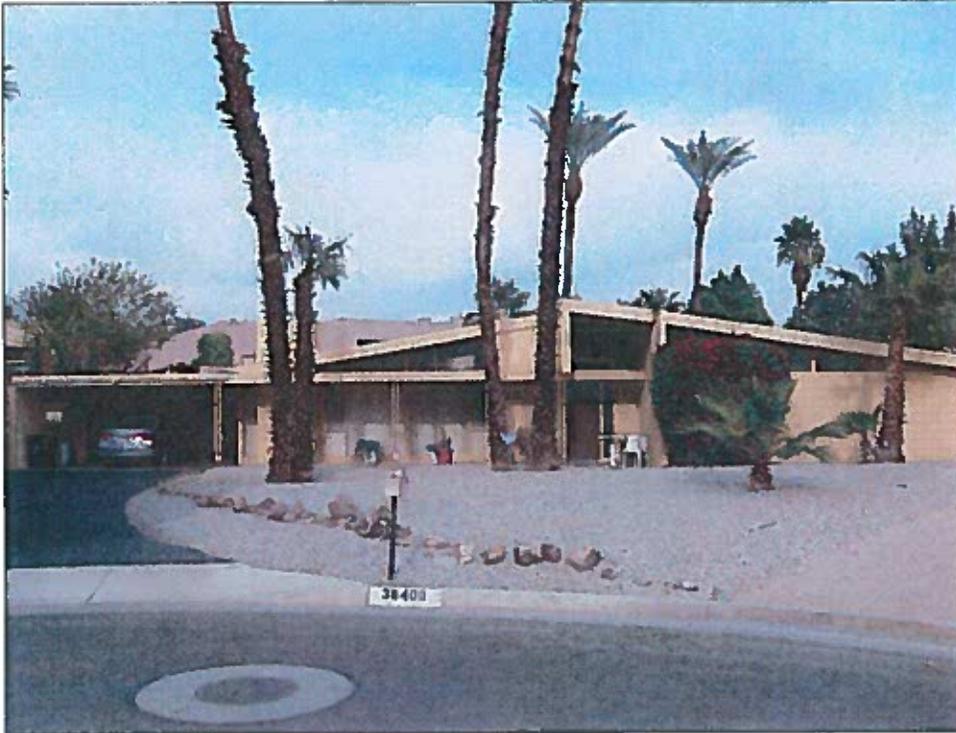


**36-400 Sandsal Circle
Rancho Mirage, California
City Landmark Assessment Report**



Prepared for:
City of Rancho Mirage
Community Development Department

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36-400 Sandsal Circle
City of Rancho Mirage
APN: 674-110-014
City Landmark Assessment and Evaluation

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Description of site or structure

The property is located at the northeast portion of Sandsal Circle, a cul-de-sac containing six single-family residences within the Valley of the Sun Estates tract. The property was not identified or evaluated in the City's Historic Resources Survey completed in February 2003.

Erected in 1958 of post-and-beam wood frame construction, this Modern one-story front-gabled house faces southwest. The residence is 2,149 square feet with three bedrooms and 1.75 bathrooms set on .27 acres. A flat-roofed carport occupies the west end of the dwelling. Exterior surfaces are clad in stucco, board-and-batten wood siding, and square concrete block. Fenestration consists of a mix of steel-framed fixed, casement, and clerestory windows that provide abundant light and air to the dwelling. Deep overhanging eaves shade north and south elevations. Sliding glass doors open onto the rear patio and swimming pool. The east portion of the front gable projects further out toward the street than the west portion and is characterized by a dramatic downward turn of the roof near the main entrance that suggests a sun shade or flap. Paralleling the primary (south) elevation is a covered entrance walkway with its flat roof supported by pairs of slender posts that rise from steel supports. The small horizontal block of wood that straddles the bottom of the paired posts is a motif repeated in the cladding of west-facing walls inside and outside the house. A large exterior concrete block chimney and a double-door mechanical closet are also elements of the street-facing façade. Visual inspection and property records indicate that a guest wing was constructed at the rear west end of the house most likely within a few years of the dwelling's original construction. Although in somewhat neglected condition with undifferentiated single-color exterior paint, the property nonetheless exhibits a high level of physical and historical integrity.

