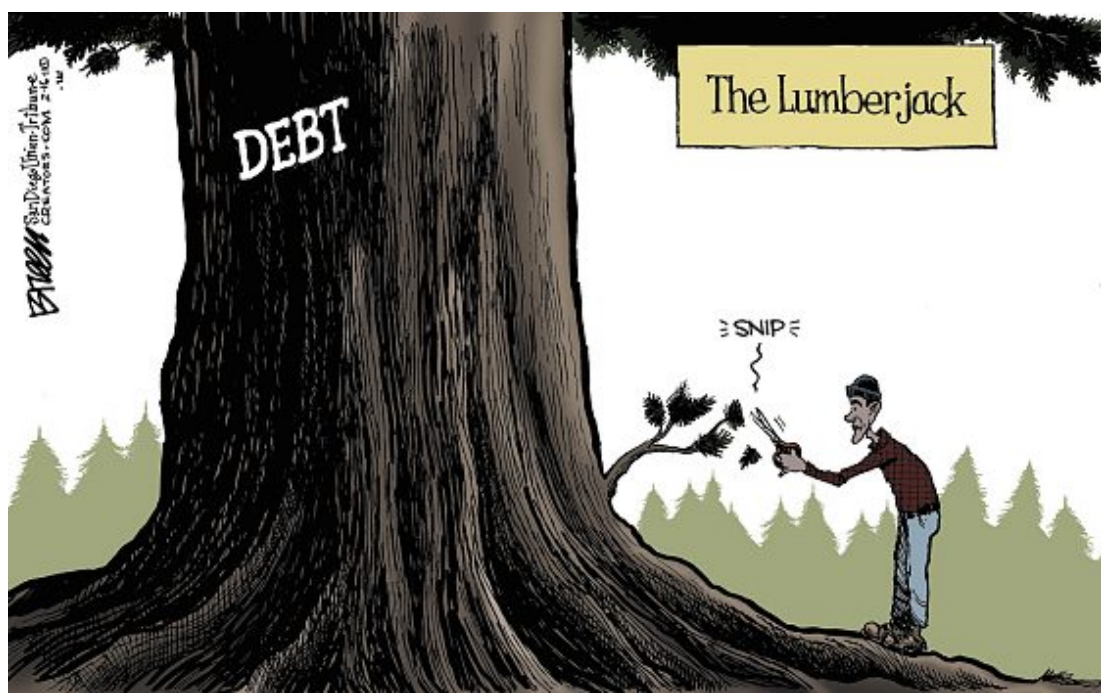


Opinion

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OUR VOICE

Modernism, a sleeping beauty for Palm Springs

Today marks the start of Palm Springs Modernism Week, which draws thousands of people from throughout the world to the Coachella Valley to check out a style of architecture that wasn't always as treasured as it is today.

In fact, the architecture built in the 1930s-1960s was somewhat of a "sleeping beauty" in Palm Springs until architecture enthusiasts rediscovered it in the past decade or so.

"Palm Springs is, I guess, the world center of midcentury modern since it's been destroyed in so many places," said William Krisel, an architect whose work is scattered across the valley.

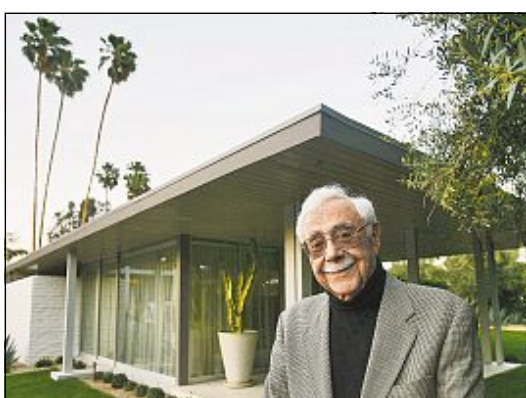
"Palm Springs has been smart enough to keep it."

And being able to preserve that treasure has now helped the city and resort area attract thousands of visitors for yet another reason other than the 340 or so days of annual sunshine.

