



## Historic Site Preservation Board Staff Report

Date: December 11, 2012

Case No: HSPB – 87

Application Type: Class 1 Designation Application

Location: 1320 E. Tamarisk Road / General Houses, Inc. Palm Springs Model Home

Owner / Applicant: Barbara Black

Zone: R-1-C / Residential, Single Family

APN: 507-255-008

From: Craig A. Ewing, AICP, Director of Planning Services

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### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

An application by Barbara Black, owner, to designate the single family dwelling at 1320 E. Tamarisk Road as a Class 1 historic site. Such designation would:

1. Place the subject property under the guidance of Municipal Code Section 8.05
2. Require present and subsequent owners to maintain the buildings consistent with that ordinance,
3. Grant possible property tax reduction opportunities to the owners under the State of California Mills Act.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) open a public hearing, received any testimony and adopt the attached draft statement of historic significance and resolution recommending to the City Council a Class 1 historic designation for the property.

## PRIOR ACTIONS

None.

## BACKGROUND AND SETTING

### Definition of an Historic Site.

Section 8.05.020 of the Municipal Code provides the definition of a historic site as follows;

#### (a) *Historic Site.*

*An historic site is any real property such as: a building; a structure, including but not limited to archways, tiled areas and similar architectural elements; an archaeological excavation or object that is unique or significant because of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect and:*

- 1. That is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community; or*
- 2. That is associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contribution to national, state or local history; or*
- 3. That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history; or*
- 4. That embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or*
- 5. That presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value; or*
- 6. That represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
- 7. That has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.*

A Class 1 Historic Site may also qualify for historic designation at the federal, state and/or county level.

### Designation of Historic Sites.

The City Council is authorized to designate Historic Sites.

The Historic Site Preservation Board makes recommendations to the City Council that certain sites be designated as Historic Sites in accordance with Section 8.05.135 of the Municipal Code. The Board may initiate studies, surveys and investigations it deems necessary to adequately gather information in consideration of a recommendation.

### Conditions that apply to Class 1 Historic Sites.

According to Section 8.05 of the Municipal Code, the following shall apply to a Class 1 Historic Site:

1. It shall meet the definition of a historic site as outlined in Municipal Code Section 8.05.020.

2. An archival file shall be maintained on the property by the City.
3. It may be qualified as 'historic' at the federal, state, and/or county level.
4. The structure/site may not be modified nor objects removed without the approval of the City Council.
5. The use may be limited by the City Council to the extent that it may impair the integrity of the site.
6. A plaque explaining the historic nature of the site will be installed at the site.
7. Compliance with all rules and regulations for Historic Sites and Historic Districts under Article IV of Chapter 8.05 of the Municipal Code shall be required.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Located on a mid-block lot on the north side of E. Tamarisk Road, between Hermosa Drive and Paseo Anza, the structure is a steel frame, factory-built single family residence erected on site in 1937. The lot is part of the Desert Sands Tract and has an area of about 12,960 square feet; it is nearly square and generally flat. The dwelling has 1,754 sq. ft. of floor area, three bedrooms and two bathrooms. A two-car garage was constructed in 1947, and partially converted to a one-bedroom, one bath guest suite in 1948. The steel post-and-beam framework is clad in compressed asbestos panels, with interior walls of plyboard. Fireproof roofing was replaced with a foam roof in 1991. A swimming pool was added in 1968.

The house has an irregular footprint made up of two offset rectangles in plan, with a projecting volume at the main facade corresponding to the living room on the interior. The main entrance is on the eastern side of this projected element and is sheltered by an entrance hood, supported by a wooden structural trellis. A secondary entrance on the western end of the living room is also marked by a hood and trellis. The design, proportion, materials, metal post and beam construction, and overall feeling of this low-slung, linear, single-story residence reflects the Streamline Moderne style and incorporates such characteristic elements as metal-framed ribbon and corner windows, smooth wall finishes, rounded corners, and a flat roof.

The original owner was Edmond Lindop (1901-1968), who became an early franchiser of General Houses, Inc. with the goal of becoming a developer. He acquired a tract of land in Palm Springs in 1936 where he hoped to develop a neighborhood of steel houses. A single model was constructed (the present nominated dwelling) but the project was not a success, and the Lindop family used model home as a weekend residence. It sold in 1946 to Charles Stern who owned the house for many years. Stern ordered a compatible two-car garage module from General Houses that was added to the main house in 1947. Since February 1962 the home has been owned by the late architect Michael Black and his wife Barbara. Barbara Black continues to own the home today. Over its 75-year history, the home has been occupied by only two families.

The dwelling is a nearly one-of-a-kind reminder of how visionaries in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century sought to supply housing through America's industrial might. The house was produced by General Houses, Inc. The first General Houses Steel Home system was designed in 1932 and examples were exhibited at the 1933-34 Chicago World's

Fair. In 1937, the first and only Palm Springs version was built, and it is one of the three earliest modern homes in Palm Springs and the first, modular, prefabricated steel home in the desert.

General Houses, Inc was founded by Howard T. Fisher, FAIA in 1932. General Houses was a pioneering firm in the development of prefabricated housing. The firm designed and erected low-cost, high-quality prefabricated homes using mass production methods that integrated design, manufacturing, and marketing of simple houses in a single package. In 1933, a typical GH steel two-bedroom house cost \$4,500. The company's slogan was 'A house that's twice as good at half the price.' Fisher's original patented construction system used pressed-steel panels for walls, roofs, and floors, set on a concrete foundation. After the foundation was cured, a crew of unskilled laborers could put a house together in about two weeks.

The company received nationwide publicity in 1932 and the media hailed Fisher's company as the 'Next Big Thing.' General Houses displayed a model home at the 'Century of Progress' World's Fair. It was a sleek, flat-roofed, stylishly furnished steel cottage that attracted thousands of visitors. The system of modular construction drew the attention and support of supplier-partners such as General Electric, Pullman Car & Manufacturing, and Pittsburgh Paint & Glass. However, General Houses could not translate its concept into a successful product in the housing market and the vision of mass-produced, factory-built housing languished until others revived the idea after World War II.

## DEFINING HISTORIC CHARACTERISTICS

In 1937, the first and only Palm Springs version of General Houses Steel Home system was built; it is one of the three earliest modern homes in Palm Springs and the first modular, prefabricated steel home in the desert.

Built as a model home, the subject building, "The Trenton" GH Model # H-14-16-L was the deluxe model with an optional fireplace. It was a 1,754 sq. ft. 3-bedroom<sup>1</sup>, 2-bathroom single family residence. The design, proportion, materials, metal post and beam construction, and overall feeling of this low-slung, linear, single-story residence reflect the Streamline Moderne style and incorporate such characteristic elements as metal-framed ribbon and corner windows, smooth wall finishes, rounded corners, and a flat roof.<sup>2</sup>

Outside walls and interior partitions consist of a series of 35"-wide panels supported between the upright columns of the steel frame. The outer surface of each exterior wall panel consists of an asbestos cement board. Roof and ceiling panels are similar to, but

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<sup>1</sup> The home actually has four bedrooms and three baths; one of the two original garage bays was converted to a Guest Suite.

<sup>2</sup> The specifications that follow are taken from the brochure for General Houses, Inc. entitled "The House that Science Built". To the extent they are found on the subject property, they are considered defining historic characteristics.

somewhat heavier than the wall panels, and are screwed down onto the horizontal beams of the steel frame.

A waterproof, long-wearing membrane, applied in layers, was laid over the roof to assure trouble-free shelter from rain, sun and snow. An attractive coping extends above the surface of the roof at the edges, and roof drains and downspouts carry the water to the ground.

Windows are steel casement that open outward and are furnished complete with hardware. The complete window panel is the same in overall size and thickness as any solid wall panel so that the location of windows may be determined by the owner and placed by the builder within any panel opening without regard to the window locations shown on the plan.

Entrance doors were of modern flush design, made of wood in built-up construction 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick, and glazed. Rear entrance doors were recessed panel design, made of build-up wood construction, 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick, with the upper portion glazed. Thresholds were of stainless steel. Exterior connecting doors to garage were similar in design and construction to the front entrance doors, but were not glazed. Screen doors with bronze wire mesh, were provided for front and rear entrances.

The outside surface of all wall panels was painted with one coat of special primer and one finish coat of white lead in linseed oil paint. All metal surfaces such as windows and door frames, steel panel battens and coping, were given a coat of special metal primer. In addition, these parts were covered with two finish coats of white lead in linseed oil paint. Exterior doors were given three coats of white lead into the oil paint.

A more detailed discussion of the building, its history and its design and manufacture are provided in the attached draft Statement of Historic Significance.

## REQUIRED FINDINGS

As noted above in Background and Setting, Section 8.05.020 of the Municipal Code provides the definition of a historic site: "*An historic site is any real property such as: a building; a structure, including but not limited to archways, tiled areas and similar architectural elements; an archaeological excavation or object that is unique or significant because of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship or aesthetic effect*". Seven other qualities are listed therein with the applicant's and staff's analysis provided below:

1. *The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community.*

As described in the following house history, this is the first pre-fabricated modular steel home to be built in Palm Springs. Seventy-five years later, this example of a General Houses, Inc. model home stands as an early example of architectural and mass housing experimentation for architects and builders who continue to seek solutions for contemporary housing issues through the construction of pre-fabricated steel homes. Staff

supports this finding.

2. *The property is associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contribution to national, state or local history.*

Although not well-known in Palm Springs, architect Howard T. Fisher is a person of significance in our past. Fisher made a meaningful contribution to national history as an internationally known architect, famed for his pioneering work designing and marketing prefabricated houses utilizing his skills as a construction materials researcher. Fisher was also a computer technology pioneer. His personal and professional history rises to the level sufficient to qualify the building's eligibility for local listing. Staff supports this finding.

3. *The property reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history.*

The development of mass-produced, factory-built housing received significant public attention in the 1920's and 1930's. According to one source, "By the mid-1930s, homebuyers could choose from nearly three dozen manufacturers featuring a dizzying array of materials-steel, precast concrete, asbestos cement, gypsum, plywood." The house represents the optimism and opportunism of America's early 20<sup>th</sup> Century industrial leaders who sought to satisfy the growing demand for single family homes. Staff supports this finding.

4. *The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.*

The property's "distinctive characteristics" are its form, proportion, structure, plan, style, and especially its materials, the unique details that are a result of its prefabricated, modular method of construction, including the wall and roof panel system, curving roof flashing details, casement windows and surviving original doors. The subject building's appearance is unique in Palm Springs because of those characteristics and is considered the first local prototype of its particular type, period, and method of construction. Staff supports the finding.

5. *The property presents the work of a master builder, designer, artist, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age; or that possesses high artistic value.*

The application does not seek approval under this finding.

