets are ebonized cerused oak, and the stools are by BassamFellows. A wall in the den is clad in panels of Edelman leather, the custom sofa is upholstered in a fabric by Classic Cloth with cording by Samuel & Sons, and the selenite-and-nickel tables are by Ron Dier. For details, see Resources.





In 2009, he decided the time was right to buy a house as a winter base for himself and his longtime girlfriend, Courtney Rudnick. They looked at a mid-mod classic with a brown exterior, front lawn, and an interior that was "very period and a little kitschy," he says. "It was warm and well done, but not crisp and clean enough for me. I couldn't pull the trigger."

Yet Boschetto could see the potential. The 4,900-square-foot main house, built in 1957 and stretching across a single level, had terrazzo floors and plate-glass windows with spectacular views of the surrounding desert landscape. The 25,000-square-foot property also came with a pair of guest rooms (reachable via the patio), a separate guest cottage, and a pool. Best of all was the location, which is tony enough that designer Michael S. Smith maintains a home here, where he has hosted President Obama on more than one occasion. "The house kept haunting me," Boschetto says. "Architecturally, I could envision what it could be." At last he went for it, purchasing the home and all of its contents—furniture, art, even dishes and silverware—as is the custom in the Palm Springs environs. "It's why we have so many consignment shops," he jokes.

The businessman quickly assembled his dream team—Laguna Beach, California-based decorator Sheldon Harte, who had previously helped him with his homes in Newport Beach and Sonoma, and landscape designer Marcello Villano, known for his naturalistic approach. For Harte, the design mandate was





The bed in the master bedroom came with the house and is dressed in Barbara Martin linens with a blanket and shams by Hermès; the painting is by Daryl Edwards, and the wood screen and marble bedside tables are estate-sale finds.

clear. "Paul is a minimalist," he says. "The house had been futzed up, and he wanted to take it back to what it was originally."

Villano transformed the exterior with a new zero-edge pool, a pavilion that provides much-needed shade, and a desert-friendly scheme of cacti, native plants, and gravel. Harte preserved the home's vintage features, including the stone wall around the fireplace, but almost everything else inside was replaced. To create more openness, a wall was removed between the kitchen and living area. Carpeting was ripped out and replaced with terrazzo to match the original. "The whole house is terrazzo now," Boschetto notes, "which gives a sense of continuity and feels cooling."

Once everything was pared down, Harte began to judiciously embellish the interiors. The living room's zebra rug was banished, making way for a cream-colored scheme of Barcelona chairs and back-to-back sofas by William Haines, who designed the interiors at nearby Sunnylands, the Annenberg estate. Meanwhile, the master bedroom suite features a bath fitted with a stainless steel soaking tub, and a cork-lined dressing room where Boschetto stores his baseball caps and array of pastel-hued Trina Turk blazers.

Boschetto says the house turned out exactly as he'd imagined it. "I'm at my happiest when I spend time here," he says. "My friends ask, 'Why live in the desert?' But to me, it's a magical place. If Frank Sinatra chose to live here, I guess I can, too." ■



On the patio off the master bedroom, the outdoor showerhead is by Grohe, and the artwork is by Paulden Evans.



In a guest room, the vintage bed is upholstered in a Groundworks fabric and dressed in Barbara Martin linens; the wallpaper is a Kelly Wearstler design; the drawings are by Frank Gehry, the chair is by Donghia, and the walnut side table is from Design Within Reach. For details, see Resources.