

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**DRAFT**

## National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (formerly 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information.

New Submission                       Amended Submission

### A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Architecture of E. Stewart Williams, The

### B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976

### C. Form Prepared by:

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### D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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Architecture of E. Stewart Williams, The  
Name of Multiple Property Listing

California  
State

**Table of Contents for Written Narrative**

Create a Table of Contents and list the page numbers for each of these sections in the space below.

Provide narrative explanations for each of these sections on continuation sheets. In the header of each section, cite the letter, page number, and name of the multiple property listing. Refer to *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* for additional guidance.

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 250 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**E. Statement of Historic Contexts**

**SUMMARY STATEMENT**

This Multiple Property Submission covers the many property types associated with the work of architect E. Stewart Williams, FAIA from 1946-1976. Each property that meets registration requirements is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance. Under Criterion C, each property represents an exceptional architectural solution as realized by E. Stewart Williams as lead designer. The historic properties associated with this Multiple Property Submission may be nominated as outstanding examples of the architecture of E. Stewart Williams, FAIA under the context: Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976.

**INTRODUCTION**

E. Stewart Williams arrived in Palm Springs in 1946 to join his father and brother in architectural practice. Almost immediately, he took on the role of lead designer with the construction of two modest commercial buildings and his first important residential commission, the residence of Frank Sinatra. In the ensuing five decades of his career, Williams successfully united the warmth of natural materials with the precision of International Style Modernism in designing buildings devoted to client needs while tailored to the local setting.

Williams’ architectural impact in the Coachella Valley was enormous. It is revealed in the sheer number of his built projects: houses, schools, hotels, banks, religious buildings, and educational and cultural institutions. It is revealed in the prominence of some of his buildings: the Sinatra House, the Edris Residence, his own home, Santa Fe Federal Savings, Coachella Valley Savings #1 and #2, Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Mountain Station, Crafton Hills Community College, and the Palm Springs Desert Museum. It is revealed in the respect for his work by scholars and architectural aficionados drawn to the Coachella Valley to celebrate Williams’ design legacy.

The work of E. Stewart Williams helped define desert modernism in the Coachella Valley. Desert modernism is the adaptation of modern architectural concepts to the climatic extremes of the Coachella Valley while embracing the area’s unique natural setting of mountains and open vistas.

In the twenty-first century, Williams’ oeuvre along with the work of desert modernists Albert Frey, William F. Cody, and Donald Wexler have fueled the extraordinary revival of interest in Palm Springs’ modern architecture.

Although E. Stewart Williams designed buildings of a wide variety of property types, the property types associated with this nomination are single-family residences, commercial buildings, cultural institutions, and educational institutions. Eligible properties qualify for individual listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance.

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**E. Stewart Williams, FAIA on His Design Philosophy**

E. Stewart and Roger Williams participated in an oral history project of the Palm Springs Public Library. It was titled “Prickly Pears: Portraits of Historical Palm Springs” and consisted of videotaped interviews with over 60 local residents, including several architects, in the mid-1980s. On December 6, 1986, as part of the Prickly Pears project, the Williams brothers were interviewed together by Stewart’s son Erik as they sat in the living room of the house Stewart had designed for himself and his family in 1955. Stewart reflected on his career through a chronological review of his major commissions since arriving in Palm Springs in 1946. His responses appear throughout the following historic context. This quote from the interview neatly sums up his overall design philosophy, “I always have tried to use in any building I’ve done as many natural materials and natural finishes and let the beauty of the material be the thing that you see on the finish, not covered with stucco or covered with paint. And I think that, more or less, this rule has guided me all through the years that we’ve done work here.”<sup>1</sup> Williams added, “Some people write music. They hear it first before it’s played. Then they put it down and record it before anybody sings it. Somehow it sings in their brain or somewhere. And I think if an architect is any good he’s built the house inside of his head before he draws it.”<sup>2</sup>

**Contextual Framework and Period of Significance**

In November 2014, the Palm Springs Art Museum organized the exhibition “An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect.” It featured drawings, renderings, models, photographs, watercolors, etchings, and film clips to provide a comprehensive overview of Williams’ creative output and afforded a view of his formative role in the development of Modern architecture in Palm Springs, the Coachella Valley, and beyond. A comprehensive 208-page catalog produced for the exhibition included essays by Lauren Weiss Bricker, PhD; Elizabeth Edwards Harris, PhD; Erin Hyman, PhD; Volker M. Welter, PhD; Sidney Williams; and Wim de Wit.<sup>3</sup> The exhibition and catalog form the basis of the contextual framework utilized in this Multiple Property Submission for understanding the significance of the architect’s work. In addition, dates for each building are those found in the extensive project list on pages 190-201 of the exhibition catalog.

In documenting E. Stewart Williams’ work for this nomination, a representative selection of his designs from 1946 to 1976 is presented here. This approach reveals Williams’ architectural philosophy of humanizing Modernist tenets based upon local environmental conditions through scale and natural materials. This philosophy would find expression in an exceptionally wide range of architectural types: residences, banks, schools, civic buildings, religious buildings, office buildings, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, museums, recreational facilities, and a new college campus, among others.

<sup>1</sup> E. Stewart Williams from an interview on stage at the Palm Springs Desert Museum’s Annenberg Theater. February 12, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Williams, ed. *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect* (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014).

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The period of significance for this Multiple Property submission begins in 1946, when E. Stewart Williams arrived in Palm Springs, completing his first commission—the Potter Clinic—the same year. It concludes in 1976, when the celebrated Palm Springs Desert Museum opened.<sup>4</sup> The museum was a prestigious capstone to Williams’ career even though he would continue practicing architecture off and on for another two decades. The museum meets National Register Criteria Consideration G for exceptional importance.

**Attribution of Designs to E. Stewart Williams, FAIA**

Architecture is a collaborative enterprise with various individuals contributing to the successful completion of a project. Outside of architects working alone, partners in an architectural practice typically share in the credit assigned to the completed building. Within a practice, architects often focus on aspects to which they are attracted or especially adept. Of the firms with which E. Stewart Williams was a partner during his career—Williams, Williams and Williams from 1946 to 1956, Williams and Williams from 1957 to 1963, and Williams, Clark and Williams from 1963 to 1970—Stewart generally assumed the role of lead designer.<sup>5</sup> Of his firm’s many collaborations, the roles that the various architects played have been researched, identified and documented in the project list compiled by the Palm Springs Art Museum in its 2014 exhibition catalog “An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect” pages 190-201.

**California’s Coachella Valley**

California’s Coachella Valley is part of the vast Sonoran Desert that stretches from the east side of the San Jacinto Mountains deep into southwestern Arizona and south through Baja California. In this desert, temperatures can range from below freezing in winter to 125 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer. Generally exceptionally dry, monsoonal flow from the Gulf of California brings humidity and thunderstorms to the area from July through September. However, the typical climate in the winter months is dry and pleasant, which accounts for why the region has been a winter getaway for American and Canadian “snow birds” since the 1920s.

The Coachella Valley itself stretches southeast for 45 miles from Palm Springs to the north end of the Salton Sea. In addition to Palm Springs, the Valley includes the communities of Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, La Quinta, and Indio. Although only 100 miles east of Los Angeles, the Coachella Valley’s topography and climate are dramatically different and more extreme.

<sup>4</sup> Renamed the Palm Springs Art Museum in 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Lauren Weiss Bricker, PhD, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression’” in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014).

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**Palm Springs**

Palm Springs is the ancestral home of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians who lived in the greater Coachella Valley for centuries before white people began colonizing the desert in the late nineteenth century. Initially promoted as a sanatorium for sufferers of lung disease, Palm Springs transformed into a winter resort in the early 1920s due to its proximity to Los Angeles and accessibility to the rest of North America via transcontinental railroad. Sprawling Palm Springs resort hotels were built in the years prior to the Great Depression, with more modest construction projects continuing through the 1930s when Albert Frey began working there.

Palm Springs was incorporated in 1938. A few years later, as America entered the war, the Coachella Valley became a training site for desert tank warfare. Palm Springs' El Mirador Hotel was transformed into the Torney General Hospital for the war's duration. Following World War II, America's growing prosperity led to a building boom in residential and commercial construction in Palm Springs and the entire Coachella Valley. Celebrities, industrialists, and ordinary visitors in rapidly increasing numbers chose Palm Springs as their winter destination.

Prior to World War II, several prominent modernists completed projects in the Coachella Valley. Rudolph Schindler designed the Popenoe Cabin in 1922 (demolished), Lloyd Wright the Oasis Hotel (1923, only a remnant remaining), William Grey Purcell, a disciple of Louis Sullivan, his own house (1933, extant), Albert Frey the Kocher-Samson office building (1936, extant and listed in the National Register of Historic Places), and Richard Neutra the Grace Miller House (1937, extant).

In the postwar era, visiting modern architects who received important Coachella Valley commissions include A. Quincy Jones, Paul R. Williams, John Lautner, Rudy Baumfeld of the Victor Gruen office, William Pereira, Welton Becket, and, again, Neutra and Schindler.

Among the prolific Palm Springs-based architects who demonstrated exceptional talent in the postwar years—in addition to E. Stewart Williams, FAIA—were Albert Frey, John Porter Clark, William Cody, Robson Chambers, Donald Wexler, Richard Harrison, and Hugh Kaptur. Los Angeles-based William Krisel of the firm Palmer & Krisel designed sleek, modern tract houses in the desert for the Alexander Construction Company that would number in the thousands by the mid-1960s. Yet, other than Krisel, most of these architects did not consider themselves “modernists” but designers responding to client needs and desert conditions. It just so happened that the functional, elegant buildings they produced would later be categorized as Desert Modern.