6. *The property represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

The application does not seek approval under this finding.

7. *The property has yielded or may be likely to yield information important to national, state or local history or prehistory.*

The application does not seek approval under this finding.

## CONCLUSION

Both the original construction of the dwelling and its current condition provide a strong basis for historic designation. Few changes have occurred to the building; however, its grounds have been modified with landscaping and other outdoor features which do not contribute to the site's historic significance.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

In accordance with Section 15331 (Historical Resources Restoration/Rehabilitation) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the proposed designation is categorically exempt from environmental review as the proposed designation meets the conditions outlined for preservation of a historic resource.

## NOTIFICATION

Pursuant to section 8.05.140 of the Municipal Code of Palm Springs, All property owners within three hundred (300) feet of the subject property have been notified and notice was made in a newspaper of general circulation. As of the writing of this report, staff has not received any inquiries on this matter.



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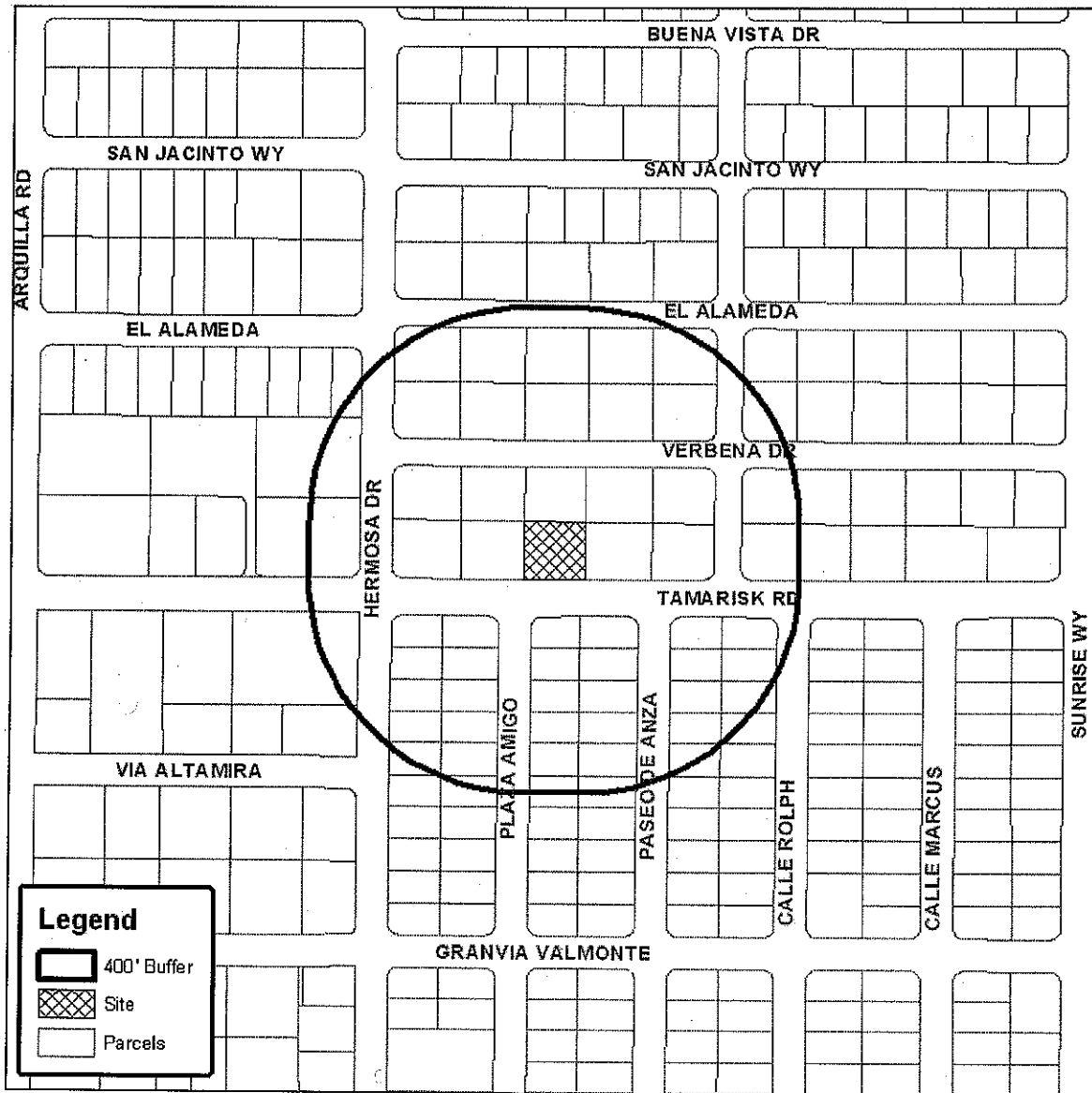
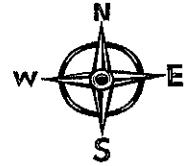
Craig A. Ewing, AICP  
Director of Planning Services

## ATTACHMENTS

1. Vicinity Map
2. Draft Resolution and Statement of Historical Significance
3. Application and Submitted Documents
4. Building permits



# Department of Planning Services Vicinity Map



## CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

CASE NO: HSPB 87

APPLICANT: Barbara Black

DESCRIPTION: To consider designating a residential property developed with a single family home and accessory structures as a Class 1 Historic Site at 1320 East Tamarisk Road, Zone R1C, Section 11/T4R4.



## HSPB RESOLUTION NO. 87

OF THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD OF  
THE CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA,  
RECOMMENDING THAT THE CITY COUNCIL  
DESIGNATE THE PROPERTY LOCATED AT 1320 E.  
TAMARISK ROAD ("GENERAL HOUSES, INC. PALM  
SPRINGS MODEL HOME") AS A HISTORIC SITE, CLASS  
1 – HSPB 87

WHEREAS, in 1937, the General Houses Inc. Palm Springs Model Home was constructed as designed by the architectural firm of Howard T. Fisher on a flat lot mid-block on East Tamarisk Road between North Hermosa Drive and Paseo de Anza; and

WHEREAS, the General Houses Inc, Palm Springs Model Home was the earliest pre-fabricated modular steel home to be constructed in Palm Springs and because it is almost completely intact, save for minor interior alterations; and

WHEREAS, the defining characteristics of this pioneering prefabricated steel home include:

- Design, proportion and materials;
- Metal post and beam panelized construction;
- Overall feeling of a low-slung, linear, single-story residence;
- Streamline Moderne style;
- Metal-framed ribbon and corner windows; and
- Smooth wall finishes, rounded corners and flat roof

WHEREAS, Chapter 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code allows for the designation of historic sites; and

WHEREAS, on October 29, 2012, Barbara Black, owner, initiated an application for Historic Site Designation for the General Houses Inc, Palm Springs Model Home at 1320 E. Tamarisk Road; and

WHEREAS, notice of a public hearing of the Historic Site Preservation Board of the City of Palm Springs to consider designation of the property, known as the General Houses Inc., Palm Springs Model Home, as a historic site was issued in accordance with applicable law; and

WHEREAS, on December 11, 2012, the Historic Site Preservation Board conducted a public hearing in accordance with applicable law to consider designation of General Houses Inc, Palm Springs Model Home as a historic site; and

WHEREAS, the Historic Site Preservation Board has carefully reviewed and considered all of the evidence in connection with the designation, including but not limited to the Nomination Application, the staff report, application and historical research, all written and oral testimony presented

THE HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD HEREBY FINDS AS FOLLOWS:

1. *The resource is associated with events that have made a meaningful contribution to the nation, state or community.*

As described in the following house history, this is the first pre-fabricated modular steel home to be built in Palm Springs. Seventy-five years later, this example of a General Houses, Inc. model home stands as an early example of architectural and mass housing experimentation for architects and builders who continue to seek solutions for contemporary housing issues through the construction of pre-fabricated steel homes.

2. *The property is associated with lives of persons who made meaningful contribution to national, state or local history.*

Although not well-known in Palm Springs, architect Howard T. Fisher is a person of significance in our past. Fisher made a meaningful contribution to national history as an internationally known architect, famed for his pioneering work designing and marketing prefabricated houses utilizing his skills as a construction materials researcher. Fisher was also a computer technology pioneer. His personal and professional history rises to the level sufficient to qualify the building's eligibility for local listing.

3. *The property reflects or exemplifies a particular period of the national, state or local history.*

The development of mass-produced, factory-built housing received significant public attention in the 1920's and 1930's. According to one source, "By the mid-1930s, homebuyers could choose from nearly three dozen manufacturers featuring a dizzying array of materials-steel, precast concrete, asbestos cement, gypsum, plywood." The house represents the optimism and opportunism of America's early 20<sup>th</sup> Century industrial leaders who sought to satisfy the growing demand for single family homes.

4. *The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction.*

The property's "distinctive characteristics" are its form, proportion, structure, plan, style, and especially its materials, the unique details that are a result of its prefabricated, modular method of construction, including the wall and roof panel system, curving roof flashing details, casement windows and surviving original doors. The subject building's appearance is unique in Palm Springs because of those characteristics and is

considered the first local prototype of its particular type, period, and method of construction. Staff supports the finding.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that, based upon the foregoing, the Historic Site Preservation Board recommends that the City Council adopt the attached Statement of Historic Significance and designate the dwelling and garage located at 1320 E. Tamarisk Road as a Historic Site, Class 1 subject to the following conditions;

1. The property owner shall permit the City to place a historic marker of the City's choosing at the site. The marker shall be placed in a location visible from the public right-of-way. The owner shall maintain the marker in the location installed and pay for the replacement cost if the plaque is lost, stolen, or otherwise removed from the property.
2. All future modifications of the existing structures, as well as any new buildings shall require HSPB review pursuant Municipal Code Ordinance 8.05.180.
3. No review for maintenance of the parking lot or landscaping shall be required, except that, subject to staff approval, any new landscape materials shall be native or desert-appropriate, including removal of turf, where practical.
4. All requirements of the Palm Springs Zoning Code shall be met.
5. That the City Clerk submit the Council Resolution to the County recorder for recordation within 90 days of the effective date of this resolution.
6. Any alterations or modifications to the exterior approved prior to the designation of this site by the City Council shall be considered legal, non-conforming only as to Section 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code.

ADOPTED this \_\_\_th day of December, 2012.

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTENTIONS:

ATTEST:

CITY OF PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

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Craig A. Ewing, AICP  
Director of Planning Services  
Historic Site Preservation Board Secretary

## STATEMENT OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

1320 E. TAMARISK ROAD

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### **House History:**

The first General Houses Steel Home system was designed in 1932 and examples were exhibited at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair; in 1937 the first and only Palm Springs version was built. Along with the Grace Lewis Miller Residence (1937, Richard Neutra) and the H. C. Davidson Residence, "Merienda" (1936, Webster and Wilson), the GH Model Home is one of the three earliest modern homes in Palm Springs and the first, modular, prefabricated steel home in the desert.