What's been amazing in seeing Palm Springs Modernism Week grow and expand over the years is it didn't require consultants or expensive marketing studies or government subsidies to thrive.

Its success has been organic, the result of hard work by dedicated individuals, businesses and private groups who saw the potential in showcasing the city's distinctive look to affluent and artistic visitors.

And in doing so, the groups have not only helped the event succeed and grow,



WADE BYARS THE DESERT SUN

Architect William Krisel is a guest at the reception of California Preservation Foundation's 34th conference in 2009 in Palm Springs at the Abernathy House, designed by Bill Cody in 1962. The house is an important example of midcentury modernism.

but they've helped put Palm Springs on the map as somewhat of an arts and cultural center — what with its unique historic architecture and a wonderful art museum.

This all packages well with the upcoming College of the Desert campus in the western Coachella Valley that will feature a concentration on the arts.

The arts also play a prominent role in the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership's four-pronged blueprint to diversify the desert economy.

It has been great to see Modernism Week expand and grow even more appreciated over the years.

We wish it additional success and look forward to the valley doing even more to capitalize on the growing midcentury modern fascination.

VALLEY VOICE

Palm Springs Jail is a name we don't want to hear around here

The problem regarding the proposed detention center near the off-ramp to Palm Springs is that the real answer can only be determined if the facility is built there. However, I have a hunch that it could turn out badly for us.

Think about what it will be called by the media and the public. Right now, we have a billion-dollar name for our area. It's almost a household word, coast to coast.

Regardless of what name the proposed facility is given and regardless of how beautiful it might look, with carefully considered landscaping, the vernacular that will be used will be: the Palm Springs Jail.

Tourism is our chief industry. Why even suggest tampering with it?

The transient occupancy tax is a valuable source of income for many of our cities. In addition to the Palm Springs Desert Resort Communities Convention and Visitors Authority, most of our cities also have hardworking tourist development committees working to maintain or increase this source of revenue in a very competitive market. Why deliberately put an obstacle in their path?

Dixon Correctional Institute is called Angola

A glittering example of negative jail identification is the Dixon Correctional Institute of the Louisiana State Penitentiary. It has wooded acreage, even a golf course. However, the land, a former plantation, was once called Angola, named after the area in Africa, the original home of many former slaves.

So, it isn't called Dixon. It isn't called Louisiana State Penitentiary. It is called Angola. The name pops up in dozens of crime novels. It just sticks to the wall. It means jail and hard time. What could be a worse connotation? Do we need anything like that?

Whatever the county facility will be called, it will be called Palm Springs! It is too colorful and too well known for anyone to call it anything else.

While all the suggestions of why it should be built at the proposed location may sound logical and all the ancillary benefits (jobs) are certainly worthwhile, the same arguments would work at any location in our area.

The Palm Springs Jail? That would not be good.

Let's say a crime occurs in Riverside County and it's picked up by news media throughout Southern California. The perpetrator is caught,



ira laufer

tried and sentenced.

Do you think the Los Angeles Times or any other media will say, "He has been taken to the Riverside County Regional Detention Center?" Not on your life! He's headed for the Palm Springs Jail! We can live without that.

Mental health facility has dogged Camarillo

When Ventura County was growing, there was always reluctance for people to look at tracts in Camarillo, then a home of a state mental health facility. It is now a lovely community but it lagged several years behind other areas because of the connection. The common phrase was that if someone did something irregular, they would jokingly be warned, "You'll be taken to Camarillo." Eventually, the facility became outdated and the area became the site of a state college and everything is wonderful but there were some bad years leading up to it.

Once the public takes hold of a name nothing changes it easily. Palm Springs Jail is too juicy not to be used. Our leading industry shouldn't be tampered with. There must be another location that doesn't have so much riding on its name.

Longtime residents tell people proudly they live in Palm Springs. Someday they may have to explain they mean the resort — not the other place.