Of Palm Springs' remarkable design legacy, architect, author, and historian Alan Hess wrote:

Is Palm Springs architecture unique? The history of midcentury Modernism has a dozen unwritten chapters of regions that developed a strong individual style: San Diego, Oregon and Washington, Hawaii, Florida. Yet the character of the collection of buildings in Palm Springs is certainly special. Together they reflect a rare confluence of forces: Hollywood,

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tourism, the desert, populism, elitism, all heightened by the influx of inordinate wealth that allowed new designs to be plumbed. Similar forces existed in Los Angeles, but in Palm Springs they were concentrated in a small, isolated area. ... The concentration of extraordinary homegrown talent in such a small town is rare; some of the best designers in organic, commercial and minimalist Modernism worked here. From city hall to banks to shops to motels to custom homes to country clubs to tract homes, the full and varied impact of Modernism can be seen here as clearly as anywhere.<sup>6</sup>

In the mid-1990s, Palm Springs was rediscovered by the interior design and fashion industries, using the city's modern architecture as the location for numerous photo shoots. In 1998, Kurt Andersen wrote a lengthy photo essay for the *New Yorker* magazine on the renewed appreciation of Palm Springs' mid-century vibe.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by a cover story in the June 1999 issue of *Vanity Fair* about the rediscovery of Palm Springs by a younger generation.<sup>8</sup> Since that time, Palm Springs has been acknowledged for its concentration of midcentury modern architecture with events such as Modernism Week—a 10-day celebration featuring lectures, exhibitions, documentary films, home tours, double-decker bus tours, a vintage furnishings show, and numerous parties in historic modern venues—and the professional architectural bus and walking tours occurring throughout the year.

### **E. Stewart Williams Before Palm Springs<sup>9</sup>**

E. Stewart Williams was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1909. His brother, Roger, was born three years later in 1912. Their father, Harry Williams, had co-founded the Dayton-based architectural firm of Schenck and Williams in 1905 that, at its peak in 1929, had a staff of 120. Both Schenck and Harry Williams received their architectural training at Cornell University, an institution that had been founded on Beaux Arts principles. As such, Cornell treated architecture as fine art, grounding their students in drawing, painting, and sculpture. Given their father's stature as an alumnus and eminent architect, Cornell accepted both Stewart and Roger into its architectural program. Stewart began his education there in 1927. In later years, Stewart would comment that the training he received there resembled that of an art school, which proved useful once he became a practicing architect and produced his own hand drawn renderings and watercolors. However, its architectural program was highly traditional such that the influence of the European modern movement would not be recognized or embraced at Cornell until the late 1930s.

Upon graduating in 1932, Williams was awarded the Baird Prize for his notable drawing abilities. From Cornell, Stewart was accepted into a graduate program in architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. While its architectural program was extremely prestigious at the time, it, like Cornell, was highly

<sup>6</sup> Michael Stern and Alan Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications/Palm Springs Art Museum, 2008), 20-21.

<sup>7</sup> Kurt Andersen, "Desert Cool," *New Yorker* February 23, 1998, 128-137.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Colacello, "Palm Springs Weekend" *Vanity Fair*, June 1999, 192-211.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from the essay "Trying His Hand: Williams as Multifaceted Artist" by Erin Hyman PhD in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014).

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traditional in its Beaux Arts approach. Williams graduated from the university in 1934.

From 1934 to 1938, Williams taught at Bard College as an art instructor. At Bard, the arts had a central place in the curriculum. During his four years there, Williams taught drawing, painting, watercolor, photography, filmmaking, and architecture. He also produced and exhibited watercolors, receiving several awards including the George A. Zabriskie Prize from the American Watercolor Society in 1938. During this period, Williams began studying the new architecture of European modernists, including Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, the Bauhaus, and Scandinavian modernists.

Financial turmoil at Bard in 1937 led to Williams' departure from the college in 1938. Still unable to obtain work as an architect due to the lingering economic Depression, Williams left on a tour of Northern Europe to study and photograph the architecture he had been reading about. Williams kept a journal in which he documented his thoughts about the architecture he discovered. Beginning in England, he progressed through Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and ended in France. He visited modern worker housing, factories, and civic, commercial, and industrial buildings. "Williams' notes on each building he visited methodically consider program, site, plan, elevation, and materials. He occasionally sketched details of construction but otherwise did not extensively draw what he saw, relying on photography to document the sites."<sup>10</sup> Williams was especially impressed by the work of Erich Mendelsohn, expressing admiration for the architect's Schocken department store in Stuttgart (1926-28), and the Metal Workers Union in Berlin (1928-30). "Mendelsohn's work was in many ways more evocative and less stark than other European functionalists—it may well be his focus on the 'poetics of space' that drew Williams to appreciate his work."<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, Williams' journal entries show his "reticence to embrace the more austere rigors of the International Style. This moderation in his attitude remained consistent throughout his career."<sup>12</sup> In a 1986 interview, he noted, for instance:

I was never a devotee of the International Style per se. I knew about it, and it was a great influence on contemporary architecture in the sense that it broke loose from traditional forms and taught everybody to think from the ground up and to invent your own forms and so forth. But the International Style had a series of rather rigid tenets and rules...absolute geometric forms and...Corbusier saying the house was a machine for living. But I have always felt that architecture should be approached with an open mind.<sup>13</sup>

It was in Scandinavia, particularly Sweden, where Williams found his greatest inspiration as relates to

<sup>10</sup> Erin Hyman PhD, "Trying His Hand: Williams as Multifaceted Artist" in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014), 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>12</sup> Hyman, "Trying His Hand: Williams As Multifaceted Artist," 28.

<sup>13</sup> Interview by Erik Williams, Dec. 6, 1986 for the Palm Springs Public Library's local history project "Prickly Pears," a series of videotaped interviews.

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modern design. “It was the craftsmanship, proportions, and materials that Williams often admired. He loved the warmth of wood and brick, whereas in other places he found the bright white stucco dear to the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier ‘dingy.’”<sup>14</sup> Williams was to write, “Functionalism is all right, but I believe it can be carried too far very easily. The skeleton of the living organism is covered by nature with materials which clothe, protect, and beautify. Why not architecture?”<sup>15</sup>

While in Sweden, Williams met Mari Schlytern, the woman he eventually married. A schoolteacher, Mari was also a talented dressmaker who designed and wove her own textiles. She also had a keen interest in interior design. It would be two more years before Mari emigrated from Sweden to the United States.

Upon his return from Europe, Williams’ plans to join his father’s architectural practice were thwarted by the lack of work for the firm in Dayton. Instead, he took a job designing and painting murals for the Transportation Pavilion at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York. There, he witnessed the futuristic pavilions created by industrial designers such as Norman Bel Geddes and Raymond Loewy. In fact, Williams work at the fair led to a job as a designer in Loewy’s New York office in January 1939. Williams remained with the firm for two years during which time he was able to bring Mari to America. They married in June of 1940 in New York’s Hudson Valley region.

At Loewy’s firm, Williams was assigned to the growing retail and merchandising division that had contracts to plan department stores, supermarkets, and other merchandising facilities “on the principle that they were ‘selling machines’ that could be designed to appeal to special consumer groups as carefully as were products.”<sup>16</sup> Later, Williams would recall that his time at the Loewy office was not particularly enjoyable given the mercurial personality of the firm’s namesake.

In 1941, Williams left the Loewy office and returned to Dayton with Mari. It was not long, however, before Stewart’s father, Harry, decided to move to Palm Springs in an attempt to ease the distress of his wife, Una, who suffered from severe rheumatoid arthritis. Palm Springs was not new to Harry Williams, as he had designed the Spanish Colonial Revival style La Plaza Shopping Center for Mrs. Julia Carnell, an important Ohio-based client, in the heart of the growing desert city in 1936. After settling in Palm Springs following America’s entry into World War II, Harry Williams opened an architectural firm, obtaining commissions almost immediately.

Meanwhile, Stewart and Mari had moved to Tiburon in the San Francisco Bay Area where he had taken a position with the Navy at the Mare Island Naval Base. They remained there for the duration of the war. Then, following Stewart’s discharge from the Navy in 1946, the couple, now including son Erik and daughter Mari Anne, relocated to Palm Springs so that Stewart could join his father’s thriving

<sup>14</sup> Hyman, “Trying His Hand: Williams As Multifaceted Artist,” 29.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur J. Pulos, “Nothing Succeeds Like Success: Raymond Loewy, the Thirties and Forties” in *Raymond Loewy: Pioneer of American Industrial Design*, ed. Angela Schonberger (New York: Prestel, 1990), 83.

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architectural practice there. E. Stewart Williams was 38 years old and had not yet practiced as an architect.

Williams was a Midwestern pragmatist with East Coast Training and a passion for the open spaces of the West and California. Once he moved to Palm Springs, he never returned to his native Dayton, nor ever second-guessed where a career in New York might have taken him. He had grown up in an atmosphere of esteem for engineering, but he had also found an avocation as an artist, winning accolades for his watercolors and producing work in a wide range of media. After he became a full-time architect, he—sadly—never painted watercolors again. But the draw of bright hues, the feel of natural materials, the meticulous attention to details big and small, the romantic and poetic notions he professed about beauty and nature—these colored his approach to design all the rest of his life.<sup>17</sup>

From 1934 until 1941, Stewart's younger brother, Roger Williams, had worked as an architect at Schenck and Williams, their father's architectural firm in Dayton. Like his brother, Roger had graduated with honors from Cornell. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the war, Roger left the firm to work as a design engineer at Aero Products, which was based at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base just outside of Dayton. Following the war, in 1945, Roger, his wife D'Esta and their son Roger, Jr. relocated permanently to Palm Springs so that Roger could assist in his father's architectural practice. With Stewart's arrival in 1946, the architectural firm of Harry Williams and his two sons would have a major impact in the Coachella Valley.

### **Firm of Harry J. Williams 1946-1948**

As noted, prior to E. Stewart Williams' 1946 arrival in Palm Springs, the architectural practice of his father Harry and younger brother Roger was well established in the city. During World War II, the firm of Harry J. Williams was responsible for numerous single and multi-family dwellings, several medical clinics, a local hospital, a handful of retail stores, a hotel, high school classrooms, restaurants, a Masonic Temple, a service station, the 139 Club, and the remodeling of, and additions to, a substantial number of existing buildings.

Despite the addition of E. Stewart Williams to the enterprise in 1946, it continued to operate as the firm of Harry J. Williams until 1948, when it became the firm of Williams, Williams and Williams.<sup>18</sup> "Stewart assumed the role of lead designer and Roger that of engineer, assuring that the buildings were structurally sound."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 32.

<sup>18</sup> With the three men in practice together, the locals referred to Harry and his sons as "Williams Cubed" according to Stewart as documented by Sidney Williams in her essay "The Spirit of Collegiality: The Power of Eloquence" in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect* (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014), 35.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 38.