General Houses History: Architect Howard T. Fisher, FAIA was a Harvard graduate who organized General Houses, Inc. [GH] in 1932. GH was a pioneering firm in the development of prefabricated housing. The firm designed and erected low-cost, high-quality prefabricated homes using mass production methods that integrated design, manufacturing, and marketing of simple houses in a single package. In 1933, a typical GH steel two-bedroom house cost \$4,500. The company's slogan was 'A house that's twice as good at half the price.' Fisher's original patented construction system used pressed-steel<sup>3</sup> panels for walls, roofs, and floors, set on a concrete foundation. After the foundation was cured, a crew of unskilled laborers could put a house together in about two weeks. The company received nationwide publicity in 1932 and the media hailed Fisher's company as the 'Next Big Thing.' GH displayed a model home at the 'Century of Progress' World's Fair. It was a sleek, flat-roofed, stylishly furnished steel cottage that attracted thousands of visitors.

Fisher had devised an ingenious system of modular construction and lined up a syndicate of private investors that became supplier-partners such as GE, Pullman<sup>4</sup>, and Pittsburgh Paint & Glass. GH was based upon the belief that these homes could be best be provided by a group of companies that contributed their special products, rather than by a single large manufacturing company. He convinced Charles Allen Liddle, President of Pullman Car & Manufacturing, that GH could become the General Motors of housing. Liddle, with much experience in building steel shelter units – they supplied the pressed steel panels - joined other companies in supplying the components of the GH Steel houses.

And the press was in his corner: *Fortune* and *Time*, among others, had all but deemed GH the answer to America's housing crisis. In Chicago, so many visitors lined up to see the House of Steel that Fisher begged the fair's managers to let him charge for

<sup>3</sup> The panels are described in the GH brochure as being "asbestos cement board."

<sup>4</sup> It is believed that this connection to Pullman Car & Manufacturing Co. gave rise to the erroneous information that the house was built for a member of the Pullman family.

admission.”<sup>5</sup> Among the visitor’s to the house was Edmund Lindop (1901-1968). He was born in Chicago, the son of Englishman Frank Raven Lindop who immigrated to the United States and settled in Illinois. By 1925 the younger Lindop had married and was living in Oak Park where he was employed as a Realtor.

The ambitious Lindop became an early franchiser of GH with the goal of becoming a developer. Anticipating a recovery in the Florida real estate market (which did not occur until World War II), Lindop relocated his family to Miami in 1932. He soon realized that Florida was not going to be the anticipated land of opportunity. Seeking better development opportunities, he took his dreams and his family to Los Angeles in 1936. Soon thereafter he acquired a tract of land in Palm Springs where he hoped to develop a neighborhood of steel houses.

In November 20, 1936 *The Desert Sun* ran the following article, "Steel House Now Being Erected: "The first of the steel houses manufactured by General House, Inc. to come to California is now being erected in the Desert Sands tract by Edmund F. Lindop, owner of the tract and California distributor for the manufacturers. The new steel house will be completed in three weeks and will then be open for public inspection. It is a large house, having three bedrooms and two baths; of the new modernistic type of architecture which originated in Europe .... General Steel Houses are being erected by the hundreds in the fashionable areas of Eastern cities, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, New York and other places. Mr. Lindop has 50 dealers under him in various parts of the state and all are looking forward to the first house of the company to be erected in California, now being assembled in Palm Springs. Every part of the house is made by mass production in the factory. The steel frame bolted together and compressed asbestos panels on the outside as well as heat and cold resisting fireproof materials for the roof, form a building that is both earthquake proof and fireproof. Inside walls are of plywood and both inside and outside walls are finished in any color desired.

The project was not a success, resulting in the Lindop family’s use of the model home as a weekend residence. It finally sold in 1946 to another Los Angelino Charles Stern who owned the house for many years. Stern ordered a compatible two-car garage module from GH that was added to the main house in 1947. Since February 1962 the home has been owned by the late architect Michael Black and his wife Barbara. Barbara Black continues to own the home today. Over its 75-year history, the home has been occupied by only two families.

#### **Building Description:**

Built as a model home, the subject building, "The Trenton" GH Model # H-14-16-L was the deluxe model with an optional fireplace. It was a 1,754 sq. ft. 3-bedroom<sup>6</sup>, 2-bathroom single family residence. The design, proportion, materials, metal post and beam construction, and overall feeling of this low-slung, linear, single-story residence reflects the Streamline Moderne style and incorporates such characteristic elements as

<sup>5</sup> GH Marketing Brochure.

<sup>6</sup> The home actually has four bedrooms and three baths; one of the two original garage bays was converted to a Guest Suite.

metal-framed ribbon and corner windows, smooth wall finishes, rounded corners, and a flat roof.

Two offset rectangles in plan, the house has an irregular footprint with a projecting volume at the main facade corresponding to the living room on the interior. On the eastern side of this projected element is the main entrance, sheltered by an entrance hood, which is supported by a wooden structural trellis. A secondary entrance on the western end of the living room is also marked by a hood and trellis.

The following specification describing the construction materials for the house is taken from the brochure for General Houses, Inc. entitled "The House that Science Built":

*"The entire weight of the house is carried on steel columns and beams of copper bearing steel that are bolted to each other and to a heavy concrete foundation to form a rigid support for walls, partitions, ceilings, and roof. Roofs are designed to carry live loads of 40 pounds per square foot.*

*"All outside walls and interior partitions consists of a series of 35"-wide panels supported between the upright columns of the steel frame. Each panel is a complete factory-built unit consisting of a wood frame in which the insulation is suspended and to which the interior and exterior surfaces of the panel are glued under pressure. Panels are wedged securely between the supporting steel columns by steel battens or plates that are bolted to each column. The combined roof and ceiling consists of factory-built panels, similar in construction to the wall panels, but somewhat heavier. They are made edge to edge to cover the entire house and are screwed down onto the horizontal beams of the steel frame of the building with heavy sheet metal screws. The outer surface of each exterior wall panel consists of an asbestos cement board. Asbestos cement is entirely mineral in composition and therefore is highly resistant to damage caused by weather, fire, and vermin. It is so compact that it is virtually airtight and thus stops the entrance of cold drafts from without and leakage of warm air from within.*

*"A waterproof, long-wearing surface is laid over the roof and ceiling panels to assure trouble-free shelter from rain, sun and snow. This protective surface consists of a build-up, membrane type roof applied in layers. This type of roofing will give years of service without requiring any attention or expense. An attractive coping extends above the surface of the roof at the edges to prevent rain from flowing down over the walls. Roof drains and downspouts carry the water to the ground.*

*"The interior walls, partitions and ceilings are of thick, fir plywood sheets which are an integral part of the panels used in building the house. Each plywood sheet consists of three layers of wood in which the grain of the center layer is at right angles to the grain of the two outside layers. This gives the wood rigidity and strength in a direction in all directions and*

*results of the wall and ceiling which will be permanently smooth. Interior panels are acoustically treated to reduce transmission of sound from room to room.*

*"All windows are steel casement which open outward and are furnished complete with hardware. Friction hinges hold windows open in any position. Windows are so hinged that they may be washed from both sides from within the house. Because the complete window panel is exactly the same in overall size and thickness as any solid wall panel the location of windows may be determined by the owner and placed by the builder within any panel opening without regard to the window locations shown on the plan. Each window is equipped with an interior hinged screen with steel frame and bronze wire mesh.*

*"The entrance doors are of modern flush design. They're made of wood in built-up construction 1 3/4" thick, and glazed. Rear entrance doors are recessed panel design, made of build-up wood construction, 1 3/4" thick, with the upper portion glazed. Spring bronze weather-stripping keeps out dusty chilly drafts. Thresholds are of stainless steel. Exterior connecting doors to garage are similar in design and construction to the front entrance doors, but are not glazed. Screen doors with bronze wire mesh, are provided for front and rear entrances. Interior doors are of wood, 1 3/8 inches thick overall, of inset panel design. Doors are supplied for all openings where they are indicated on each plan.*

*"The outside surface of all wall panels is painted with one coat of special primer and one finish coat of white lead in linseed oil paint. All metal surfaces such as windows and door frames, steel panel battens and coping, are given a coat of special metal primer. In addition, these parts are covered with two finish coats of white lead in linseed oil paint. Exterior doors are given three coats of white lead into the oil paint.*

*"All exposed plywood for the interior surfaces of walls and ceilings is given one primer coat. In addition the services received two finish coats of linseed oil paint, except in the closets and cases, which received one finish coat. Interior doors and trims are painted with three coats of lead and oil paint.*

*"All floors, except in the kitchen, bath, closets, garages and utility-storage room, are made ready to receive carpeting or other suitable finish that the owner may decide to purchase. Linoleum covers the kitchen and bathroom floors to provide an attractive, quiet, washable, practical floor covering for these rooms. Closet floors are painted. The garage and utility-storage room floors are cement finish. The garage floor is sloped toward the doors for drainage.*

*"An optional wood-burning fireplace may be installed in this model. It is a*

*prefabricated design, complete with chimney, and efficient in operation. Direct warmth comes from the rise of the open fire. In addition cool air is drawn through a grill at the floor level into an air chamber which surrounds the steel firebox. The air is heated in this chamber and then allowed to merge into the room through grills near the ceiling.”<sup>7</sup>*

A detached two car garage was ordered from GH a year after the house was sold. It was a two-car model 19'1" wide by 19'1" long and originally equipped with two pairs of out-swinging doors.