We should be stewards of a magical name known worldwide. This asset has spread to bring prominence and fortune to the entire Coachella Valley. A worldwide trade name is an invaluable asset.

If the two words "Palm Springs" become the least bit synonymous with the two words "jail house," we will have taken a multimillion-dollar hit. It's a needless risk.

Ira Laufer is a member of the Rancho Mirage Planning Commission. He is former board member of the Southern California Visitors Council and has been awarded 10 Golden Mikes for commentary by the Southern California Radio & TV News Association. E-mail him at ilaufer88@gmail.com

See videos, photo galleries, an interactive map and more coverage at mydesert.com/modernism

YOUR VOICE

Desert Fashion Plaza

Let it sit until Wessman goes away

John Wessman will never redevelop the Fashion Plaza unless and until he gets his pound of flesh from the city. It will either be a sizable financial contribution from the city or favorable zoning that will include as many residential units as he considers necessary to allow him to recoup his own financial investment.

I give no credit whatsoever to Mayor Steve Pougnet for his recent efforts to fashion an agreement with Mr. Wessman. It is clear that having lost his bid for a congressional seat, the mayor feels he needs a major accomplishment to further his political career. He is relying on a new Fashion Plaza to provide it — and wants the taxpayers to pay for it.

I say no! We have survived this long without it. Let Mr. Wessman stew in his own pot until it hurts enough to either sell out or redevelop it on his own.

Arnold J. Rotman Palm Springs

Rep. Mary Bono Mack

Why abandon Palm Springs?

Interesting how Rep. Mary Bono Mack campaigned before the last election criticizing her opponent, Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet, for empty storefronts and offices in Palm Springs. Now Bono Mack has closed her office in Palm Springs and has moved it to a more remote, less-accessible location in Palm Desert.

I wonder if the fact that she badly lost to Mayor Pougnet in Palm Springs last November had anything to do with Bono Mack's move to Palm Desert.

Robert J. Westwood Rancho Mirage

Revolution in Egypt

Dictators, your days are numbered

We salute the people of Egypt who brought down a brutal dictatorship with great courage, perseverance and dignity!

Autocrats in the region, beware. Your days are numbered. The time has come for you to be fearful of the people you have been oppressing.

They are educated, informed, fearless and more importantly, secular-minded, therefore less likely to be exploited by religious sentiments and the leaders who use them to achieve their selfish motives. Secularism will free the entire region from the tyranny of dictatorships and religious fundamentalism.

President Obama's inspiring speech in Cairo during his visit to the Middle East sparked the passions of the Egyptian people.

The social media networks like Facebook and Twitter then help create the perfect storm that the world witnessed. Let the whole region be inspired by what took place in Egypt and move toward a more free society.

J. Augustine Palm Springs

send your letter

Submit letters at our website, www.mydesert.com/letters

- Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number for verification
- Letters should be fewer than 200 words
- Letters may be edited for length, clarity and taste.

See a complete list of rules online.

SHARE YOUR VIEWS

The Desert Sun welcomes guest columns addressing local political and social issues.

General guidelines include:

- Columns should be 500 to 550 words.
- We print the author's photo and contact info (typically an e-mail address) with the column.
- Anonymous columns are never published.
- Stick to a single topic and avoid personal attacks.
- We reserve the right to edit and republish (including electronically) all columns.

Direct column submissions and questions to: **James Folmer, community conversations editor, at james.folmer@thedesertsun.com**

MYDESERT POLL

Today's question

Do you like the midcentury modern aesthetic?

A) Yes B) No C) Don't know

To vote, go to mydesert.com/opinion.

Wednesday's poll results

259 votes cast as of 5 p.m.

Do you think plans for a housing development that caters to gay retirees in Rancho Mirage will come to fruition?

35.7% Yes
64.3% No



Ten diverse architecture firms are collaborating with a Los Angeles-based real estate investment company to build a \$250 million urban-village type retirement community primarily for gays on 100 acres in Rancho Mirage.