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Upon settling himself and his family in Palm Springs, the newly arrived Williams added the “E” (for his given name Edward) to his name to differentiate himself from a Stewart Williams already residing in Palm Springs. Nonetheless, he was generally referred to as Stewart throughout his life and for the purposes of this document.

**Potter Clinic 1946 (demolished)**

The Potter Clinic appears to be the first major project that Stewart designed in Palm Springs. Located on the city’s main thoroughfare, Palm Canyon Drive, the two-story building consisted of a doctor’s office on the first floor and two apartments on the second, one of which, upon completion in 1946, was occupied for two years by the architect’s family. The building’s commercial portion was constructed of brick while the residential portion was faced in horizontal redwood planks that cantilevered over the office below. Shading the full-width upstairs balcony was a prominent gridded redwood trellis facing the street. Floor-to-ceiling glass walls provided unimpeded views of majestic Mt. San Jacinto to the west.

**Bisonte Lodge 1947 (demolished)**

The Bisonte Lodge was Williams’ second important commercial commission. It was a one-story motel of wood frame construction on a concrete slab. A redwood trellis covering the west elevation provided shade. In addition to the eye-catching trellis, Stewart placed each guestroom on a diagonal that provided privacy while affording views of the nearby mountain. The result was a zigzag plan that was highly unusual for the time. In fact, the reference book “Motels, Hotels, Restaurants and Bars” published in 1951 and in its 1960 second edition highlighted the design for its functionalism.<sup>20</sup>

**Frank Sinatra House 1947 (extant)**

It seems improbable that E. Stewart Williams’ first stand-alone residential commission would be a vacation home for singer Frank Sinatra. Yet, in the summer of 1946, a young Sinatra wandered into the firm’s Palm Springs office requesting a new house to be designed and completed by Christmas. However, the style of house Sinatra had in mind was, according to Stewart’s brother Roger, “a great big beautiful Georgian mansion with columns and stone balustrades. ... Stew almost dropped his teeth, but he said ‘Frank, what we’ll do, we’re gonna design this thing you’re talking about but I’m going to lay out what I think fits the desert a little better and let you decide.’”<sup>21</sup> A few days later, Stewart presented Sinatra with both designs and the singer chose the modern ranch style house Williams had prepared versus the Georgian Revival option. Said Roger, laughing, “We were so glad because we’d have been ruined right then and there if we’d been forced to build that here in the desert.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Architectural Record, *Motels, Hotels, Restaurants and Bars*, 2d. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1960), 72-74.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Williams interviewed by Erik Williams, Dec. 6, 1986 for the Palm Springs Public Library’s local history project “Prickly Pears,” a series of videotaped interviews.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

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The design was ranch house in inspiration but instead of a typical grid it was laid out at a casual angle somewhat like a pinwheel. The house was capped by both a shed and flat roof with exterior elevations sheathed in redwood board-and-batten siding. According to Williams, “instead of walls I put in glass” in order “to make the house feel as if it were part of the desert landscape.”<sup>23</sup> Given its remote location near the town’s airfield, this was a feasible goal. With Sinatra’s fondness for entertaining in mind, the house was designed with a large, open plan living room and dining area with sliding glass doors adjacent to the grand piano-shaped swimming pool. The bedroom wings were on opposite sides of the living room with the master bedroom’s floor-to-ceiling windows facing Mt. San Jacinto. The prominent central chimney was of Arizona flagstone and interior walls were of natural wood.

Of the house, architect and author Alan Hess concluded, “As a first design, the Sinatra House had some awkward moments; the front façade did not resolve the informal wings as elegantly as later Williams’ designs would. But overall the careful proportions and subtle but rich mix of materials (stone, wood, glass, plaster) show a keen eye. It was an eye trained by Modern art and its deliberate arrangement of abstract form, color, and balance—not a fetish for astonishing structural gymnastics.”<sup>24</sup>

**Pepper Tree Inn 1948 (demolished)**

For the already-existing hacienda style Pepper Tree Inn, Williams added a modern two-story main building that faced Indian Canyon Drive. Like the Potter Clinic, the ground floor was of brick construction while second story guest apartments were faced with redwood. A redwood trellis once again sheltered the open second story terrace. A similar trellis shaded the deck on the swimming pool’s south and west sides. Expanses of floor-to-ceiling glass punctuated east and west elevations giving a contemporary look to the composition.

Of the importance of these early commercial projects, architectural historian Elizabeth Edwards Harris writes, “The Potter Clinic, the Bisonte Lodge, and the Pepper Tree Inn exemplified Williams’s first forays in designing livable architecture for the desert, balancing the need for an appropriate amount of physical comfort with his desire to foster the integration of humans with the outdoor environment.”<sup>25</sup>

**Firm of Williams, Williams and Williams 1948-1956**

**Palm Springs High School, 1947-1956 (partially extant)**

In the 1940s the three Williamses worked closely together on this sizeable project. A historic photograph depicts the architects examining a large model of the planned campus. Their firm would be responsible for the auditorium, gymnasium, and library. The buildings were constructed primarily of steel and

<sup>23</sup> Howard Johns, “His Kind of Town,” *Palm Springs Life*, February 1999, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Stern and Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Edwards Harris PhD, “E. Stewart Williams: The Lost Buildings” in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect* ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014), 118.

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concrete block. In the model the gymnasium appears to be a large steel Quonset hut and the library had a concrete frame and walls enclosed by painted concrete block. The most impressive and important building of the three was the auditorium, which was not completed until the mid-1950s. It served as a key performance venue for the entire Coachella Valley for many years. Stewart was quite proud of the building, particularly because of its fine acoustical qualities that were specified by renowned UCLA acoustical physicist Dr. Vern Oliver Knudsen.

When interviewed in 1986, Williams held up a photograph of the auditorium's interior, pointing out the elements specifically designed for sound such as the straight plane of the ceiling, a cone-like element that reflects sound downward, side walls that carry air throughout as well as reflecting sound back. Stewart concluded, "...Everything in this room is designed to do something...all surfaces are designed to focus sound on the seat. Natural materials are used throughout and every form in it is a functional form. Now that is what contemporary architecture is all about. Use good materials, design forms that function to make the job work because if the job doesn't work, well, you'll soon find it out."<sup>26</sup>

**Temple Isaiah, 1949-1951 (substantially altered)**

Another early commission was for the Palm Springs Jewish Community Center with its Temple Isaiah portion identifying the entire complex. For its construction, Stewart chose unpainted concrete block, a humble building material often utilized for basements and garages back east. The initial composition consisted of a one-room synagogue with its primary elevation facing south with a covered walkway leading to a small classroom. Of the synagogue, Stewart later commented, "It was just as simple and beautiful as a finished church, or anything else, in its lines. No pretense, just exposed concrete block, ... [demonstrating] that you can take a very common material and if you spend enough nights working on the drawings you can come up with something that wins an honor award."<sup>27</sup> Stewart was referring to the First Honor Award presented to the firm by the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Of the significance of this early civic project, professor Lauren Weiss Bricker wrote, "He left the concrete exposed on the interior as well as the exterior; this may be the first indication we have of his appreciation for the structural and aesthetic properties of exposed concrete."<sup>28</sup>

**Oasis Hotel (demolished) and Oasis Commercial Building (extant), 1953 - 1955**

At the southwest corner of Palm Canyon Drive and Tahquitz Avenue once sat the venerable Oasis Hotel that had been designed by Lloyd Wright in 1923 for Palm Springs pioneer Pearl McCallum McManus. Its minimalist appearance and slip-form concrete construction made it perhaps the earliest truly modern hotel in Southern California.<sup>29</sup> Following its purchase by the Western Hotels chain in 1952, the Oasis Hotel was demolished with the exception of its distinctive tower and commercial wing, which survive to

<sup>26</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Bricker, "Civic and Educational 'Architecture as Environmental Expression,'" 135.

<sup>29</sup> Alan Hess and Andrew Danish, *Palm Springs Weekend: The Architecture and Design of a Midcentury Oasis* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 27.

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this day on the southeast corner of the property abutting the 1955 Oasis Commercial Building. The firm of Williams, Williams and Williams was hired to design the hotel's replacement (also called the Oasis Hotel) that would consist of 50 guest rooms, a restaurant, cocktail bar, card room, and outdoor patio. Another key part of the program would be an expansive 27,000 square foot, two-story commercial structure of ground floor shops with second story offices (the Oasis Commercial Building, also known as the Oasis Office Building). Design began in 1953 with the entire complex completed in 1955. This was an important commission for the Williams firm because of its large \$1.35 million budget and its prominence in the center of town. As had become the norm at the firm, Roger served as engineer and Stewart as designer.

The new Oasis Hotel complex featured an informal modern style that used materials such as natural rock, brick, glass and wood—materials often found on midcentury ranch style houses of the period. A flat biomorphic canopy supported by steel posts served as the roof of the hotel lobby's porte cochere. At the dining room, great panes of glass provided expansive views of the nearby mountains. To shade the pool pavilion, Williams reintroduced the redwood trellis design found in his earlier hotel projects. A generous use of wood paneling and large stone fireplaces in the lobby and restaurant added to the warm, ranch style atmosphere.

An entirely different architectural vocabulary was employed for the Oasis Commercial Building. Inspired by modernist architect Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in France, the Oasis Commercial Building is rectangular in plan with its second story raised above the ground and supported by piloti. Painted white on a smooth exterior surface, the building is a striking example of the International Style on such a busy corner. Angled, floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows facing Palm Canyon Drive enclose ground floor shops that are deeply recessed beneath the second story to provide welcome shade to pedestrians. Centering the building is an interior courtyard open to the sky that offers respite for shoppers and a pleasant setting for al fresco dining. Natural rock cladding on the walls surrounds the courtyard softening the straight lines of the composition. The upper level consists of a full-width loggia facing the main thoroughfare enclosed by a metal balustrade supported by narrow posts. Elongated multi-paned steel casement ribbon windows punctuate north, south, and west elevations with the latter two shaded by metal awnings. At the rear of the building are recessed store entrances with adjacent display windows framed by natural rock veneer. A passageway provides access between the south end of the building and the original Oasis Hotel tower. Above the passageway is a bridge connecting the newer building to an elevator shaft abutting the older tower. Accenting the rear west elevation at the north end is a dramatic exterior staircase.