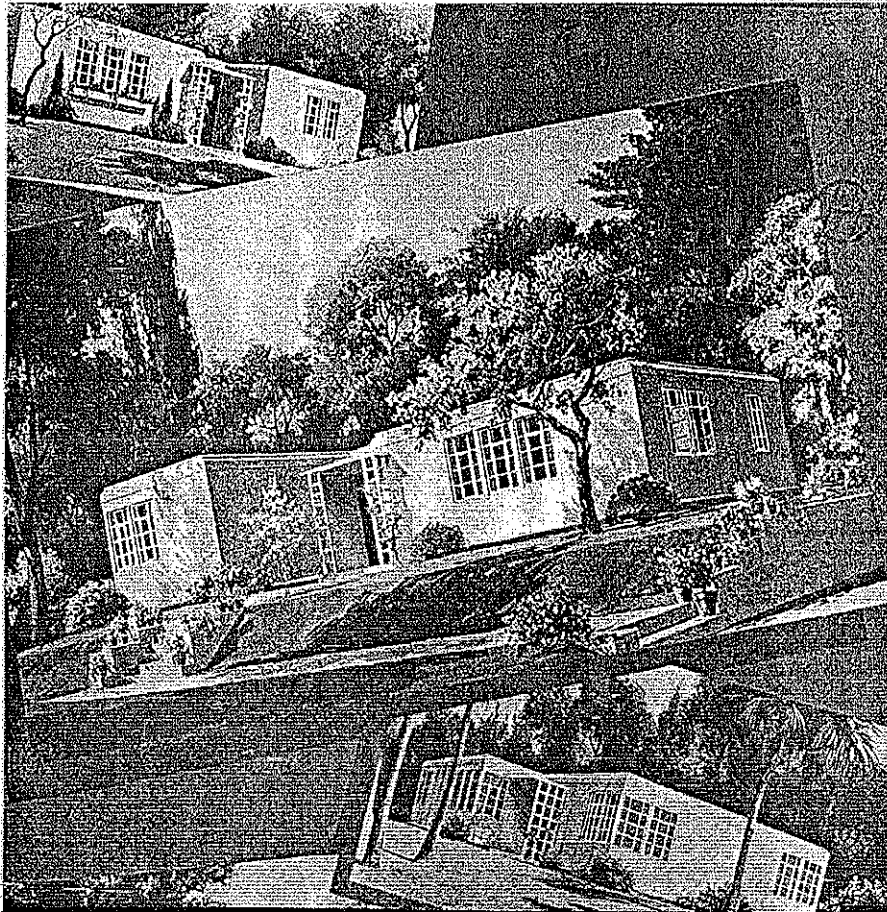
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<sup>7</sup> GH Catalog.



Nomination Application for  
Class 1 Historic Site  
General Houses Inc., Palm Springs Model Home  
1320 Tamarisk Road  
Palm Springs, California 92262

## GENERAL HOUSES INC., PALM SPRINGS MODEL HOME



Cover: General Houses Brochure

**RECEIVED**

NOV 06 2012

PLANNING SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT

Prepared by  
Patrick McGraw, Historic Site Preservation Board  
November 2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The owner of the Palm Springs General Houses Model home, Barbara Black has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to the maintenance and preservation of this important piece of Palm Springs Architectural History. She embodies the essence of the stewardship of an historic property and serves as a model for future owners, not only of this house, but of other historic properties in Palm Springs and beyond.

A special acknowledgement goes to Barbara Black; her archive of background information made the detail contained in this nomination possible. And, without the care and maintenance with which she protected this home, it's likely it would not have survived.

-Patrick McGrew  
November 2012

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The subject building is eligible for listing on the local registry under the following three paragraphs of the Planning Code and possesses a high level of integrity and retains the identity for which it is significant.

### Events

**8.05.020 (a) paragraph 1 - Events:** Paragraph 1 recognizes properties associated with events or *patterns of events or historic trends*. As described in the following house history, this is the first pre-fabricated modular steel home to be built in Palm Springs. As such, it qualifies under Code Section 8.05.020 (a) paragraph 1 as an event that has made a meaningful contribution to the community. Today, some seventy-five years later, this example of a GH model home stands as an early example of architectural and mass housing experimentation for architects and builders who continue to seek solutions for contemporary housing issues through the construction of pre-fabricated steel homes.

### Persons

**8.05.020 (a) paragraph 2 - Persons:** This paragraph applies to properties associated with individuals whose specific contributions to history can be identified and documented. Persons "significant in our past" refers to individuals whose activities are demonstrably important within a local, State, or national historic context. The criterion is generally restricted to those properties that illustrate a person's important achievements. Although not well-known in Palm Springs, architect Howard T. Fisher is a person of significance in our past. For a brief biography of Fisher, see attachment. In summary, Fisher made a meaningful contribution to national history as an internationally known architect, famed for his pioneering work designing and marketing prefabricated houses utilizing his skills as a construction materials researcher. Fisher was also a computer technology pioneer. His personal and professional history rises to the level sufficient to qualify the building's eligibility for local listing. The building qualifies for listing Class 1 Site on the local registry under Code Section 8.05.020 (a) paragraph 2

### Architecture:

**8.05.020 (a) paragraph 4:** To be eligible under this paragraph, a property must clearly illustrate, through "distinctive characteristics" a pattern of features common to a particular class of resources

The property clearly illustrates, through its "distinctive characteristics" a pattern of features common to a modern, pre-fabricated, steel, residential construction. The properties' "Distinctive characteristics" its form, proportion, structure, plan, style, and especially its materials, the unique details that are a result of its prefabricated, modular method of construction, including the wall and roof panel system, curving roof flashing details, casement windows and surviving original doors. The subject building's appearance is unique in Palm Springs because of those characteristics and is considered the first local prototype of its particular type, period, and method of construction. The building qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Site on the local registry under 8.05.020 (a) paragraph 4



# CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

## Department of Planning Services

3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Telephone: 760-323-8245 ~ Fax: 760-322-8360

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Public Works & Engineering ~ 760-323-8253

Fire Department ~ 760-323-8187

Building & Safety ~ 760-323-8242

Building Inspections ~ 760-323-8243

Code Enforcement ~ 760-778-8434

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## HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION

The City of Palm Springs allows for the local designation of historic buildings, sites or districts within the City (Section 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code.) This application packet is to be completed in order to request a historic designation. For additional information, please contact the Department of Planning Services at 760-323-8245 or [planning@palmspringsca.gov](mailto:planning@palmspringsca.gov).

### **APPLICATION**

The completed application and required materials may be submitted to the Department of Planning Services. The submittal will be given a cursory check and will be accepted for filing only if the basic requirements have been met.

A case planner will be assigned to the project and will be responsible for a detailed review of the application and all exhibits to ensure that all required information is adequate and accurate. Incomplete applications due to missing or inadequate information will not be accepted for filing.

Applicants may be asked to attend scheduled meetings pertaining to their project. These will include the Historic Site Preservation Board (HSPB) and the City Council.

### **HISTORIC SITE PRESERVATION BOARD (HSPB)**

Once the application has been determined to be complete, the HSPB will review the application to determine whether the site meets the minimum qualifications for designation pursuant to Chapter 8.05 of the Palm Springs Municipal Code. If such determination is made, a public hearing will be scheduled for a future meeting. A public hearing will be held by the HSPB to receive testimony from all interested persons concerning the Historic Site Designation. The public hearing may be continued from time to time, and upon complete consideration, the HSPB will make a recommendation to the City Council. Notice will be provided as indicated below.

### **CITY COUNCIL**

After receiving the recommendation of the Historic Site Preservation Board, a public hearing will be held by the City Council to receive testimony from all interested persons concerning the requested Historic Site Designation. The public hearing may be continued from time to time, and upon complete consideration, the City Council will then conditionally approve, deny, or approve the application as submitted. The City Council's decision on the application is final.

### **NOTIFICATION**

Prior to consideration of the application by the HSPB and the City Council, a notice of public hearing for a Historic Site Designation request will be mailed to all property owners within 400 feet of the subject property a minimum of ten (10) days prior to the hearing dates.



**Office Use Only**

Date:
Case No.
HSPB No.
Planner:

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**CITY OF PALM SPRINGS  
Department of Planning Services**

**HISTORIC SITE DESIGNATION APPLICATION**

**TO THE APPLICANT:**

Your cooperation in completing this application and supplying the information requested will expedite City review of your application. Application submitted will not be considered until all submittal requirements are met. Staff may require additional information depending upon the specific project. Please submit this completed application and any subsequent material to the Department of Planning Services.

This form is to be used to nominate individual properties for Class 1 or 2 historic designations, or to nominate the formation of historic districts. Applicants are encouraged to review two bulletins from the US Department of Interior for additional information:

- "How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form" (National Register Bulletin 16A: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/>); and
- "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation" (National Register Bulletin 15; <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>).

Complete each item by darkening the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions in the Bulletins cited above.

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**1. Property Information**

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Historic Name: General Housing Inc., Palm Springs Model Home

Other names: General Houses Model # H-14-16-L

Address: 1320 Tamarisk Road

Assessor parcel number: 507255008

Owner's name: Barbara Black

Owner's Address: 1320 Tamarisk Road, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Telephone: 760 799 6773

e-mail address: [babsblackmail@yahoo.com](mailto:babsblackmail@yahoo.com)

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## 2. Classifications

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Ownership of Property. Check as many boxes as apply.

- Private
- Public - Local
- Public - State
- Public - Federal

Category of Property. Check only one box.

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property. TOTAL must include at least One (1) in Contributing Column.

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
1		Buildings
1		Sites
		Structures
		Objects
2		Total

If the building or site is part of a larger group of properties, enter the name of the multiple-property group; otherwise enter "N/A".

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## 3. Use or Function

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Historic Use or Function: Model Home / Single-family Residence

Current Use or Function: Single-family Residence

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## 4. Description

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**Architect:** Howard T. Fisher, FAIA

**Construction Date and Source:** 1937, Riverside County Assessor's Records (Designed in 1932).

**Architectural Classification:** Streamline Moderne

**Construction Materials:**

The foundation is reinforced concrete, as is the floor slab. The roof is a three-ply built up roof over prefabricated roof panels. The walls are factory-built, insulated wood panels, faced with asbestos cement board. Other exterior materials include wood trellises at each entry.

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**5. Fill all boxes that qualify the property for listing**

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**Events**

■ (1) Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**Persons**

■ (2) Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**Architecture**

- (3) That reflects or exemplifies a particular period of national, State or local history, or
- (4) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or
- (5) Represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or
- (6) Represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**Archeology**

(7) Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations (Check all the boxes that apply.)**

- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- removed from its original location.
- a birthplace or
- a grave or cemetery.
- a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- a commemorative property.
- less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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**6. Statement of Significance**

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Attach an explanation of any of the numbered criteria selected in Section 5 (above).

- Significant Event *(Complete if Criterion 1 is marked above)*
- Significant Person *(Complete if Criterion 2 is marked above)*
- Significant Architecture *(Complete for each of Criteria 3, 4, 5 and / or 6 marked above)*
- Significant Archeologically *(Complete if Criterion 7 is marked above)*

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## 7. Integrity Analysis

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INTERGRITY STATEMENT: Alterations to this building have been restricted to the interior, including changes to the Mechanical Room, Bathroom, Kitchen and closets. Changes to the exterior including changing the paint color from the standard issue white to the current taupe. A two-car garage module was added in 1947, and subsequently altered to convert one automobile bay to a Guest Suite; the current Garage door is not original.

Even with the minor alterations cited above, the residence still retains a high degree of integrity: the location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association appear to remain unchanged since the building was constructed. The property retains the identity for which it is significant. It has been well maintained and is in excellent condition. Additionally, the site benefits from mature vegetation and handsome landscaping that enhances the setting and reflects the period of development before street paving and sidewalks were installed.