Statement of Architectural Significance

The subject property located at 36-400 Sandsal Circle is an excellent example of the Desert Modern style of architecture as applied to a residence of the late 1950s. In particular, it is highly representative of the Desert Modern tract homes typical of master architect William Krisel of the Los Angeles-based firm of Palmer and Krisel.

The Desert Modern style was in many ways a domestication and refinement of the avant garde International Style of the 1920s and 1930s, and grew out of local architects' desire to adapt modern materials, techniques, and floor plans to the unique requirements of

desert living. Characteristics include large expanses of floor-to-ceiling glass sheltered by deep overhangs extending from flat roofs and flowing interior floor plans that merged imperceptibly with the outdoors. Oriented to the rear, Desert Modern houses in Rancho Mirage embrace desert, swimming pool, and golf course views and outdoor access while front elevations are often shielded for privacy, with only clerestories and obscured glass panels adjacent to the entries providing light. Desert Modern houses appear light, with roofs floating above the glass walls and clerestories, and ceilings supported by thin steel or wood posts. In addition to glass, exterior materials include stucco, wood, slumpstone, and natural rock. The subject property incorporates most of these characteristic features adding multiple exterior surface materials, front-facing windows, a dramatic folded sun shade roof element, square concrete block chimney, and covered entrance walkway.

Several architects contributed to the development of the Desert Modern style, including William F. Cody, E. Stewart Williams, Donald Wexler, Albert Frey, William Krisel, Val Powelson, Howard Lapham, and Hugh Kaptur. Subject property architect William Krisel, a graduate of the University of Southern California School of Architecture, designed some of the first tract homes in the Coachella Valley under the firm of Palmer and Krisel.¹

Starting in 1956, Palmer and Krisel became associated with developers George and Robert Alexander. Their first tract of 39 homes was built in the Twin Palms section of Palm Springs, south of Highway 111, in 1958. Says author and critic Alan Hess, “Krisel used post-and-beam construction methods as he oversaw the Palm Springs projects. Butterfly roofs, natural stone walls, patterned concrete block, clerestory windows, carports – these designs showed that Modern could be a successful commodity in the housing market.”² Because of air-conditioning, a standard feature of each tract, “Alexander homes helped to usher in the era of year-round desert living,” says Hess. Although the floor plans were essentially identical, the 1,600 square foot houses were available in a range of rooflines and facades, which gave each neighborhood a varied street appearance. Other desert projects included the residential subdivisions of Vista Las Palmas, Racquet Club Estates, Kings Point at Canyon Country Club, and Sandpiper in Palm Desert. Hess concludes, the Palmer and Krisel tracts “display the hopefulness and easy lifestyle of Modernism in the 1950s as it spread to a general audience.”³ In sum, the Palmer and Krisel designs are architecturally noteworthy for their clean lines, excellent floor plans, indoor/outdoor orientation, and attention to detail.

In Rancho Mirage, for developers Maus and Holstein, Palmer and Krisel used their Twin Palms floor plan, slightly enlarged, and three roof configurations in the construction of sixteen houses on the adjacent cul-de-sacs of Sandsu and Sandsal Circles. According to William Krisel, he and Palmer maintained ownership of the house plans and designs,

¹ Current research indicates that the Tahquitz River Estates tract of developer Paul W. Trousdale in Palm Springs was the first large scale tract housing development in the Coachella Valley. It dates from 1948-1951 with Los Angeles-based Allen G. Siple serving as lead architect.

² Hess, Alan and Danish, Andrew. *Palm Springs Weekend: The Architecture and Design of a Midcentury Oasis*. 2001. Page 69.