The building's main commercial tenant was the Milton F. Kreis drugstore with interiors designed by the team of A. Quincy Jones and Paul R. Williams. The two were prominent Los Angeles-based architects whose previous work in Palm Springs consisted of the 1946 expansion of Pearl McCallum McManus' Tennis Club and the design for the 1950 Town and Country Center across from the Desert Inn. It was through the designs of these and other visiting modernists, as well as local architects such as E. Stewart Williams, Albert Frey, John Porter Clark, and William Cody that the 1950s became the decade when the "Old West village" transitioned into a much more sophisticated town.

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In the 1970s, new owners of the Oasis Hotel completely remodeled the property based upon a Moroccan theme. None of Williams' original stylistic elements remained. Yet somehow the Oasis Commercial Building avoided the same fate. "It remains a striking example of Williams' early investigations into International Style Modernism."<sup>30</sup>

**Williams, Williams and Williams Office in Oasis Commercial Building**

Part of the arrangement with Western Hotels involved leasing half of the second story of the Oasis Commercial Building to Williams, Williams and Williams upon completion of the project.<sup>31</sup> The new space offered many advantages including a contemporary modern reception room, conference room, and a large drafting room all bathed in light from the north-facing windows. It was prominently located in the very heart of Palm Springs. Of the operation of the firm at this time Stewart later said, "When we got into this new office we became a little more organized in our duties. My job was to more or less take care of client contact and early design, preliminary design, conceptual design. Roger was involved by that time mostly in the structure of the work and did a lot in structural design, and we worked very well together in this combination."<sup>32</sup>

**Edris Residence, 1953 (extant)**

William and Marjorie Edris had lived in one of the Potter Clinic's upstairs apartments at the same time as the Williams family in the late 1940s. The two couples became friends and in 1953, when the Edrises decided to have a winter residence built in Palm Springs, they selected Stewart. The parcel chosen was located in the undeveloped upper reaches of the Tuscany Heights neighborhood in a boulder-strewn alluvial fan of Mt. San Jacinto. Taking full advantage of the unique location, Williams moved only those boulders necessary to place the house on a flat surface with the goal of integrating as much of the natural environment into the design as possible. Although of steel frame construction, the exterior of the house was clad in native rock and board-and-batten Douglas fir siding. The sloping roof of the living room expressed the shallow triangular shape of the roof's structural steel truss. Native rock was used for the prominent chimney, with the east end penetrating the floor-to-ceiling plate glass wall of the living room with breathtaking views of the Coachella Valley. Of the organically shaped swimming pool, Stewart Williams said as he pointed to a Julius Shulman photograph of the house, "There was a little arroyo here that we dug out and put the pool down below it."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, almost the entire pool is surrounded by boulders, several of which are just a foot away from the pool's edge.

The use of wood as an exterior element in the desert was a point of contention between Williams and local architect Albert Frey. Said Williams in 1986,

<sup>30</sup> Harris, "E. Stewart Williams: The Lost Buildings," 128.

<sup>31</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

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Albert says you can't use wood in the desert, it goes to rot, just breaks down. That's not true. You have to use dry wood to start with and you have a nice dry desert. Nothing ever happens to dry wood. The only thing that breaks down wood is alternately wetting and drying and wetting and drying. And this house, if you go up there today, almost 40 years ago, is in just perfect condition. Of course, Mrs. Edris keeps it immaculate anyway. But it was an interesting example of what one can do.<sup>34</sup>

Williams' faith in wood cladding was severely tested with the Frank Sinatra House that he designed in 1946.<sup>35</sup> There, because the redwood siding was not properly maintained over the years, the wood deteriorated to the point where it was replaced with a stucco finish in the 1990s.

Professor Volker M. Welter, who wrote the chapter on William's modern domestic desert architecture in the 2014 museum catalog concluded "The Edris House, arguably Williams' best domestic work, shows the possibilities inherent in a more genteel approach to nature and the environment that aims at complementing the realm of nature with that of architecture and vice versa."<sup>36</sup>

### **E. Stewart and Mari Williams Residence 1955 (extant)**

For his own residence, Stewart Williams chose a large parcel on the former grounds of the El Mirador Hotel golf course. His immediate neighbors were Albert Frey and John Porter Clark. Although the Frey House (known as Frey House I) has been razed, the John Porter Clark and Williams residences remain hidden behind the gates of a recent housing development. With his own dwelling, Williams was able to fully implement his design philosophy. "I've always loved natural materials—I love stone, clay, sand, pebbles...that has always been my goal to bring whatever environment that we build in, whether it was a boulder strewn hillside or flat area, I try to bring the prime features of that environment into the living space of the buildings and homes that we did."<sup>37</sup>

In realizing his objective, Williams said "I thought it would be nice to have a roof that floats, so I designed a butterfly roof low on both ends that cantilevers out over three rows of side beams. We eliminated walls where we could to let the landscape flow through and we tried to put one wall of glass in each room. The house is essentially a roof over the garden so the desert can flow through. It was designed to be a shelter in a very hard climate."<sup>38</sup>

At the north end of the house, the outside garden continued into the living room where numerous

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> The house was designed in 1946 and completed in early 1947.

<sup>36</sup> Volker M. Welter, PhD, "At Home with E. Stewart Williams: Modern Domestic Desert Architecture in the Genteel Tradition" in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect* ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014), 72.

<sup>37</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in *Prickly Pears*, December 6, 1986.

<sup>38</sup> Adele Cygelman, *Palm Springs Modern* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1999), 94.

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boulders surrounded an open fire pit. The dining room flowed into the public space with the kitchen and bedrooms located in the southern portion of the house. Unpainted wood surfaces defined interior walls as well as the built-in furniture Williams integrated into all of the rooms. Because the property was situated in the north end of town that, at the time, was relatively undeveloped, Stewart erected a long pebble encrusted tilt-up concrete wall to block the strong winds common during early spring and late fall.

Of the design, Hess concludes, “The house is mated to the site, the views, the desert floor and the desert plants.”<sup>39</sup> Although a small family residence, “This house was clearly conceived both as a Modernist residence and as the advertisement of a Modern architect.”<sup>40</sup>

**Koerner Residence 1955 (extant)**

Built for the Vancouver-based couple of Leon and Thea Koerner, their Williams-designed house in the Deepwell neighborhood of Palm Springs was placed on a flat parcel with a panoramic view of Mt. San Jacinto to the west. The house shares the upswept roof of the Edris House with deep overhangs and various cutouts for palm trees. Floor to ceiling windows bring abundant light into the wood post-and-beam house. Internal courtyards wrapped in glass enclose planting and water features. The ubiquitous swimming pool outside of the living room features a shaded resting area near the pool steps.

The original landscaping—much of which remains—was designed by the celebrated Los Angeles-based firm of Eckbo, Royston and Williams. Arthur Elrod designed the interiors. Overall, “the Koerner House comes close to what is nowadays often considered typical midcentury Modern architecture, especially that of a modular, post-and-beam variety.”<sup>41</sup>

**Kenaston Residence 1956 (extant)**

This “small masterpiece”<sup>42</sup> designed for Roderick W. Kenaston is located near the Thunderbird Country Club in the Coachella Valley city of Rancho Mirage. U-shaped in plan, its most striking feature is a swimming pool within the “U” where a natural rock wall, the west elevation of the living room, continues below the pool surface to several feet beneath the water level. The pool is visible from most of the interior rooms and hallways. This same natural rock, which clads a portion of the exterior north elevation, softens the strict rectilinear geometry of the flat-roofed house. Consistent with Williams’ architectural philosophy, the Kenaston Residence adeptly demonstrates how he integrates natural materials expressing the local environment into his modern architectural designs.

**Modern Banks**

<sup>39</sup> Stern and Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs*, 80.

<sup>40</sup> Welter, “At Home with E. Stewart Williams: Modern Domestic Desert Architecture in the Genteel Tradition,” 81.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

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E. Stewart Williams designed three of the most distinctive banks in Palm Springs between 1956 and 1961, all within several blocks of each other.<sup>43</sup> Writes Elizabeth Edwards Harris of his work,

Modern offices and banks came with their own unique challenges that Williams assiduously studied and resolved, eventually becoming an accomplished bank designer. Key to his success was the fact that he lived and worked in Palm Springs and understood firsthand the needs of businesses operating in this expanding desert town. Williams created more than ten banks and bank complexes over his career, each a fresh articulation of similar programmatic requirements to fulfill the needs of this rapidly changing modern business. ... Williams's Modern banks were good examples of how banks used architecture to lure back old customers and to entice new ones in user-friendly spaces that were efficient, welcoming, and secure.<sup>44</sup>

**Coachella Valley Savings and Loan #1, 1956 (extant)**

The first bank commission that the Williams office received was for a new branch of Coachella Valley Savings and Loan (CVS #1). The lot for the new bank was located on the west side of South Palm Canyon Drive and was relatively small for the program of a reception area, teller stations, offices, conference rooms, lunch room, two vaults, and automobile parking. Stewart's solution was to raise the building on piloti, creating a covered driveway with parking spaces beneath the upper floor and around the west and south sides of the building. The overall design was similar to the Villa Savoye-influenced Oasis Commercial Building the firm had completed the previous year. Writes Edwards Harris, "Although Williams never directly ascribed to any particular school of modernism, the International Style did lend itself well to building in the desert. In addition, it was a style that at this time conveyed both an efficient and au courant sensibility appropriate for his first financial institution clients."<sup>45</sup>

From Palm Canyon Drive, CVS #1 appears as a rectangular box of painted white stucco floating above a wide driveway and a small lobby. The east elevation frames a wall of glass with aluminum mullions that fills the double-height second story with light. Apparently, it was discovered that too much light filled the room because vertical metal louvers designed by Williams that cover the east-facing windows were installed soon after the bank began operation. The glazed entry lobby serves to welcome customers and is primarily designed to direct them up the floating staircase to the second floor. Behind the lobby reception desk is a large polished steel vault with a twin vault immediately above it on the second floor. Enclosing the vault stack on both floors is native rock cladding—a typical Williams feature designed to soften the straight lines and man-made materials of the International Style.

<sup>43</sup>Two other distinctive modern banks in Palm Springs are City National Bank, 1959 by Victor Gruen (Rudi Baumfeld, designer), and Security First National Bank, 1959 by Joseph B. Wong.