As cited in the *2004 Citywide Survey*: "This house appears to meet the level of significance for individual National Register of Historic Places or California Register of Historical Resources eligibility at the local level."<sup>1</sup>

Although the subject property need not be compared with similar properties, it is informative to note that preservation battles have been waged in an attempt to preserve some of the few GH homes that still survive. Although a GH home built for Adalai Stevenson has been demolished, as has the Bowers Residence in Cambridge, MA, the Winslow Ames Residence at Connecticut College survives and has been the focus of rehabilitation efforts for years. The college donated \$100,000 towards the rehabilitation, and the still-somewhat derelict building has been listed on the National Register. By comparison, the GH Palm Springs house has always been privately maintained.

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## 8. Bibliography

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Attach a list of all books, articles, and other sources cited or used in preparing this application. Also, identify any previous surveys that cite the subject property, or any other documentation that may be on file. See Appendix I.

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## 9. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: .3 acre

Property Boundary Description: APN: 507255008-0 Lot 3 MB 018/074 Desert Sands Tract

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<sup>1</sup> 2004 Citywide Survey



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**10. Prepared By:**

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Name/title: Patrick McGrew, Historic Site Preservation Board Member

Organization: Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board

Street address: c/o Palm Springs City Hall, 3200 East Tahquitz Canyon Way

City: Palm Springs

State: California

Zip: 92262

Telephone: (760) 416-7819

E-mail address: patrickmcgrew2@gmail.com

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**11. Required Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed application form. **Do not mount any exhibits on a board.**

1. **Attachment Sheets.** Include all supplemental information based on application form (above).
2. **Maps:** For Historic Districts, include a sketch map identifying the proposed districts boundaries.
3. **Photographs:** Eight (8) sets of color photographs showing each elevation of the property and its surroundings.
4. **Non-owner's Notarized Signature:** If the applicant is not the owner, a notarized affidavit shall be provided (see following page).
5. **Site Plan:** One 1/8" to 1/4" scale drawing of the site, and eight reduction copies (8 1/2 x 11 inches) The site plan shall show all of the following: Property boundaries, north arrow and scale, all existing buildings, structures, mechanical equipment, landscape materials, fences, walls, sidewalks, driveways, parking areas showing location of parking spaces, and signs. **Indicate the square footage and use of each building and the date(s) of construction.**
6. **Public Hearing Labels:** Three (3) sets of typed self-adhesive labels of all property owners, lessees, and sub-lessees of record. **The labels shall include the Assessor's parcel number, owner's name and mailing address of each property with 400 feet from the exterior limits of the subject property.** Additionally, all Assessor Parcel Maps clearly indicating the 400-foot radius and a certified letter from a title company licensed to conduct business in Riverside County, California shall be submitted.

BARBARA BLACK  
1320 EAST TAMARISK ROAD  
PALM SPRINGS, CA. 92262  
760-322-5151  
[babsblackmail@yahoo.com](mailto:babsblackmail@yahoo.com)

October 26, 2012

Director of Planning Services  
City of Palm Springs  
3200 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way  
Palm Springs, Ca. 92262

RE: 1320 Tamarisk Road, Palm Springs, Ca. 92262

To Whom It May Concern,

Please accept this letter as my authorization for Patrick McGrew from the Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board to act as my agent in matters regarding a Class 1 Historic Site designation of the General Houses Inc., Model Home located at the address above. It was the first steel prefab home built in Palm Springs in 1937. Howard Fisher was the architect. I have occupied this home since 1962. The home has been toured by a number of groups including the Hammer Museum and Palm Springs Modern Committee and will be included in a Steel Home tour during Modernism Week, 2013.

If you have any questions regarding the property I direct you to Patrick McGrew, who may be reached at [patrickmcgrew2@gmail.com](mailto:patrickmcgrew2@gmail.com).

Sincerely,

Barbara Black  
Property Owner

cc: Patrick McGrew

## Statement of Significance - House History:

The first General Houses Steel Home system was designed in 1932 and examples were exhibited at the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair; in 1937 the first and only Palm Springs version was built. Along with the Grace Lewis Miller Residence (1937, Richard Neutra) and the H. C. Davidson Residence, "Merienda" (1936, Webster and Wilson), the GH Model Home is one of the three earliest modern homes in Palm Springs and the first, modular, prefabricated steel home in the desert.

"General Housing History: Architect Howard T. Fisher, FAIA was a Harvard graduate who organized General Housing, Inc. [GH] in 1932. GH was a pioneering firm in the development of prefabricated housing. The firm designed and erected low-cost, high-quality prefabricated homes using mass production methods that integrated design, manufacturing, and marketing of simple houses in a single package. In 1933, a typical GH steel two-bedroom house cost \$4,500. The company's slogan was 'A house that's twice as good at half the price.' Fisher's original patented construction system used pressed-steel<sup>2</sup> panels for walls, roofs, and floors, set on a concrete foundation. After the foundation was cured, a crew of unskilled laborers could put a house together in about two weeks. The company received nationwide publicity in 1932 and the media hailed Fisher's company as the 'Next Big Thing.' GH displayed a model home at the 'Century of Progress' World's Fair. It was a sleek, flat-roofed, stylishly furnished steel cottage that attracted thousands of visitors.

"Fisher had devised an ingenious system of modular construction and lined up a syndicate of private investors that became supplier-partners such as GE, Pullman<sup>3</sup>, and Pittsburgh Paint & Glass. GH was based upon the belief that these homes could be best be provided by a group of companies that contributed their special products, rather than by a single large manufacturing company. He convinced Charles Allen Liddle, President of Pullman Car & Manufacturing, that GH could become the General Motors of housing. Liddle, with much experience in building steel shelter units – they supplied the pressed steel panels - joined other companies in supplying the components of the GH Steel houses.

"And the press was in his corner: *Fortune* and *Time*, among others, had all but deemed GH the answer to America's housing crisis. In Chicago, so many visitors lined up to see the House of Steel that Fisher begged the fair's managers to let him charge for admission."<sup>4</sup> Among the visitor's to the house was Edmund Lindop (1901-1968). He was born in Chicago, the son of Englishman Frank Raven Lindop who immigrated to the United States and settled in Illinois. By 1925 the younger Lindop had married and was living in Oak Park where he was employed as a Realtor.

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<sup>2</sup> The panels are described in the GH brochure as being "asbestos cement board."

<sup>3</sup> It is believed that this connection to Pullman Car & Manufacturing Co. gave rise to the erroneous information that the house was built for a member of the Pullman family.

<sup>4</sup> GH Marketing Brochure.

The ambitious Lindop became an early franchiser of GH with the goal of becoming a developer. Anticipating a recovery in the Florida real estate market (which did not occur until World War II), Lindop relocated his family to Miami in 1932. He soon realized that Florida was not going to be the anticipated land of opportunity. Seeking better development opportunities, he took his dreams and his family to Los Angeles in 1936. Soon thereafter he acquired a tract of land in Palm Springs where he hoped to develop a neighborhood of steel houses.

In November 20, 1936 *The Desert Sun* ran the following article, "Steel House Now Being Erected: "The first of the steel houses manufactured by General House, Inc. to come to California is now being erected in the Desert Sands tract by Edmund F. Lindop, owner of the tract and California distributor for the manufacturers. The new steel house will be completed in three weeks and will then be open for public inspection. It is a large house, having three bedrooms and two baths; of the new modernistic type of architecture which originated in Europe .... General Steel Houses are being erected by the hundreds in the fashionable areas of Eastern cities, Chicago, Cleveland, St. Louis, New York and other places. Mr. Lindop has 50 dealers under him in various parts of the state and all are looking forward to the first house of the company to be erected in California, now being assembled in Palm Springs. Every part of the house is made by mass production in the factory. The steel frame bolted together and compressed asbestos panels on the outside as well as heat and cold resisting fireproof materials for the roof, form a building that is both earthquake proof and fireproof. Inside walls are of plyboard and both inside and outside walls are finished in any color desired."

The project was not a success, resulting in the Lindop family's use of the model home as a weekend residence. It finally sold in 1946 to another Los Angelino Charles Stern who owned the house for many years. Stern ordered a compatible two-car garage module from GH that was added to the main house in 1947. Since February 1962 the home has been owned by the late architect Michael Black and his wife Barbara. Barbara Black continues to own the home today. Over its 75-year history, the home has been occupied by only two families.

### **Building Description:**

Built as a model home, the subject building, "The Trenton" GH Model # H-14-16-L was the deluxe model with an optional fireplace. It was a 1,754 sq. ft. 3-bedroom<sup>5</sup>, 2-bathroom single family residence. The design, proportion, materials, metal post and beam construction, and overall feeling of this low-slung, linear, single-story residence reflects the Streamline Moderne style and incorporates such characteristic elements as metal-framed ribbon and corner windows, smooth wall finishes, rounded corners, and a flat roof.

Two offset rectangles in plan, the house has an irregular footprint with a projecting volume at the main facade corresponding to the living room on the interior. On the eastern side of this projected element is the main entrance, sheltered by an

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<sup>5</sup> The home actually has four bedrooms and three baths; one of the two original garage bays was converted to a Guest Suite.

entrance hood, which is supported by a wooden structural trellis. A secondary entrance on the western end of the living room is also marked by a hood and trellis.

The following specification describing the construction materials for the house is taken from the brochure for General Houses, Inc. entitled "The House that Science Built".

"The entire weight of the house is carried on steel columns and beams of copper bearing steel that are bolted to each other and to a heavy concrete foundation to form a rigid support for walls, partitions, ceilings, and roof. Roofs are designed to carry live loads of 40 pounds per square foot.

"All outside walls and interior partitions consists of a series of 35"-wide panels supported between the upright columns of the steel frame. Each panel is a complete factory-built unit consisting of a wood frame in which the insulation is suspended and to which the interior and exterior surfaces of the panel are glued under pressure. Panels are wedged securely between the supporting steel columns by steel battens or plates that are bolted to each column. The combined roof and ceiling consists of factory-built panels, similar in construction to the wall panels, but somewhat heavier. They are made edge to edge to cover the entire house and are screwed down onto the horizontal beams of the steel frame of the building with heavy sheet metal screws. The outer surface of each exterior wall panel consists of an asbestos cement board. Asbestos cement is entirely mineral in composition and therefore is highly resistant to damage caused by weather, fire, and vermin. It is so compact that it is virtually airtight and thus stops the entrance of cold drafts from without and leakage of warm air from within.

"A waterproof, long-wearing surface is laid over the roof and ceiling panels to assure trouble-free shelter from rain, sun and snow. This protective surface consists of a build-up, membrane type roof applied in layers. This type of roofing will give years of service without requiring any attention or expense. An attractive coping extends above the surface of the roof at the edges to prevent rain from flowing down over the walls. Roof drains and downspouts carry the water to the ground.

