



ROAD & TRAVEL MAGAZINE

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by Don Weberg

Mention Palm Springs and all kinds of images pop to mind. Sunglasses, palm trees, gorgeous blue skies backset by the towering San Jacinto Mountains, modern style homes, friendly people, gobs of sunshine to bask in by large crystal blue swimming pools, and shops, lots and lots of shops. Celebrities might also come to mind, especially Frank Sinatra.

Rat Packer extraordinaire, Sinatra called Palm Springs, California home since 1947 when he built his first house there only a few minutes from the main drag downtown. Relaxing and partying when not performing, Palm Springs couldn't have been a better place for the crooner to unwind. With the exception of the summer, when temperatures surpass 100-degrees Fahrenheit, the remaining nine months of the year are relatively mild, lending to a relaxed lifestyle. The laid back people who populated (and populate, the attitude is still the same) Palm Springs were happy to have the celebrity in town, but really didn't make a fuss over it. One of the many reasons Frank felt so at home in the desert.

Many locals who recall Frank's presence in town often say one thing in common, that he brought a lot to the town, that he really helped shape the allure of Palm Springs. If this is true, then one might feel inclined to travel in the way Sinatra might prescribe.

Tripping to the desert oasis and finding a nice spot to weekend in is easy, but finding Palm Springs Rat Pack style takes a little more work, but is well worth the effort. To do something Frank, we registered with

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the Del Marcos Hotel and got a hold of a Cadillac XLR Roadster for the trek. The Caddy would more than likely have been Frank's style; an extremely stylish, powerful convertible wrapping up an interior of supreme comfort. Somehow, it's very Sinatra. For us, the convertible aspect was like icing on the cake, however, the weather had other ideas in mind and provided inches upon inches of rain for the weekend. Nonetheless, the XLR was a superb ride, a car seemingly unmatched in many ways.



We registered with the Del Marcos Hotel and got a hold of a Cadillac XLR Roadster for the trek

The Del Marcos Hotel, built in 1947, was designed in the modern style, post and beam construction with lots of floor to ceiling glass space lending to a very open, airy feeling, a sort of trademark style for the city. Lovingly restored, the Del Marcos has been brought back to its former Atomic Age glory with period furniture, paint tones, and artwork lending to an almost eerie feeling that you are back in the 1950's, that you might actually stroll from the hotel to Palm Canyon Drive a block away and bump into Frank Sinatra or Dean Martin. Even the manager, Joe Kelley, resonates the feel of the place through his personal style and demeanor. A cool cat, Joe, naturally laid back and sharply casual, is usually found in the lobby sitting on one of the super cool retro sofas chatting with guests or regulars, occasionally sipping a glass of wine. In a way, his charm reminds one of a cross between Dean Martin and Telly Savalas.

Only a block away, the heart and soul of Palm Springs awaits with shopping, dining, and dancing on Palm Canyon Drive and Indian Canyon Drive, the two main streets downtown. Las Casuellas, on Palm Canyon, proved to be an awesome dining experience, but one word of advice, call ahead for reservations. Also, make sure to specify that you want to sit on the patio or inside, booth or table. They won't ask when you call in, and the trick is, when you get there, yes, you're name is on the list, but they will seat you at first available. In other words, the list is really just a waiting list, not a true reservation roster. And, choosing not to call ahead can result in a standing time of over an hour. But, once you have the seating settled, you're in for a treat. The restaurant is old school Spanish style with heavy wrought iron work abounding and thick adobe walls with heavy wood beams overhead. In a way, it reminds one of a Spanish church. The food was tremendous, the service was excellent, and the prices weren't out of line. It was one of those places where the celebrities of Palm Springs, and those just visiting, would frequent for their Mexican dishes and an occasional dance.

After dinner, working off the food, a walk down Palm Canyon proved that despite the chilly weather, people still love to roam

this section of town. Anywhere you look, people stare into windows, talk, hold hands, sit at coffee houses, and enjoy the scene. However, what sounds like a mob is really a well behaved and somewhat sophisticated grouping of seemingly nice people enjoying not only the company of their immediate companion, but everyone else on the street. Highly refreshing from the rigors of the city.

Anxious to see more of Palm Springs than Palm Canyon had to offer, the Palm Springs Visitors Bureau located right at the entrance to town at 2901 N. Palm Canyon Dr., had a ton of ideas. Housed in what used to be the Tramway Gas Station, the building looks like something out of the Jetson's. Perfect. For \$5 we picked up a map produced by psmod.com showcasing various Atomic styled homes and structures and found it very helpful to get around.