<sup>44</sup>Elizabeth Edwards Harris, PhD, "Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks," in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014), 87.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 90.

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Entering the second floor from the staircase found the customer in an enormous, double-height open space. Teller windows and offices were on the west side of the room. A less conspicuous staircase led to the mezzanine level where a conference room and break room were located. Enclosing the mezzanine were vertical wood slats that added warmth to the interior composition.

The rear, west side of the building differed substantially from the east elevation in that ribbon windows sheltered by metal awnings provided light to the second floor and mezzanine levels. In maintaining the illusion of a floating box, Williams cantilevered the south end over tan-colored brick cladding that was visible primarily from the south driveway. The brick wrapped around the south elevation to the west side where a glazed rear entrance was located. This use of unpainted brick was yet another example of Williams contrasting the white box with warmer materials.

Concludes Harris,

Although CVS #1 and the Oasis Office Building hearkened back to earlier masters, the ways in which their designs differed from these antecedents revealed how Williams adapted what he learned as a young man and began to develop his own distinctive aesthetic. Williams was very focused on designing well in the desert environment, and he did not want to create Modern buildings that he felt were as austere as many he had visited on his European sojourn. On both of the CVS #1 and the Oasis buildings, Williams began to introduce warmer materials, including stone and wood, to allow his buildings to become more tactile and welcoming, especially at the pedestrian level and in interior public spaces.<sup>46</sup>

**Firm of Williams and Williams 1957-1963**

One of the catalysts for the expanding number of banks in Palm Springs was the explosion of tract housing in the city, particularly those built by the Alexander Construction Company. Between 1957 and the mid-1960s, this Los Angeles-based developer constructed approximately 1,260 single-family dwellings in Palm Springs.<sup>47</sup> Also during this period, developer Jack Meiselman was responsible for several tract neighborhoods appearing in various parts of the city. Most of the buyers of these properties required home loan financing that Palm Springs' new banks were eager to service. At least four banks were built in the city between 1959 and 1961. The firm of Williams and Williams was responsible for two: Santa Fe Federal Savings of 1960 and the 1961 Coachella Valley Savings #2. City National Bank opened its Palm Springs branch in 1959 designed by Rudi Baumfeld of Victor Gruen Associates. Security First National Bank appeared diagonally across from City National Bank at Ramon Road and South Indian Canyon Drive. It was completed in 1959 with a design by Joseph B. Wong.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, "Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks," 90-92.

<sup>47</sup> Jim Harlan, "On Tract," in *William Krisel's Palm Springs: The Language of Modernism*, eds. Chris Menrad and Heidi Creighton (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2016), 46.

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Given the close proximity of all of these banks located within three blocks of each other, a downtown financial district emerged. It was not until the city’s economic slowdown in the 1980s and the savings and loan crisis later in the decade that these financial institutions either were absorbed by larger banks or closed altogether. Three banks remain in the financial district: Bank of America (City National Bank), Chase Bank (Coachella Valley Savings #2), and Union Bank (Security First National Bank).

**Santa Fe Federal Savings and Loan Association, 1960 (extant)**

When queried in 1986 about the firm’s Santa Fe Federal Savings commission, Williams relayed the story of being summoned to the institution’s San Bernardino headquarters by its president, Mr. Patterson, to be given the following instructions, “Williams, the reason I asked you to come up here is I want you to build a little jewel box in Palm Springs.’ And we really did. . . . four walls of glass—and there are screens on the west and east that slide back and forth to seal it from the sun, and the north wall is still open. . . . It’s one of the better little buildings.”<sup>48</sup>

Essentially a Miesian pavilion, the Santa Fe Federal Savings building appears to float above the surface due to its recessed foundation and cantilevered floor slab. It is designed according to a strict five-foot module “...around which every aspect of the building conforms, even carrying through to the architectural detailing of the interiors. The result of this organization is an extremely unified and serene environment, where the interior space is completely open and uninterrupted by structure.”<sup>49</sup> This was accomplished by placing the slender steel post supports outside of the glass walls. To each post Williams added thin vertical fins “...to give each column a little heavier ratio—a slenderness ratio.”<sup>50</sup> The screens that Williams referred to are actually perforated sliding gold anodized aluminum panels designed to cut glare from the west and east. Crowning the delicate building is a flat roof that extends beyond the glass walls to mirror the cantilevered floor slab below. The floor-to-ceiling glazing embraces the full breadth of west-facing mountain views.

A key element of the program was a conference room with kitchen that Williams placed in the basement as a gathering place for community civic groups. For the interiors, Williams chose authentic Navajo rugs, pottery, and other objects that harmonized beautifully with the modern furniture selected to highlight the minimalism of the bank’s design. “And once again, the vault of the bank was a celebrated feature on the banking floor, in full and reassuring view of the public.”<sup>51</sup>

Having been transformed in 2014 into the Palm Springs Art Museum’s Architecture and Design Center Edwards Harris Pavilion, the little jewel box glows anew following a comprehensive rehabilitation following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards by Marmol Radziner, the architectural firm responsible for restoring the Richard Neutra-designed Kaufmann House in Palm Springs in the 1990s.

<sup>48</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>49</sup> Harris, “Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks,” 99.

<sup>50</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> Harris, “Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks,” 101.

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Upon completing the Palm Springs branch of Santa Fe Federal Savings, Williams was asked to design a new headquarters building for the institution in San Bernardino. This much larger building was five stories in height. Constructed of reinforced concrete, the bank consisted of a large vertical element with a prominent exterior cantilevered staircase and elongated hallways with associated offices. Large aluminum panels shaded the hallways and windows. This more solid and imposing design was deemed appropriate for the bustling urban downtown that was San Bernardino in the early 1960s versus the quieter village of Palm Springs.

**Coachella Valley Savings #2, 1961 (extant)<sup>52</sup>**

The rapid growth of Coachella Valley Savings led to the institution's need for a much larger space in Palm Springs than the building Stewart had designed for them only six years earlier. A site a few blocks south of CVS #1 at the northwest corner of South Palm Canyon and Ramon drives was selected. "By this time in his career, Williams was interested in going beyond typical post-and-beam systems and exploring the possibilities of more advanced structural forms, especially using concrete. Coachella Valley Savings #2 (CVS #2) demonstrated Williams' advanced use of structural concrete, for which he won a creativity award from The Portland Cement Company."<sup>53</sup> Compared with Williams' recently completed San Bernardino headquarters of Santa Fe Federal Savings, CVS #2, "...with its classical composition and expressive used of concrete—was meant to be a more sculptural and overtly monumental statement."<sup>54</sup>

At the site, a 10-foot grade variance presented a challenge. Williams' solution was a split-level parking structure at the rear of the building with entrances on both levels. These led to either the main lobby below or the mezzanine above. The parking structure and main building were of steel and concrete construction, engineered for both seismic safety and to provide a single enormous banking space without interior columns. "The roof was precast concrete with post-tensioned T-beams that spanned ninety feet across the first-level banking floor and loan department. The mezzanine floor was hung from the ceiling structure allowing the banking floor below to be completely column free."<sup>55</sup>

Coachella Valley Savings #2 was a highly dramatic form,

... as seen in the inverted arches, tapering upward to touch the wafer-thin roof. ...  
Though the silhouette immediately brings to mind a variation on the well-publicized 1956 Alvorada Palace by Oscar Niemeyer in newly built Brasilia, Williams insisted that his design had no relation to the Brazilian Modernist's designs. His bank's arches are inverted structures, supporting the columns and widening at the bottom for seismic

<sup>52</sup> Adapted from Harris, "Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks," 101-106.

<sup>53</sup> Harris, "Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks," 102.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

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stability. ... The design also responds appropriately to its desert site. The two-story banking space is walled in with tall panels, but the panels are lifted up from the ground, and stop just short of the ceiling, in order to let light into the space. The strong sun is shielded, but the light is balanced and controlled to avoid the gloom.<sup>56</sup>

The final element in emphasizing the bank's monumentality was a reflecting pool and fountains that Stewart placed along the full width of the building at street level. The pool continued under the cantilevered floor slab where the arches touched the ground. At night, with the row of uplit fountains and recessed lighting behind the arches, it appeared that the massive structure was floating above the water.

Harris concludes, "Individually, Williams's banks showed his capacity to adapt to changing business programs and expand on aesthetic trends, while always maintaining his core values and design principles. Even with buildings as utilitarian as banks or offices, Williams sought to 'uplift the human experience,' a goal he was able to accomplish because of his long and sustained commitment to community and place."<sup>57</sup>

**Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Mountain Station, 1949-1963 (extant)**

Conceived in the late 1940s but not begun until 1961, the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway was a joint venture of the architectural firms of Frey and Chambers, and Williams, Williams & Williams. John Porter Clark served as coordinating architect. The Aerial Tramway became one of the Coachella Valley's most popular tourist attractions taking passengers from the arid lower station at 2,600 feet to the upper station at 8,500 feet, a mountainous area of pine trees and winter snow. The valley station was designed by Albert Frey in collaboration with Robson Chambers using a New England style covered bridge as its inspiration.<sup>58</sup> In 2015, the property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for architectural merit at the local level of significance under the context "The Architecture of Albert Frey: Desert modern design in the Coachella Valley, 1934-1965." The Williams team, with E. Stewart Williams as lead designer, was responsible for the mountain station, also known as the upper or alpine station.

Investigations into the viability of the challenging project began in 1949, when it was quickly discovered that current technology could not produce a single cable long enough to span the distance between the valley and mountain stations. The subsequent cost of constructing an intermediate transfer station to connect the two cables was found to be too high to make the project feasible.<sup>59</sup> It would not be until the early 1960s that a manufacturer was found that could weave a single wire that would go the full length of the journey from top to bottom, thereby requiring only two stations.

<sup>56</sup> Stern and Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs*, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Harris, "Dignity and Delight: Modern Banks," 109.

<sup>58</sup> Albert Frey as videotaped in *Prickly Pears*, 58:00.

<sup>59</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in *Prickly Pears*, December 6, 1986.