"The interior walls, partitions and ceilings are of thick, fir plywood sheets which are an integral part of the panels used in building the house. Each plywood sheet consists of three layers of wood in which the grain of the center layer is at right angles to the grain of the two outside layers. This gives the wood rigidity and strength in a direction in all directions and results of the wall and ceiling which will be permanently smooth. Interior panels are acoustically treated to reduce transmission of sound from room to room.

"All windows are steel casement which open outward and are furnished complete with hardware. Friction hinges hold windows open in any position. Windows are so hinged that they may be washed from both sides from within the house. Because the complete window panel is exactly the same in overall size and thickness as any solid wall panel the location of windows may be determined by

the owner and placed by the builder within any panel opening without regard to the window locations shown on the plan. Each window is equipped with an interior hinged screen with steel frame and bronze wire mesh.

"The entrance doors are of modern flush design. They're made of wood in built-up construction 1 3/4" thick, and glazed. Rear entrance doors are recessed panel design, made of build-up wood construction, 1 3/4" thick, with the upper portion glazed. Spring bronze weather-stripping keeps out dusty chilly drafts. Thresholds are of stainless steel. Exterior connecting doors to garage are similar in design and construction to the front entrance doors, but are not glazed. Screen doors with bronze wire mesh, are provided for front and rear entrances. Interior doors are of wood, 1 3/8 inches thick overall, of inset panel design. Doors are supplied for all openings where they are indicated on each plan.

"The outside surface of all wall panels is painted with one coat of special primer and one finish coat of white lead in linseed oil paint. All metal surfaces such as windows and door frames, steel panel battens and coping, are given a coat of special metal primer. In addition, these parts are covered with two finish coats of white lead in linseed oil paint. Exterior doors are given three coats of white lead into the oil paint.

"All exposed plywood for the interior surfaces of walls and ceilings is given one primer coat. In addition the services received two finish coats of linseed oil paint, except in the closets and cases, which received one finish coat. Interior doors and trims are painted with three coats of lead and oil paint.

"All floors, except in the kitchen, bath, closets, garages and utility-storage room, are made ready to receive carpeting or other suitable finish that the owner may decide to purchase. Linoleum covers the kitchen and bathroom floors to provide an attractive, quiet, washable, practical floor covering for these rooms. Closet floors are painted. The garage and utility-storage room floors are cement finish. The garage floor is sloped toward the doors for drainage.

"An optional wood-burning fireplace may be installed in this model. It is a prefabricated design, complete with chimney, and efficient in operation. Direct warmth comes from the rise of the open fire. In addition cool air is drawn through a grill at the floor level into an air chamber which surrounds the steel firebox. The air is heated in this chamber and then allowed to merge into the room through grills near the ceiling."<sup>6</sup>

A detached two car garage was ordered from GH a year after the house was sold. It was a two-car model 19'1" wide by 19'1" long and originally equipped with two pairs of out-swinging doors.

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<sup>6</sup> GH catalog.

## EVALUATION for CLASS 1 ELIGIBILITY UNDER PALM SPRINGS CRITERIA:

### Events

**8.05.020 (a) paragraph 1 - Events:** Paragraph 1 recognizes properties associated with events or *patterns of events or historic trends*, As described in the following house history, this is the first pre-fabricated modular steel home to be built in Palm Springs. As such, it qualifies under Code Section 8.05.020 (a) paragraph 1 as an event that has made a meaningful contribution to the community. Today, some seventy-five years later, this example of a GH model home stands as an early example of architectural and mass housing experimentation for architects and builders who continue to seek solutions for contemporary housing issues through the construction of pre-fabricated steel homes.

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### Architecture:

**8.05.020 (a) paragraph 4:** To be eligible under this paragraph, a property must clearly illustrate, through "distinctive characteristics" a pattern of features common to a particular class of resources. The property clearly illustrates, through its "distinctive characteristics" a pattern of features common to a modern, pre-fabricated steel residential construction. The properties' "Distinctive characteristics" are its form, proportion, structure, plan, style, and especially its materials, the unique details that are a result of its prefabricated, modular method of construction, including the wall and roof panel system, curving roof flashing details, casement windows and surviving original doors. The subject building's appearance is unique in Palm Springs because of those characteristics and is considered the first local prototype of its particular type, period, and method of construction. The building qualifies for listing as a Class 1 Site on the local registry under 8.05.020 (a) paragraph 4

## Appendix I: Abbreviated Bibliography

Alfred, Bruce, with Harold Sandbank, *A History of Prefabrication*. John B. Pierce Foundation, New York, 1943. (Reprints from *Architectural Forum*, December 1942)

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<http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/riverside/steel-modern-a-history-of-steel-houses-in-palm-springs.html>

Modernism Week 2012: "Steel Modern After all These Years Tour."  
[http://www.pspreservationfoundation.org/modernism\\_2013.html](http://www.pspreservationfoundation.org/modernism_2013.html)



## Appendix II Biography: Howard Taylor Fisher, FAIA

Howard T. Fisher (1904-1979) was born in Hibbard Woods, IL, the son of Walter Lowrie Fisher, one of Chicago's leading attorneys and Secretary of the Interior under President Taft. He was brought up in Chicago and was a graduate of the Asheville School (Asheville, North Carolina) in 1922 and of Harvard College in 1926. After attending the Harvard Graduate School of Design, he practiced architecture and city planning in the Chicago area, becoming well-known in the field of prefabricated housing and efficient building methods. He was among many architects influenced by the push for mass production suggested by the slogan "houses like Fords." He founded the modestly successful General Houses, Inc., hoping it would become the "GM" of the shelter industry.<sup>7</sup>

Fisher was listed in *Who's Who in America* and was internationally known as an architect and building materials research specialist. He was consulting architect to the United Nations, as well as to the town of Kermia on the island of Cyprus; the Morton Arboretum near Chicago; and the Structural Clay Products Research Foundation. Fisher's firm was widely known for its pioneering work in prefabricated houses and shopping centers, and it also specialized in institutional and industrial projects. In later years the firm was active internationally, executing projects in Burma, Cyprus, Columbia, Canada and the South Pacific. Additionally, Fisher taught or lectured at many institutions of higher education, including Harvard, McGill (Montréal, Québec), Northwestern University, the University of Kansas, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts at Montréal, Lake Forest (Illinois) College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Institute of Design in Chicago, and others. The firm maintained offices in both Chicago and New York.

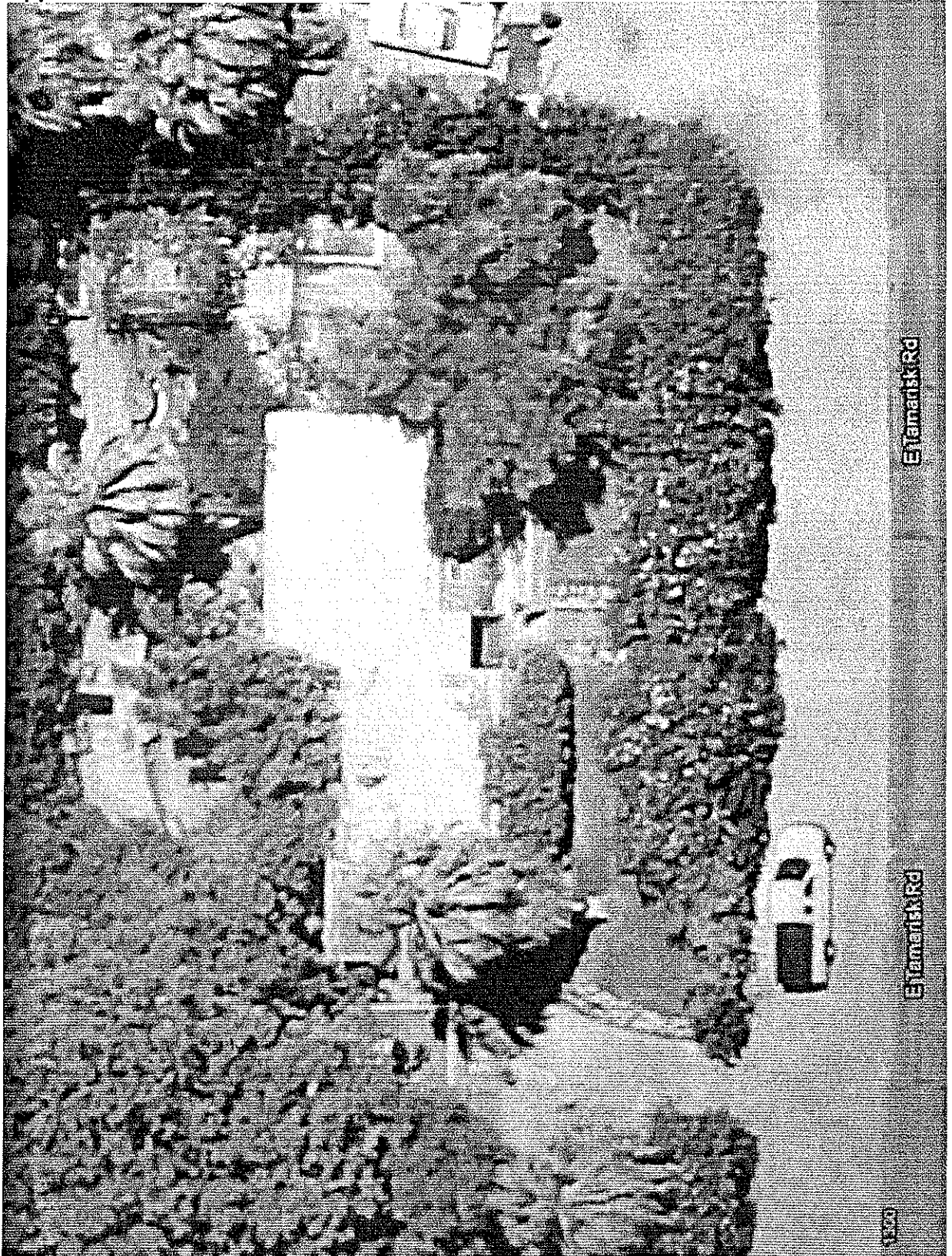
From 1957 to 1964 Fisher began a second career while serving on the faculty of Northwestern University where he developed SYNAP, a computer program that makes maps of statistical information such as census data. Returning to Cambridge in 1965, Fisher was appointed professor of the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University where he was the founder and first director of the laboratory for computer graphics. Here he also held the post of professor of city and regional planning and subsequently that of research professor of cartography.

He remained active after retirement and served as editor of the *Harvard Papers in Theoretical Cartography*, a series of publications to which he was also a principal contributor. As an enthusiastic sailor, he and his small boat were a familiar site to others in the area who also enjoyed the Lamprey River in the Great Bay. Fisher was survived by his wife Marion (née Hall) and their two sons, Morgan Hall Fisher of Santa Monica, California and Alan Hall Fisher of Baltimore, Maryland.