Shell Station Built in 1964,
designed by William F. Cody

Sprinkled throughout the region are homes that have been lovingly restored to their original condition and furnished with period décor. Of them, just a few minutes away from the Tramway Gas Station, is the still-in-service Shell Station at 2796 N. Palm Canyon Dr. Built in 1964, the structure was designed by William F. Cody, and still has the majority of its' character intact, despite the new millennium Shell

touches. Hidden away in the hills a bit was the House of Tomorrow, better known as Elvis Presley's honeymoon retreat. A stunning piece of architecture, the home was built in 1962 and from the outside at least, still looks fairly original and well maintained. At last, we found Frank Sinatra's first Palm Springs home, Twin Palms.

Built in 1947, this unique home was designed for a New Years party Frank wanted to host when '47 gave way to '48, and this proved quite a deadline. Workers worked round the clock to make sure it was built in time, and it was. When the Sinatra family sold the home, it fell into a state of ruin for quite a long time; however, the house has been restored to wonderfully presentable condition, right down to the piano shaped swimming pool. Needless to say, if modern architecture is your thing, it's possible that Palm Springs is where you need to be.

While zipping around, we noticed that the Convention Center happened to have a Modern Furniture Show and Sale going on. Timing, or the vibe of the city, we knew where our next stop would be, and what a stop it was. The space is smallish compared to that of the Los Angeles convention center, but an extremely nice place to host an event such as a furniture show.

Dealers from all over the country were on hand showing some of their original and reproduction furniture and decorator's concepts. It was like going into an Ikea from years ago. But, like all things collectible or vintage, the pieces were not cheap, not by a long shot. One sofa was priced at \$6,500, while a massive piece of artwork had a tag of \$45,000. No, they weren't joking. While these dealers need to make mortgage payments like all of us, this is the price trend of certain periods. For a while, about 10 years ago, the big heavy décor from the 1970's was en vogue, and pieces demanded hefty prices that people paid happily for. Now, it looks as though the in thing is the 1950's and 1960's modern designware, and for good reason.



The Convention Center hosting a Modern Furniture Show and Sale.

For years, the modern look was out of fashion, shunned by designers and decorators the world over for many reasons. However, despite that some of the pieces were not well built, thanks to thinnish legs and simple lines, the furniture was very fun and highly stylized. Today's reproduction components are often better built, thanks to technology, and cheaper while offering a very unique design. Even just having one or two Atomic style pieces in a living room filled with contemporary furniture can make the room feel less claustrophobic, and a little more chic. There is even a rather new magazine covering such a lifestyle, Atomic Ranch, who was on hand at the show.



Melvyn's, a high-end restaurant, located right around the corner from the Del Marcos Hotel.

After drooling over some more art and tables, it was time to move on. Finding things of Frank wasn't hard, in fact some of the things we'd heard about such as old stomping grounds and hang outs presented themselves while just running around town, like Lord Flecher's and Melvyn's. Melvyn's, a high-end restaurant, was located right around the corner from the Del Marcos, and looked to be a wonderful establishment, one of those old world, old money type places, the kind of place Frank could afford. Lord Fletcher's appeared more relaxed while offering an upscale image, a place where pretensions were left at the door and enjoyment was a requirement. A bit off the beaten path, Fletcher's is in Rancho Mirage, the place where Frank's last Palm Springs home, called The Compound, was located.

After a day of running around, the Del Marcos felt very much like home. The next day, a complementary continental breakfast was provided in the stylized lobby with some good conversation by Joe

and the other guests. The rooms overlook the beautiful patio and swimming pool, and provide a comfortable aura to relax in. The fact that the main drag is only a block away is like a security blanket, reminding you that should you desire, the world is right around the corner. But, if hanging out and just vegging all day is your thing; the Del Marcos is perfect for that too. Quiet and serene, it's the kind of place you could write a novel in, or that Hitchcock would have used for a film. Sinatra himself might have even sung about it as a secret hideaway.

Through it all, the Cadillac XLR blended perfectly. Its sharp design and Cadillac emblem on the grille are the perfect match for a chic city such as Palm Springs. The car has an eerie psychic feeling to it too, as if it knows what you want to do and exactly when you want to do it. Power is abundant, but not immature, and it's delivered well, and predictably. Apply a little more pressure to the accelerator, and the car smoothly jets from 60 to 80 in a heartbeat. The brakes and steering are also as responsive. The leather interior is of the highest standard, and all the controls fall immediately at hand. The stereo and dual climate control systems are phenomenal, and putting the top down to enjoy some cold air, post-rain night cruising is easy with the seat heaters. The XLR proves that big things are happening at GM, things that should make the competition a little nervous.

The weekend was a blast to the present past, and one that we recommend highly. Even if mod architecture isn't your thing, taking the self guided tour is fun just because it can introduce so many other aspects of the city to you while lending small ideas for things you can do to your own home. And, if you happen to stay for a couple of days, the Del Marcos won't steer you wrong. Who knows, maybe hanging out downtown sipping coffee in the shadow of a massive palm, you too will find that same special something about the desert that Frank found.

IF YOU GO

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