

Vista Las Palmas Neighborhood A Mix of History, Celebrity By Joan Gand

Welcome to Vista Las Palmas, the midcentury Palm Springs neighborhood where architecture and celebrity make history.



In the late 1950s, tract housing had become a national phenomenon. In Palm Springs, tract housing was taken to a new level by the father-and-son team of George and Robert Alexander of the Alexander Construction Company.

The Alexanders built more than 1,200 homes in the architectural style now known as Southern California Modern. They commissioned talented modernist architects to create forward-looking homes that included soaring roof lines and elegant minimalist facades with lots of curb appeal. The interiors included post and beam construction, walls of glass, and spacious floor plans that flowed smoothly from inside to out. The homes fit perfectly in the natural desert landscape against a backdrop of the San Jacinto Mountains.



Vista Las Palms also was a draw for the firm of Dan Palmer and William Krisel, as well as architect Charles Dubois, who designed approximately 330 homes. Krisel contributed his iconic “butterfly” roof houses, a folded-plate roof design, and several others. Dubois created the distinctive “Swiss Miss” A-frame, among others. This mix of designs created one of the most varied, yet cohesive neighborhoods in Palm Springs, and it is a

stop on many architectural tours of the area.

Robert Alexander and his wife, Helene, moved from Los Angeles to Palm Springs in 1957, living in Vista Las Palmas. Their special custom home at 1350 Ladera is “The House of Tomorrow” which was featured in an eight-page spread in Look Magazine’s September 1962 issue.

Designed by Palmer and Krisel, the home features a series of circular glass pavilions under a single, “batwing” roof. The cost of the new home -- said to be \$300,000 -- set a new standard for luxurious living in Southern California. In 1968, the home was used as the secret getaway for Elvis and Priscilla Presley during their honeymoon.

On Sunday, Nov. 14, 1965, George and Robert Alexander and their wives were killed in an airplane crash when their Learjet en route to Burbank crashed into the Little Chocolate Mountains northwest of Indio. The Alexander legacy lives on today in Vista Las Palmas.

In the 1950s the neighborhood became a desert retreat for celebrities wanting to get away from their busy work scheduled in Los Angeles. Celebrities who once lived and played in Vista Las Palmas include Marilyn Monroe, Dean Martin, Peter

Lawford, Colonel Tom Parker, Debbie Reynolds, Joan Collins, George Hamilton, Kirk Douglas, Dinah Shore, John Phillips of the Mamas and Papas, and Trini Lopez (still a resident.)



Today, Vista Las Palmas has become a symbol of midcentury modern design for the distinctive homeowner who wants the relaxed lifestyle of the desert.

All photos by James Schnepf