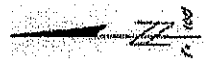
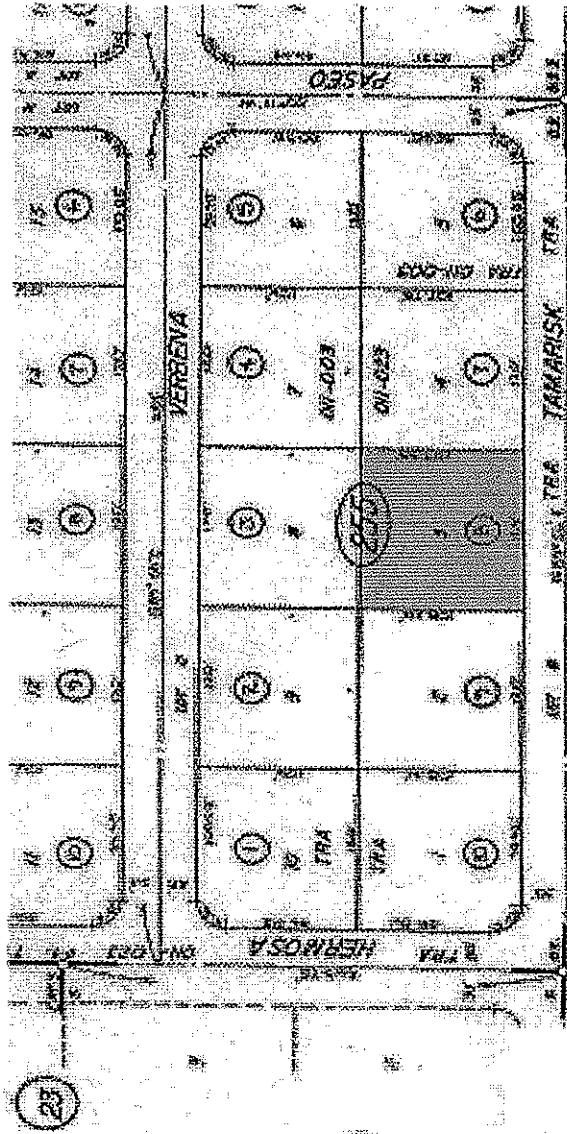
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<sup>7</sup> *Fortune Magazine* July 1930.

Appendix III Aerial Photo



# Appendix IV Assessor's Map



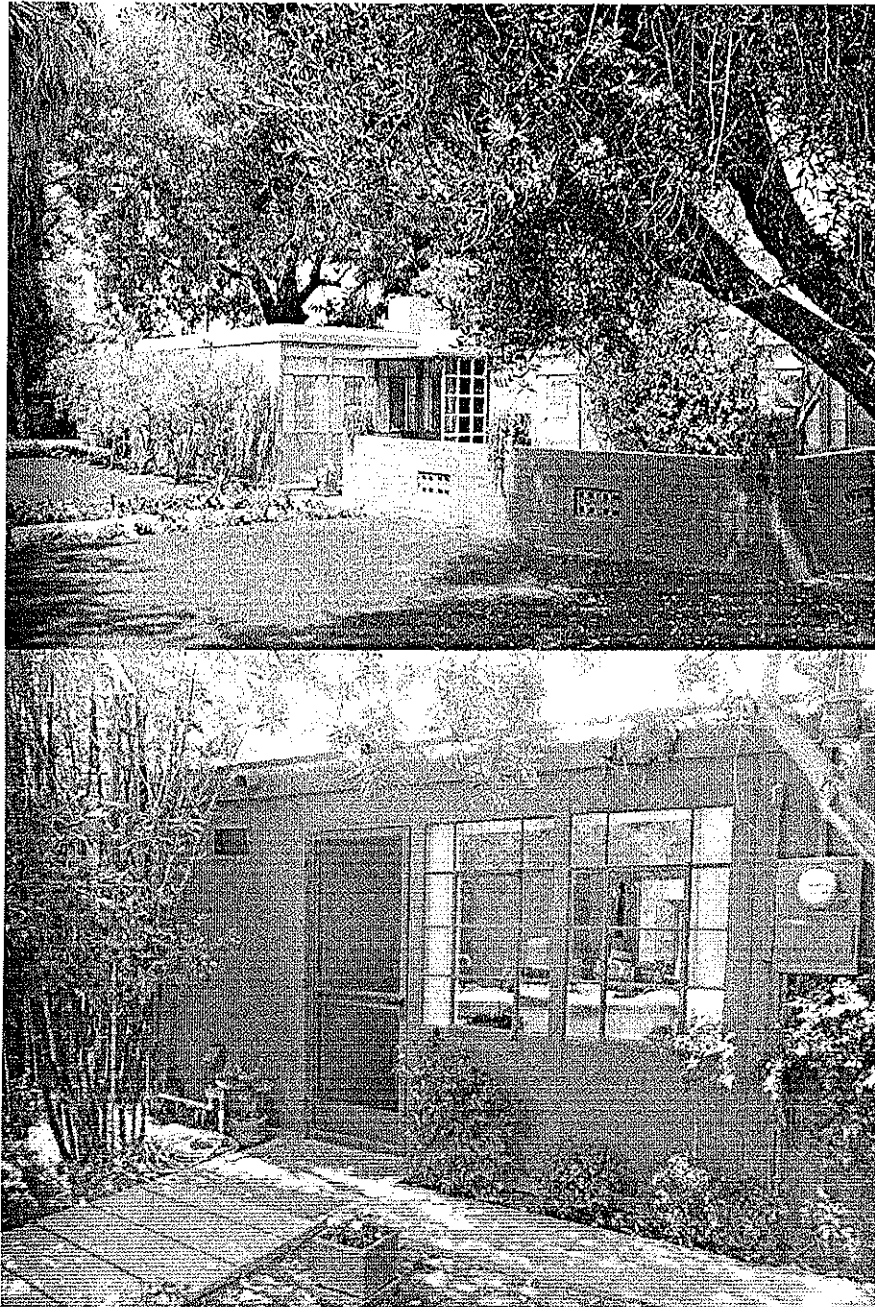
ASSESSOR'S MAP No. 257 PG. 28  
TAMARISK COUNTY, CALIF.

28

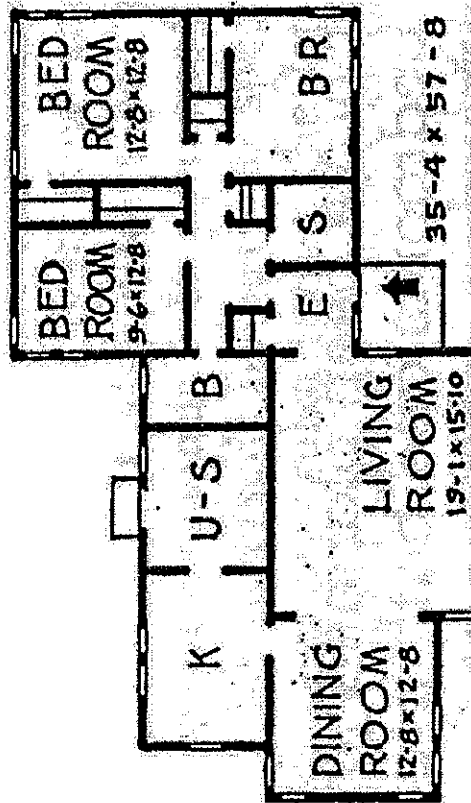
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MSB1572 Secret Service No. 3

APR 1982

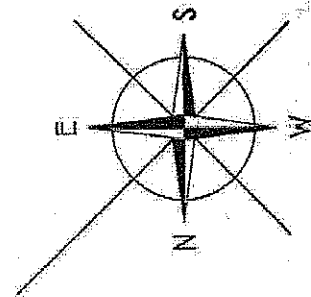
## Appendix V Photographic Documentation



1 Contemporary photos of front and rear views of GH Model House



House No. H14-16-L. Rear bedrooms and living and dining rooms larger.

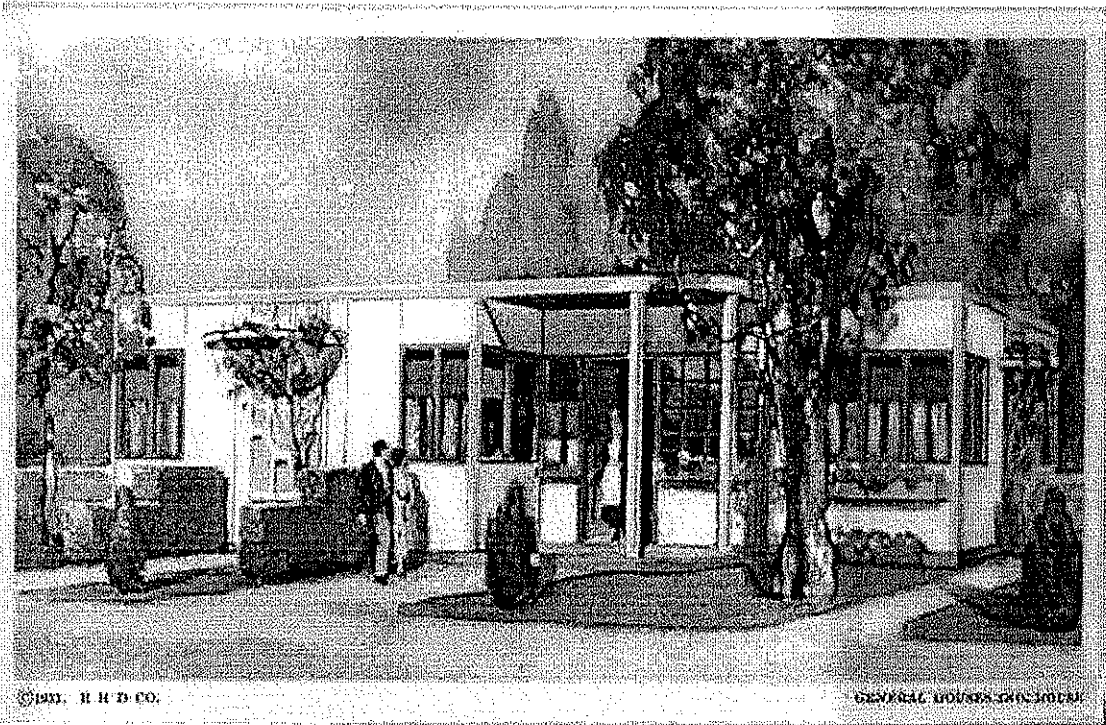


HOWARD T. FISHER, ARCHT.  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

**GENERAL HOUSE INC.**

A CENTURY OF PROGRESS  
CHICAGO ILLINOIS

2 Composite Floor Plan of Palm Springs Model Home



©1933, H. H. D. CO.