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From 1949 until the early 1960s, the joint venture of architects continued to work on the project. Said Roger Williams of the process many years later, “The architects and engineers were willing to do a lot of work for nothing for a period of 12 years. Exploring the possibilities, climbing the mountain on horseback ... to come up with final designs. Our agreement was that if they ever did build it we would get 2% more on fee; instead of 8% we would get 10%. Of course, we didn’t make any money on it but it was an interesting project.”<sup>60</sup>

Given the green light once the single cable concept was approved, the architects prepared a new set of drawings with one station at the bottom and one at the top. According to Stewart, “At the top we were dealing with a state park and the state wouldn’t let us touch anything. They wouldn’t let us cut a tree down unless it was just under the building. We had to take all of the gravel and sand up in helicopters for the foundation. Everything had to be taken up by helicopter—sheets of glass, glue lams, all of it—some 23,000 trips.”<sup>61</sup>

The mountain station is based on a Swiss chalet, with angled wings and sloping roofs with large windows to take in views. The building with its wings and outdoor terraces is fitted to the topography, “tying the building to the natural beauty that attracted tourists in the first place.”<sup>62</sup> The lower base of the building, including the tower that contains the tram’s mechanical equipment and receives the tramway cars, is constructed of reinforced concrete. However, the portion of the building above the concrete base is made primarily of wood and glass. Natural rock cladding flanks a monumental metal chimney connecting the two wings. It features a fireplace opening on the inside to warm the restaurant and lounge, and another on the opposite side facing the outside terrace.

Of the design of the mountain station, Williams later said, it “has a certain quality that fits in with the native environment at the top. ... But once again, the site dictates the form of the final architectural solution.”<sup>63</sup>

**Firm of Williams and Williams in Collaboration with John Porter Clark 1963-1970**

**Palm Springs Planning Collaborative 1964-1967**

By the early 1960s, Williams believed that Palm Springs had grown too rapidly without the benefit of a long-term master plan to guide and direct that growth, particularly in the city core. In addressing the issue, a committee of local architects under the leadership of Williams came together to form the Palm Springs Planning Collaborative. The group included Robson Chambers, John Porter Clark, William Cody, Albert Frey, Richard Harrison, Herman Raines, Donald Wexler, and Roger Williams. After

<sup>60</sup> Roger Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>61</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>62</sup> Stern and Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs*, 81.

<sup>63</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

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securing a \$25,000 commission from the City Council, the collaborative spent three years studying and creating a comprehensive master plan for the city core.

Surveys sent to the Retail Merchants, Board of Realtors, Central Business Association, and the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce revealed a majority favored the relocation of Highway 111 off Palm Canyon Drive, the construction of underground garages, and the focus of the Central Business District (CBD) as a tourist center. These responses guided the Collaborative in developing goals and concepts that they presented to the Economic Development Commission for their review and their frequent meetings. They planned and designed buildings for the downtown area, containing a two-block pedestrian mall, recommending a new zoning standard for the CBD with one-third open space, one-third parking, and one-third buildings. They also outlined the physical facilities and exterior requirements that would require financing.<sup>64</sup>

In October 1967, the Collaborative presented their master plan to the City Council. Their presentation included a ten-foot-long model of the city core depicting the pedestrian mall and various buildings representing specific functions and their placement: convention center, multistory hotels, underground parking, plazas, stores, offices, restaurants, and cultural buildings. Emphasis was placed on limiting automobile traffic in the new pedestrian mall. Overarching the entire plan was the goal of preserving the unique resort flavor of Palm Springs.

The master plan was enthusiastically received by the City Council and business community; however, implementation was another matter. For a variety of reasons, not the least of which were the parochial interests of property owners unwilling to sacrifice their modest shops, restaurants, and small inns for the benefit of a unified downtown plan. Said Williams, "The plan was filed for reference. The model was at City Hall for ten years and then taken out. It went to the maintenance shop and then was dumped out. It was very disappointing... a lack of vision on everybody's part. [The master plan] was our last effort to plan Palm Springs. After that we tried to do the best we could when major projects came along."<sup>65</sup>

**Crafton Hills Community College 1966-1972 (extant)<sup>66</sup>**

In the late 1960s, the Board of Trustees of San Bernardino Valley College decided to create a new campus in Yucaipa, just east of Redlands, on a 163-acre parcel of land that had been gifted to the college by wealthy Los Angeles-based industrialists. In a competitive bid process, the firm of Williams and Williams was selected to work with the architects of the San Bernardino Valley campus: Poper and Jones of Long Beach and Jerome Armstrong of San Bernardino. The new association, formed in 1966, was named the Valley College Architects' Collaborative. Stewart Williams would be the architect of the

<sup>64</sup> Sidney Williams, "The Spirit of Collegiality: The Power of Eloquence" in *An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect*, ed. Sidney Williams (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Art Museum, 2014), 46.

<sup>65</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>66</sup> Adapted from Bricker, "Civic and Educational 'Architecture as Environmental Expression,'" 142-149.

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campus master plan and chief designer of its buildings.

The challenging topography of narrow ridges and steep arroyos fascinated Williams. “I tramped over these hills getting it together in my mind and was already concluding that we wished to disturb the natural environment as little as possible.”<sup>67</sup> The program was based upon the then-popular “cluster college” concept—an innovative academic environment consisting of a cluster of semi-autonomous schools each with its own faculty and administrators that would share common spaces (science laboratories, lecture halls, library, and administrative offices). Each college would accommodate 1,000 students. Williams sited the first cluster on the spine of the hillside with a system of terraces and covered walkways linking the principle buildings. Ultimately, this cluster and the central campus buildings were the only portions of the scheme that would be realized.

In designing the buildings, Alan Hess comments,

Williams took on yet another material and structure in the late 1960s: concrete—first at Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa and then notably at the Palm Springs Desert Museum. Both were ‘the very best I could turn out.’<sup>68</sup> Unlike anything he had done before, Crafton Hills College (1968) is a megastructure, then popular in architecture. A series of ribbed concrete buildings ride a narrow ridge, connected by plazas and flights of steps responding to the difficult site. While many megastructure complexes (such as Paul Rudolph’s Boston Government Center) emphasized the massive, Brutalist character of poured concrete, Williams’s version is surprisingly humane. He did not abandon his enduring sense of human scale.<sup>69</sup>

The campus buildings were of sandblasted reinforced concrete to enhance fire and seismic protection. The concrete was tinted a warm color to integrate with the landscape. Concrete fins or brise-soleils controlled the sunlight while creating a compelling shadow pattern. The key buildings that Williams designed were the Administration/Laboratory Center, Library, and Classroom Center. A Performing Arts Center that Williams designed was erected in 1975.

Straddling the ridge was the Administration/Laboratory Center with its majestic flight of stairs through the center of the building. The design creates a wide, shaded outdoor space that affords splendid views of the surrounding landscape. “Its third floor appears to float above the walkway; its iconic silhouette is one of the most distinctive features of the college.”<sup>70</sup> The one-story library centered the campus. It was designed to take two additional floors that were later added in 1975 at the same time as the Performing Arts Center. Unfortunately, the library was demolished in 2012, replaced by several unremarkable student service buildings.

<sup>67</sup> “Architect Finds Crafton Hills Most Exciting Project of Career,” *Facts Shoppers’ Guide, Redlands Daily Facts*, August 24, 1972, 8.

<sup>68</sup> E. Stewart Williams, interview by Alan Hess, August 1, 1999.

<sup>69</sup> Stern and Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 144.

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Distinguishing the L-shaped Classroom Center, situated at the west end of the original campus, is a clock tower. In the original campus plan, such a tower would serve as a visual landmark for each college cluster. Overhangs shade the classrooms; faculty offices hover above a covered walkway along the building’s northern wing. The three-story Performing Arts Center completed in 1975 descends in terraces down the hillside with a plaza located at the heart of the campus serving as the theater’s roof.

For their design of Crafton Hills Community College, the Valley College Architects’ Collaborative was recognized by the Inland California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects with a First Award of Excellence in 1973.

**Firm of Williams, Clark and Williams 1971-1982**

**Palm Springs Desert Museum 1976 (now the Palm Springs Art Museum, extant)<sup>71</sup>**

By the early 1970s, Palm Springs had grown sufficiently in size and stature to support a much larger cultural institution than the existing Desert Museum located in a small downtown building erected in 1958. In conceiving a replacement, the museum’s director and board of trustees organized a fund-raising campaign that would allow for a robust program consisting of an art gallery, natural history museum, and performing arts center. In competing for the commission, Williams invited the trustees to tour Crafton Hills College, which had recently opened. Sufficiently impressed, the firm of Williams, Clark and Williams was given the job to complete the new museum.

Due to a two-story height limit in Palm Springs at the time, a subterranean level was necessary to accommodate the 75,000 square foot building planned for the site. The art gallery and natural history museum were to be raised above street level in consideration of security. Each would include space for both permanent installations and changing exhibitions. The core of the main floor was the orientation center—a grand space providing access to both galleries, which were housed in cubic volumes set at 90 degrees to the street. A staircase from the main floor leads to the lower level where the 433-seat theater was located as well as storage, workshops, and other spaces. The lower level also leads to the landscaped sculpture gardens.

Williams constructed the museum out of concrete mixed with Warmtone cement and several aggregates. Long expanses of concrete panels were hammered to expose the aggregate. For cladding, Williams sought a lightweight material with colors sympathetic to the adjacent mountainside. Following an extensive search, a lightweight volcanic cinder weighing one-fourth of regular stone was located in Clearlake, Inyo County, California. “The dramatic textural effects of his selected materials were sympathetic to the characteristics of the terrain, yet strengthened and distinguished the museum’s presence—no small accomplishment given the power of the mountain. The drama of the materials was

<sup>71</sup> Adapted from Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 151-168.

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carried into the museum interior, where they add to the character of the open spaces.”<sup>72</sup>

A highly innovative structural system of post-tensioned high-strength steel cables that ran the length of cantilevered floor and roof beams was employed for seismic resistance and to support the high-ceilinged, column-free 60-foot span in the galleries, 80-foot span in the theater, and 100-foot span in the orientation center.