³ Hess, page 73.

which is why the Rancho Mirage tract of houses built by Maus and Holstein, including the subject property, are so similar in form to the Alexander tract homes.

The house located at 36-421 Sandsal Circle is the most similar to the subject property in the design of its street-facing façade. It is also one of the best preserved of the 16 original dwellings of which the majority have been substantially altered. Specifically, in the 2004 Historic Resources Survey, only three dwellings appeared eligible for designation as local landmarks: 36-421 Sandsal Circle, 36-421 Sandsu Circle, and 36-468 Sandsu Circle. The current landmark assessment validates the 2004 conclusions. Of the remaining residences in the two cul-de-sacs, the subject property and 36-420 Sandsu Circle retain sufficient integrity to appear eligible for local designation.

Statement of Historical Importance

The period of 1951-1973 has been identified as the Country Club Era of Rancho Mirage's history.⁴ The era was characterized by the appearance of the Thunderbird and Tamarisk Country Clubs in 1950 and 1952, respectively, whereby Rancho Mirage became the leader in the development of the Coachella Valley as the "golf capital of the world." Attracting attention initially because of their well-heeled membership from the corporate and entertainment spheres, Thunderbird and Tamarisk focused the limelight by hosting tournaments such as the Women's Invitational, the Ryder Cup, and the first Bob Hope Classic. High profile visitors, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower, brought additional publicity. Innovations such as the invention of the golf cart at Thunderbird and the popularization of the alpaca golf cardigan by Thunderbird member Perry Como on his national television show added to the luster of the Rancho Mirage clubs.

The construction of the country clubs and their associated residences coincided with another development that had profound implications for the character of the Rancho Mirage built environment: the evolution of a "Desert Modern" style of architecture as detailed above. Several property types are associated with the Country Club Era in Rancho Mirage. Most are single family homes in the Modern and Desert Modern styles, either built in conjunction with the development of the country clubs or on properties purchased elsewhere in the community. Other property types include improvements associated with the country clubs themselves, higher density housing such as apartments, condominiums, or hotels, and a development type peculiar to Rancho Mirage: clusters of single family residences grouped around cooperatively owned landscape and recreational amenities such as swimming pools. One category of property type, improvements associated with celebrities, spans most building types and runs the gamut from the country clubs to the Blue Skies Village mobile home park.

As relates to the growth of single-family residential developments during the Country Club Era, it was the appearance of tract housing exemplified by the Alexander Construction Company's projects in Palm Springs that would have a strong impact on Rancho Mirage. Los Angeles developer Robert Alexander of the Alexander Construction

⁴ Moruzzi, Peter, Leslie Heumann and Teresa Grimes. *Historic Resources Survey, City of Rancho Mirage: Final Report*. Prepared by Leslie Heumann and Associates for the City of Rancho Mirage, February 3, 2003. Page 12.

Company believed that there was an unmet demand for moderately priced second homes in the desert. He was convinced that well-designed Modern tract houses with amenities such as built-in appliances, swimming pools, and landscaping would sell. In fact, the homes he built in Palm Springs' Twin Palms neighborhood sold immediately and were a huge success. Palmer and Krisel went on to plan and design many tract developments built by the Alexander Company in the Coachella Valley, with an output totaling several thousand units.

As noted, a modest tract of two cul-de-sacs designed by William Krisel was constructed on Sandsu and Sandsal Circles in 1958 by developers Maus and Holstein, according to Krisel.⁵ These developers appear to have been influenced by the appearance of the Twin Palms Estates tract that was completed the same year, but on a much smaller scale. Current research revealed little about Maus and Holstein who do not appear to have been major developers in Southern California at that time in comparison with the Alexanders. Within Rancho Mirage, it is not known if Maus and Holstein were responsible for the construction of any other dwellings other than the 16 in their small tract. In addition, other than the Maus and Holstein tract, it does not appear that the firm of Palmer and Krisel was involved in the design of any other residences in the City.