GENERAL HOUSES INC. CHICAGO

Official Post Card of  
**A CENTURY OF PROGRESS**  
140. *General Houses Int. House*

**POST CARD** PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

©1933 H. H. D. CO.

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10/33

## Appendix VI: Historic Consultant Qualifications

**Professional Qualifications Standards:** The Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR Part 61 defines the minimum education and experience required to perform historic preservation identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment activities. The minimum professional qualifications in architecture are a professional degree in architecture plus at least two years full-time experience in architecture; or a State license to practice architecture.

Patrick McGrew received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Oklahoma in 1965. He has been actively engaged in the architectural profession, specializing in historic preservation, since then. McGrew has been a licensed architect in the State of California since 1970, as well as a holder of the NCARB (national licensing) certificate. He possesses an in-depth knowledge of all procedures and standards utilized in the identification, evaluation, registration, and treatment of historic properties as evidenced by his lengthy career the depth and breadth of his accumulated architectural / historical knowledge. He places a high value on the objectivity and completeness of his written works. He has many years' experience in research, writing, practicing and teaching architecture with academic and historical agencies and institutions. He has made a substantial contribution through the research and publication of a body of scholarly work in the field of California architectural history. His experience includes the preparation of numerous historic research reports, National Register nominations, and San Francisco and Palm Springs historic site nominations, as well as the preparation of plans and specifications for architectural preservation projects. He regulates his firm through the use of ethics standards developed by the Society of Architectural Historians.

Patrick McGrew's knowledge and reputation in the field of historic preservation provided the basis for his public service as the long-time President of San Francisco's Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, which extended over an eighteen year period beginning in 1978 when he was first appointed by then-Mayor George Moscone; he served the next ten years under Mayor Dianne Feinstein. Although he served less than a year under Mayor Art Agnos, it was Agnos who declared November 17, 1991 "Landmarks of San Francisco Day" to honor the publication of McGrew's first book, *Landmarks of San Francisco* (Harry Abrams, New York, 1991). Reappointed in 1992 by Mayor Frank Jordan, McGrew served four more years on San Francisco's Landmarks Board. McGrew's second book, *Landmarks of Los Angeles* was published by Abrams in 1994. His acknowledgment by government and/or regulatory agencies, combined with Mr. McGrew's impressive list of publications on California's historic architecture, is a testament to his proficiency as a leading expert in California architectural history. He is a member of the Society of Architectural Historians, and has received many awards for his work during a distinguished career. In 1995, his book *The Historic Houses of Presidio Terrace*, received an award of honor from the California Heritage Council.

Upon the occasion of Mr. McGrew's induction into the "City Club of San Francisco's Wall of Honor", Mayor Willie Brown declared November 30, 2003 as "Patrick McGrew Day" in San Francisco, and a Commendation from the United States Senate was presented in recognition of McGrew's "distinguished career and outstanding contributions to the City of San Francisco." Patrick McGrew moved to Palm Springs, California in 2005. Recently McGrew has presented lectures on architects William F. Cody and Hugh Kaptur for the Palm Springs Art Museums' Architecture and Design Council. In January 2010, he completed a monograph entitled *Donald Wexler, Architect* and this year saw the publication of his *Desert Spanish: the Early Architecture of Palm Springs* both published by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. Previous Class 1 Nominations prepared by McGrew include the Kocher-Samson Building; the Oasis Commercial Building; The (Town & Country) Center; the Sidney Noles / Kirvin Satterwhite Residence; the Marius and Rachael de Brabant Residence; the Royal Hawaiian Estates Historic District; the Dr. Hugh Stephens Residence, the Frank Sinatra Residence and many others. McGrew was PSMoCom's 2011 Preservationist of the Year. He currently writes about Palm Springs Architecture for Los Angeles Public Television station KCET's Artbound project.

**Memberships and Affiliations:** Patrick McGrew is the Chairman of the Architecture & Design Council of the Palm Springs Art Museum; a Board Member of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation and a Board Member, Palm Springs Historic Site Preservation Board. Additionally, he maintains memberships in the Palm Springs Historical Society; the Society of Architectural Historians, Southern California Chapter; the California Preservation Foundation; and the National Trust for Historic Preservation

APPLICATION FOR PERMIT  
**BUILDING**

BUILDING DEPARTMENT, CITY OF PALM SPRINGS

Job Location

1500 Palm Springs

Lot 3 Block 3 Tract 1000

Contractor

Contractor's License No.

Architect

State

City

Use and Occupancy

Lot Size

Block Footage

Height

Zone

Fire Zone

Type

Front

Side

Side

Rear

Street

Description of Work to Be Done - Remarks and References

Total value of Work

Roofing  
L.S.W. - Masonry - Wiring  
Heating - Plumbing - etc.

\$ 1000.00

PERMIT NO.

PERMIT FEE \$

Owner OR Contractor

By

(Sign)

0.128 0.0011



450 P.P.  
Rev. 8-57

ACCOUNT NO.  
11-273

# CITY OF PALM SPRINGS BUILDING PERMIT

OWNER <b>Michael Black</b>	JOB LOCATION <b>1320 Tamarisk</b>	CONTRACTOR <b>Boane Const. Co.</b>
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LOT NO. <b>7</b>	BLOCK
---------------------	-------

TRACT <b>Desert Sands #1</b>
---------------------------------

LOT SIZE	ZONE	FIRE ZONE	HEIGHT
----------	------	-----------	--------

SET BACKS			
FRONT	SIDE	GIDE	REAR

Permission to construct the herein described building is hereby granted. Building to be constructed in accordance with the regulations of the City of Palm Springs. No work to be covered without inspection.

LIST	AREA
<b>Swim Pool</b>	<b>34 32x16</b>

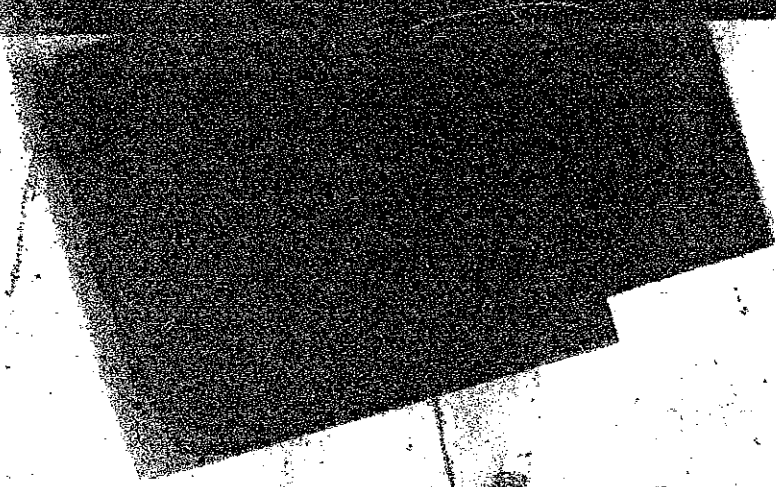
THIS PERMIT MUST BEAR CITY TREASURER'S VALIDATION

DESCRIPTION OF WORK <b>Construct 1 gunite Swimming Pool</b>
--

REMARKS & CONDITIONS OF PERMIT  
 THIS PERMIT VOID IF CONSTRUCTION IS NOT STARTED WITHIN (60) SIXTY DAYS.  
 It is the responsibility of the person obtaining the pool permit to see the equipment installed per P. S. Ordinance. (Underground or housed per P. S. Ord.)

TOTAL VALUE OF WORK \$3,000
Edge Permit 11-3211 32.00
Plan Ch. 11-3907 6.
TOTAL FEE \$ 38.00

OWNER OR CONTRACTOR <i>[Signature]</i>	BUILDING DEPT. <i>[Signature]</i>	DATE <b>11-26-68</b>	<b>B 11678</b>
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0138 0006



# CITY OF PALM SPRINGS BUILDING PERMIT

Page 1 of 2

Owner <b>Richard F. Prierer</b>	Address <b>1320 Tamarisk Rd.</b>	Phone <b>327-6590</b>
Contractor	Address	Phone
Owner		Lic. No.

Architect	Address	Total Value of Work <b>2849.00</b>
Engineer	Address	Building Permit 111-3211

Lot No.	Blk No.	Tract	Building Address <b>1320 Tamarisk Rd.</b>
---------	---------	-------	--

Lot Size	Zone	Height	Occupancy	A.A. No.	Total Area <b>2080 s.f.</b>
----------	------	--------	-----------	----------	--------------------------------

Sidewalks As Constructed	Front	Side	Side	Rear	R.O.W.	Parcel Number <b>507-255-008</b>
--------------------------	-------	------	------	------	--------	-------------------------------------

Description of Work <b>Remove existing roofing. Apply new 4 ply hot mopped roofing.</b> <b>No roofing equipment.</b>  <b>FOAM ROOFING INSTALLED, SEE NEW CONTRACT &amp; CHANGE OF CONTRACTORS</b>	SMIP Tax 111-3789 1:111-3790 II
	Microfilm 111-3431 <b>1.50</b>
	Permit Issuance 111-3216 <b>15.00</b>
	Const. Tax 111-3190
	Dbl. Fee/Ft/wl/Misc 111-3226
	Reroof 111-3231 <b>54.00</b>
	Const. Permit 111-3215
	Sewer Inspection 111-3214
	Sewer Main 342-3542
	Sewer Agreement No. T&A

Special Condition: <b>DO NOT CONCEAL OR COVER ANY CONSTRUCTION UNTIL THE WORK IS INSPECTED</b>	Sewer Conn. Fee 342-3641 F.U.
	Drainage Fee 135
	Special Fee Public Arts 550-3604
	Turn 134-3780 Planning 111-3606
	<b>TOTAL FEE 70.50</b>

**IMPORTANT**

The issuance of this permit shall not be held to be an approval of the violation of any provisions of any city or county ordinance or state law.

Inspections of work are subject to an approved set of plans being on the job. Changes to plans are not to be made without permission of the Building and Safety Division.

The owner and/or contractor is responsible for establishing all property lines. All utilities must be underground.

This permit will expire if work is not started in 120 days or if more than 120 days elapse between inspections.

I certify that I am familiar with all requirements of the City of Palm Springs as they apply to this permit and understand that these requirements must be completed prior to final inspection and that no certificate of occupancy will be issued until such time as these requirements are met. I certify that I have read this application and state that the information is true and correct.

*[Signature]* **2-22-91** **C. Thomas**  
 OWNER/CONTRACTOR AGENT DATE ISSUED BY

City Treasurer Validation
<b>FINAL</b>
<b>5-28-91</b>
<b>ABK</b>

This is a Building Permit when properly filled out, signed and validated, and is not transferable.

PERMIT NUMBER **B 20102**

INSPECTOR'S COPY

0036 0281