Hess summarizes the overall sense of the building,

The Palm Springs Desert Museum is Williams’s major civic monument. As at Crafton Hills College he used large, blocky forms; ... but once again Williams’ skill of proportion comes into play. The solid, mostly windowless wings of the museum are lifted above sunken sculpture gardens, imparting a sense of visual lightness. The sunken gardens provide a variety of smaller outdoor spaces that also break down the apparent massiveness of the structure. Secondary wings jutting at an angle from the main façade are impressed with a layer of reddish-brown volcanic cinder cone; as always, Williams ties his building to the site by recalling the rugged textures and colors of the mountain immediately behind the museum. The Annenberg Theater on the below-grade level of the museum uses both curving concrete structural ribs and a thin skin of curving wood to reflect the organic shapes of Scandinavian design Williams had seen on his travels in the 1930s. Form, material, color, scale—the themes that he had been observing and mastering since his earliest studies in architecture unite in this building.<sup>73</sup>

In 1978, the Palm Springs Desert Museum was given a Special Award of Excellence from the Inland California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

By the early 1980s, more space was needed to display the museum’s Western Art Collection. As a result, the museum’s administrative functions were relocated to a new, separate building just north of the original building. Named the Marks Administration Building, it was designed by Williams and completed in 1981. Then, in 1993, a generous donation from interior designer Steven Chase helped fund a 15,000 square foot addition to the museum to house new galleries, a lecture hall, art storage and other utilitarian spaces. Williams came out of retirement to design the addition, which opened in 1996. “Cleverly, the original structure was designed to support the weight of a third floor, and fortunately, city building codes had evolved—there was now a 60-foot height limit. As if designed from the beginning, the expansion and modifications appear seamless and the museum has opened up, allowing site-lines which connect the divergent sections.”<sup>74</sup> The Palm Springs Desert Museum became the Palm Springs Art Museum in 2005.

<sup>72</sup> Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 159.

<sup>73</sup> Stern and Hess, *Julius Shulman: Palm Springs*, 81.

<sup>74</sup> Tony Merchell and Jade Nelson, *E. Stewart Williams. A Tribute to His Work and Life* (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, 2005), 24-25.

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Commented Williams of the museum when interviewed in 1986, “It certainly has become the center of Palm Springs cultural and social life. We’re very proud of it. ... I think that’s going to be the thing that maybe the Williams brothers are remembered for the longest in Palm Springs. It’s certainly been our joy to do it and I think it will be there for a long long time after we’re gone.”<sup>75</sup>

**Preserving E. Stewart Williams’ Architectural Legacy**

E. Stewart Williams, FAIA died in 2005 in Palm Springs. He was 96. The Palm Springs Art Museum’s comprehensive 2014 exhibition “An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect” and its associated catalog thoroughly documented Williams’ interpretation of desert modernism as revealed in five decades of work. As noted, many of the architect’s earliest works have been demolished—Bistonte Lodge, Oasis Hotel, Pepper Tree Inn, and Potter Clinic—the latter as recently as 2007. In 2009, a proposal to cocoon Williams’ Santa Fe Federal Savings building with new construction was thwarted after a protracted battle by a vote of the City Council to designate the property as a local landmark. The building has been reborn as the Architecture and Design Center (ADC) of the Palm Springs Art Museum. When the Oasis Commercial Building was proposed for local landmark designation, the City Council chose to protect only the second story, leaving the ground floor vulnerable to inappropriate alterations. Fortunately, the most recent election cycle resulted in a new majority of preservation minded city council members and mayor. With Williams’ archive safely housed at the Palm Springs Art Museum along with the consensus that the best of the architect’s remaining work deserves protection, it is hoped that such preservation battles will be a thing of the past.

**Conclusion**

The context associated with this Multiple Property Submission is “Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley 1946-1976.” As has been shown, for E. Stewart Williams, FAIA “...it was the desert environment and a sense of professional responsibility to his clients that were the ultimate determinants of his architecture.”<sup>76</sup> ... “Williams took a non-doctrinaire approach to Modernism. He embraced a rational use of technology but did not let it override the expression of humanizing values conveyed through scale and natural materials.”<sup>77</sup>

Williams was an exceptionally gifted architect, and if he had a greater appetite for publicity or was willing to practice on a larger stage, his reputation during his lifetime might have expanded outside California. To a great extent, this is also true of some of Williams’ contemporaries, such as [Donald] Wexler, [John Porter] Clark, and William Cody. Only [Albert] Frey seems to have enjoyed a global reputation during his lifetime, and that may be more due to his European associations than to his raw talent. However,

<sup>75</sup> E. Stewart Williams as videotaped in Prickly Pears, December 6, 1986.

<sup>76</sup> Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 133.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 135.

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by staying in a developing community that encouraged his spirit of innovation, Williams was able to produce a remarkable body of work.<sup>78</sup>

For his obituary in 2005, Elaine Woo of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that Williams was, “a Palm Springs architect who reflected a love of modernism and the desert in houses and buildings that became landmarks of midcentury style.”<sup>79</sup> She continued, “The last of his generation of Desert Modern architects, who included Albert Frey, William Cody and John Porter Clark, Williams helped define an aesthetic that embraced the informality of Palm Springs and stressed clean lines, indoor-outdoor living, and the use of glass and other artificial and natural materials.”<sup>80</sup>

Scholar Lauren Weiss Bricker concluded: “Williams was a gentle, modest man who was quietly proud of his architectural accomplishments. He was a gifted writer who could articulate the poetry of his architecture without pretense or excessive embellishment.”<sup>81</sup>

In the E. Stewart Williams tribute booklet published in 2005 by the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, author and critic Michael Stern concluded,

As one of the founding fathers of the Palm Springs Modern style, E. Stewart Williams brought a humanistic architecture to the spectacular desert landscape. With a career duration of 50 years (his last building was completed when he was 86 years old), the California desert is gifted with an abundance of his unique brand of Modernism—a mixture of natural and manmade materials, seamless interior/exterior flow, profuse warmth and a firm dedication to allow the power of the desert to inform much of his work.<sup>82</sup>

All of the buildings associated with E. Stewart Williams, FAIA that continue to meet registration requirements deserve the honor of inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C.

<sup>78</sup> Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 168.

<sup>79</sup> Elaine Woo, “E. Stewart Williams, 95; Defined Sleek, Warm Style of Desert Architecture,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 2005.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 133.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Stern, foreword to *E. Stewart Williams. A Tribute to His Work and Life* (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, 2005).

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**F. Associated Property Types**

**Property Type: Single-Family Residence**

Description

Over his multi-decade architectural career, E. Stewart Williams was strongly guided by an intense awareness of setting and materials in his approach to residential design. In particular, it was Williams’ aim to incorporate the prime features of the local environment into the living spaces of dwellings that he designed. Of course, practical considerations of site conditions and current building technologies were factored into his conceptualization of a project. It was the desert environment and a sense of professional responsibility to his clients that were the ultimate determinants of his architecture.<sup>83</sup> Williams took a non-doctrinaire approach to Modernism, embracing a rational use of technology without letting it override the expression of humanizing values conveyed through scale and natural materials.<sup>84</sup> The single-family properties nominated under this National Register Multiple Property Submission are eligible for listing under Criterion C. Each is attributed to E. Stewart Williams FAIA as lead designer.

Significance

The historic context associated with this multiple property submission is “Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976.” The E. Stewart Williams-designed single-family residence is a property type associated with this context. All of the single-family dwellings attributed to E. Stewart Williams meeting registration requirements qualify for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance.

Under Criterion C, qualifying dwellings embody the distinctive characteristics of residential architecture as interpreted by E. Stewart Williams for the desert environment of the Coachella Valley. The buildings exhibit an aesthetic that embraces the informality of Palm Springs and the Coachella Valley by stressing clean lines, indoor-outdoor living, the generous use of glass, and the incorporation of natural materials whenever possible. In addition, E. Stewart Williams, FAIA is known as a master architect within his profession.

Registration Requirements

In order to qualify In order to qualify for individual registration under Criterion C, a single-family dwelling must be attributed to E. Stewart Williams as identified in the project list compiled by the Palm Springs Art Museum in their 2014 exhibition catalogue “An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect,” pages 190-201. The property must embody the distinctive characteristics of residential architecture associated with the architect. It must maintain enough physical integrity to be readily identifiable as the work of E. Stewart Williams. To meet physical integrity requirements, the residence must possess a preponderance of original characteristics as documented by historic photographs and/or

<sup>83</sup> Bricker, “Civic and Educational ‘Architecture as Environmental Expression,’” 133.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 135.

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detailed plans. Original construction material should be evident or have been replaced in-kind in a manner consistent with the original design and materials. Character defining features include natural materials for interior and/or exterior surfaces, original roof form, floor-to-ceiling glazing, and indoor-outdoor flow. Windows should be original on the exposures visible from the public right-of-way, or, if replaced or altered, compatible with the original design.

Additions will not disqualify buildings unless they drastically alter the overall scale, substantially modify the character defining features of the dwelling, or clearly violate the documented intention of the architect. The addition of perimeter walls for security or privacy, and modifications to the original landscaping, will not disqualify buildings under Criterion C.

**Property Type: Commercial Building**

Description

The commercial properties nominated under this National Register Multiple Property Submission are eligible for listing under Criterion C. Each is attributed to E. Stewart Williams as lead designer. Although Williams never directly ascribed to any particular school of modernism, he consistently adapted the International Style to commercial buildings in the desert. Foremost among its stylistic tenets that Williams embraced was a rejection of decorative historical references. Instead, emphasis was placed on form following function. Architectural elements included flat roofs, floor-to-ceiling plate glass, steel frame construction, and later, reinforced concrete.

In the 1950s, Williams utilized warm materials, including stone and wood, so that his International Style commercial buildings would be more tactile and welcoming, especially at the pedestrian level and in interior public spaces. In the early 1960s, Williams designed several commercial buildings that were pure International Style in inspiration. These include Coachella Valley Savings #2 and Santa Fe Federal Savings. He also designed the International Style Palm Springs Unified School District Administration Building during the same period. Then, unique in his commercial oeuvre, Williams completed the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Mountain Station in 1963, a building that referenced a Swiss chalet with angled wings, a sloping roof, and large windows to take in views. Yet, like most Williams’ buildings, it is fitted to the topography and natural beauty of its surroundings through the use of wood, glass, and, in this case, native rock that clads massive dual fireplaces.

Significance

The historic context associated with this multiple property submission is “Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976.” The E. Stewart Williams-designed commercial building is a property type associated with this context. All of the commercial buildings attributed to master architect E. Stewart Williams meeting registration requirements qualify for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance.

