

2016 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Project: **Palm Springs Art Museum Architecture and Design Center**

The Santa Fe Federal Savings and Loan building in Palm Springs is considered one of the most significant designs of architect E. Stewart Williams's career. Designed in 1960, Williams intended the building to "reflect the dignity and reputation of the home office and at the same time capture some of the glamour and delight that characterizes a resort like Palm Springs." After changing hands several times, the building received the City's Class 1 Historic Site protective status in 2009. The Palm Springs Art Museum purchased the building in 2011, expanding its campus to two E. Stewart Williams-designed sites. From there, the museum sought out a firm to bring the building up to current codes while more completely revealing the architect's original vision.

As the building is a protected Class 1 Historic Site, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation were applied. The restoration designs were based on black-and-white photographs of the building taken by Julius Shulman, as well as Williams' original drawings. Renovations included removing office dividers to create one seamless space, removing carpeting to reveal the original terrazzo floor, and adding sustainable desert landscaping. The main level features gallery space for architecture and design exhibitions, curatorial offices, and a store located in and around the bank vault, which retains its original door. The lower level serves as a study center and provides archival spaces as well. Structural upgrades were implemented to increase the structural integrity without changing the appearance of the original design. Some existing walnut cabinetry and paneling has been restored, while the custom reception desk is based on the original Williams-designed bank teller counters. A drive-up teller window on the east side of the building was preserved, recalling the original function of the building and the convenience of "motor banking" in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Located a half-mile southeast of the Palm Springs Art Museum, the building has been re-established as part of the design nexus of the City of Palm Springs. The successful rehabilitation of the former bank building into the Architecture and Design Center has served as a catalyst for major improvements and restorations of other significant buildings in the immediate neighborhood. In less than two years, attendance at the Center is more than 56,000 visitors. Contributing factors to this increase include a focus on Palm Springs as a destination city (including during Modernism Week), and the public's ever-growing interest in architecture and design. A prime example of midcentury modern design, this transformed bank building provides an ideal site for the exhibition and study of architecture and design and the preservation of Palm Springs's architectural legacy.