Under Criterion C, qualifying buildings embody the distinctive characteristics of commercial

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architecture as interpreted by E. Stewart Williams for the desert environment of the Coachella Valley. In the 1950s, these buildings tend to stress clean lines, flat roofs, a generous use of glass, steel frame or reinforced concrete construction, and the incorporation of natural materials. In the early 1960s, Williams' commercial buildings became pure expressions of the International Style. Then, with the 1963 Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Mountain Station, Williams designed a modern interpretation of a Swiss chalet for the unique environment of the alpine heights of Mt. San Jacinto.

Registration Requirements

In order to qualify for individual registration under Criterion C, a commercial building must be attributed to E. Stewart Williams as identified in the project list compiled by the Palm Springs Art Museum in their 2014 exhibition catalogue "An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect," pages 190-201. The property must embody the distinctive characteristics of commercial architecture associated with the architect during the various phases of his career. It must maintain enough physical integrity to be readily identifiable as the work of E. Stewart Williams. To meet physical integrity requirements, the building must possess a preponderance of original characteristics as documented by historic photographs and/or detailed plans. Original construction material should be evident or have been replaced in-kind in a manner consistent with the original design and materials. Character defining features include a strong influence of the International Style softened, in some cases, by natural materials. Windows should be original on the exposures visible from the public right-of-way, or, if replaced or altered, compatible with the original design.

Additions will not disqualify buildings unless they drastically alter the overall scale, substantially modify character-defining features, or clearly violate the documented intention of the architect. Modifications to the original landscaping will not disqualify buildings under Criterion C.

**Property Type: Cultural Institution**

Description

The cultural institutions nominated under this National Register Multiple Property Submission are eligible for listing under Criterion C. Each is attributed to E. Stewart Williams as lead designer. Williams never directly ascribed to any particular school of modernism. Instead, he consistently placed emphasis on form following function, taking a non-doctrinaire approach by embracing a rational use of technology without letting it override the expression of humanizing values conveyed through scale and natural materials.<sup>85</sup> Architectural elements of cultural institutions associated with Williams include flat roofs, large expanses of glass, incorporation of natural materials such as rock veneer and wood paneling, and reinforced concrete construction.

Significance

The historic context associated with this multiple property submission is "Architecture as environmental

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

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expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976.” The E. Stewart Williams-designed cultural institution is a property type associated with this context. A cultural institution attributed to E. Stewart Williams that meets registration requirements qualifies for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance.

Under Criterion C, qualifying buildings embody the distinctive characteristics of cultural institutions as interpreted by E. Stewart Williams for the desert environment of the Coachella Valley. The buildings stress clean lines, flat roofs, reinforced concrete construction, and the incorporation of natural materials. The designs reject historical references. In addition, E. Stewart Williams, FAIA is known as a master architect within his profession.

Registration Requirements

In order to qualify for individual registration under Criterion C, the cultural institution must be attributed to E. Stewart Williams as identified in the project list compiled by the Palm Springs Art Museum in their 2014 exhibition catalogue “An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect,” pages 190-201. The building must maintain enough physical integrity to be readily identifiable as the work of E. Stewart Williams. To meet physical integrity requirements, the building must possess a preponderance of original characteristics as documented by historic photographs and/or detailed plans. Character defining features include reinforced concrete construction, clean lines, an absence of applied ornamentation or historical references, and incorporation of natural materials for interior and/or exterior surfaces. Windows should be original on the exposures visible from the public right-of-way, or, if replaced or altered, compatible with the original design. Original construction material should be evident or have been replaced in-kind in a manner consistent with the original design and materials. Additions will not disqualify a building unless they drastically alter the overall scale, substantially modify character-defining features, or clearly violate the documented intention of the architect. Modifications to the original landscaping will not disqualify buildings under Criterion C.

**Property Type: Educational Institution**

Description

The educational institutions nominated under this National Register Multiple Property Submission are eligible for listing under Criterion C. Each is attributed to E. Stewart Williams as lead designer. Although Williams never directly ascribed to any particular school of modernism, for educational institutions he initially adapted the International Style and then, later, embraced the expressive forms obtainable through concrete as found in the New Brutalist Movement. He consistently rejected historical references with emphasis placed on form following function. Architectural elements include flat roofs, generous expanses of glass, steel frame construction, and later, reinforced concrete.

Significance

The historic context associated with this multiple property submission is “Architecture as environmental expression in the greater Coachella Valley, 1946-1976.” The E. Stewart Williams-designed educational

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institution is a property type associated with this context. An educational institution or building(s) within a school campus attributed to E. Stewart Williams meeting registration requirements qualifies for listing in the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance.

Under Criterion C, qualifying buildings embody the distinctive characteristics of educational institutions as interpreted by E. Stewart Williams. From the period 1947 to 1965, he typically adapted the International Style to educational buildings. After that time, Williams embraced the possibilities of the New Brutalism. He tempered their massive forms by deeply sculpting exterior surfaces, incorporating brise-soleils in controlling sunlight and creating shadows, and cantilevering slender overhangs and balconies. In addition, E. Stewart Williams, FAIA is known as a master architect within his profession.

Registration Requirements

In order to qualify for individual registration under Criterion C, an educational institution or building(s) within a school campus must be attributed to E. Stewart Williams as identified in the project list compiled by the Palm Springs Art Museum in their 2014 exhibition catalogue "An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect," pages 190-201. The property must embody the distinctive characteristics of architecture designed for educational institutions from the documented phases of Williams' career. It must maintain enough physical integrity to be readily identifiable as the work of E. Stewart Williams. To meet physical integrity requirements, the building must possess a preponderance of original characteristics as documented by historic photographs and/or detailed plans. Original construction material should be evident or have been replaced in-kind in a manner consistent with the original design and materials. Character defining features include a strong influence of the International Style in buildings designed from 1947 to 1965, and the New Brutalism after that time. Windows should be original on the exposures visible from the public right-of-way, or, if replaced or altered, compatible with the original design.

Additions will not disqualify buildings unless they drastically alter the overall scale, substantially modify character-defining features, or clearly violate the documented intention of the architect. Modifications to the original landscaping will not disqualify buildings under Criterion C.

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**G. Geographical Data**

The geographical area is the greater Coachella Valley, located across Imperial, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties, California. Locations of properties designed by architect E. Stewart Williams meeting registration criteria are as follows. Each of these properties is nominated concurrently with this Multiple Property Documentation Form. Additional properties may be submitted at a later time.

Coachella Valley Savings #1, 383 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs,  
Riverside County

Coachella Valley Savings #2, 499 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Edris Residence, 1030 West Cielo Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Kenaston Residence, 39-767 Desert Sun Drive, Rancho Mirage, Riverside County

Koerner Residence, 1275 South Calle de Maria, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Oasis Commercial Building, 101 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Mountain Station, 25905 California Highway 243, Idyllwild,  
Riverside County

Palm Springs Desert Museum, 101 Museum Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Palm Springs Unified School District Educational Administrative Center, 333 South Farrell  
Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Santa Fe Federal Savings and Loan Association, 300 South Palm Canyon Drive, Palm Springs,  
Riverside County

Sinatra, Frank, House, 1145 East Via Colusa Road, Palm Springs, Riverside County

Williams, E. Stewart and Mari, Residence, Location Restricted at Property Owner's Request,  
Palm Springs, Riverside County

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**H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

The Architecture of E. Stewart Williams Multiple Property Submission was based on sources spanning multiple decades. Background information for the development of the historic context statement included a wide variety of source materials relating to the history of the Modern Movement in general and desert modernism in particular. The work of E. Stewart Williams was thoroughly documented and evaluated in the catalog published by the Palm Springs Art Museum for the 2014 exhibition “An Eloquent Modernist: E. Stewart Williams, Architect.” The catalog featured essays by Lauren Weiss Bricker, PhD; Elizabeth Edwards Harris, PhD; Erin Hyman, PhD; Volker M. Welter, PhD; Sidney Williams; and Wim de Wit.

Since the mid-1940s, articles, reviews, and critical commentary regarding E. Stewart Williams and his architectural legacy have been published and are referenced in the context statement and listed in the bibliography.

The nomination was researched and prepared by Peter Moruzzi, architectural historian. It was funded by contributions from Sam Cardella; Elizabeth Edwards Harris, PhD; Greg and Katherine Hough; Tom and Marianne O’Connell; Roswitha Kima Smale; the Williams Family Trust; Joe and Kim Zakowski; and grants from the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation and the Palm Springs Modern Committee, both of which are non-profit 501(c)(3) organizations.

Mr. Moruzzi is an authority in the area of mid-century modern resources. As an architectural historian, he conducts historic resources surveys for municipalities, writes historic assessments and technical reports, conducts CEQA and NEPA analyses, and conducts plan reviews. He was the author of The Architecture of Albert Frey: Desert modern design in the Coachella Valley, 1934-1965 Multiple Property Submission (MPS) and ten associated nominations listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2015. Moruzzi was the primary author of the Case Study House Program: 1945-1966 MPS listed in 2013. He also authored the successful nomination of the El Cortez Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas listed in the National Register in 2013. In addition, Moruzzi authored the successful nominations of the 1958 Johnie’s Broiler in Downey (architect Paul Clayton) listed in the California Register, and the 1949 Bob’s Big Boy restaurant in Toluca Lake (architect Wayne McAllister) listed as a California Point of Historical Interest.

He has been a lecturer and panelist on issues surrounding the preservation of mid-century modern resources. Mr. Moruzzi was chairman of the Los Angeles Conservancy’s Modern Committee from 1992-1997, and is the founding president of the Palm Springs Modern Committee established in 1999. In 2002, he received the Presidential Public Service Citation from the American Institute of Architects for work in the preservation of Modernist architecture in Southern California. In 2012, the California Preservation Foundation presented Moruzzi with its President’s Award for his “extraordinary work to protect modern resources and preserve California’s rich cultural heritage.” In 2016, Moruzzi was presented with the UCLA Architecture and Urban Design Award for his efforts in preserving the mid-century architecture of Palm Springs.

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Between January 2016 and April 2016, Mr. Moruzzi evaluated each of the twelve individual properties included in this Multiple Property Submission. He applied the Registration Requirements detailed in Section F in determining whether the resource met integrity requirements under Criterion C.

The individual properties nominated as part of this Multiple Property Submission appear to meet the established eligibility requirements under National Register Criterion C. Additional submissions of properties meeting these requirements and criterion may be submitted in the future.

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