Person(s) of Historical Importance

There are no Rancho Mirage-specific city directories or telephone books that were produced prior to the city's incorporation in 1973. As a result, the Palm Springs city directories and telephone books from the 1950s through the 1970s were consulted because they include other portions of the Coachella Valley such as Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage. Archival editions of these resources are housed at the Palm Springs Public Library's main branch.

The 1958 city directory does not list either Sandsu or Sandsal Circles in its pages. Further, the library has no city directories more recent than 1958. Therefore, it was necessary to consult regular telephone books that do not contain reverse directories. Through the rigorous and time consuming process of reviewing every single page of the 1961 Palm Springs telephone book starting with the letter "A" it was discovered that Norman W. Karr, a general physician, resided at 36-400 Sandsal Circle (which, at that time, was identified as being located in Cathedral City). The 1965 Palm Springs telephone book also listed Dr. Karr at the same address. However, by 1975 the residence was occupied by Mrs. Geraldine Lint who was identified as Secretary of the Shadow Mountain Golf Club. Mrs. Lint appears again at the 36-400 address in 1977. No other information regarding property owners Karr or Lint or their significance was located during the current survey process.

⁵ Interview with William Krisel by Anthony Merchell, September 15, 2002.

CONCLUSION

In summary, based on current research and the above assessment, the property located at 36-400 Sandsal Circle appears to meet several of the City of Rancho Mirage's Landmark Criteria. The property was evaluated according to statutory criteria as follows:

Landmark Criteria 15.27.070(B) The city may find a particular structure or site to be a historical resource upon finding that one or more of the following criteria are met:

15.27.070(B)(1) The subject structure or site is representative of a particular architectural style or reflects special elements of a historical period, type, style or way of life important to the city.

The subject property is an excellent example of the Desert Modern architectural style as applied to a single-family residence in the late 1950s. Typical of the style, the dwelling includes large expanses of glass sheltered by deep overhangs, a broad low-pitched roof, indoor-outdoor flow, clerestories, and an overall orientation towards the rear patio and pool area. Although surfaces and materials are in need of refurbishment, the property exhibits a substantial degree of architectural integrity in its design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association. As the only example of the work of the renowned architectural firm of Palmer and Krisel in Rancho Mirage, the dwelling is highly representative of the Desert Modern way of life that came to characterize the City. Therefore, the subject property appears to satisfy this criterion.

15.27.070(B)(2) The subject structure or site is associated with a business or use which was once common but is now rare or non-existent within the city.

The subject property does not meet this criterion.

15.27.070(B)(3) The subject structure or site is representative of the evolution or development or associated with the cultural, religious, educational, political, social or economic growth of the city, county, state or nation.

The house is representative of the development of Rancho Mirage in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a viable community of second homes for middle to upper-income buyers. The grouping of 16 Maus and Holstein tract houses on Sandsu and Sandsal Circles is an excellent example of that trend, and this property is one of the few houses in the tract that has retained its original appearance if not its original condition. Therefore, the subject property meets this criterion.

15.27.070(B)(4) The subject structure or site represents the work of a master builder, engineer, designer, artist or architect whose individual genius influenced an era.

The subject 36-400 Sandsal Circle property appears to meet this criterion as an exceptional example of the design work of master architect William Krisel. Krisel's inspired approach to the design of residential tracts in the Coachella Valley influenced an entire era of Desert Modern living.

15.27.070(B)(5) The subject structure or site signifies an historical event or is associated with persons or events that have made a meaningful contribution to the city, state or nation.

Due to the dearth of available information on the original owner and subsequent occupants of the subject property it cannot be concluded that the residence is associated with notable personages. Therefore, the subject property does not appear eligible for local landmark designation under this criterion.

15.27.070(B)(6) The subject structure or site has a high potential for yielding information or archaeological interest.

The subject property does not meet this criterion.

15.27.070(B)(7) The subject structure or site embodies elements of outstanding or innovative attention to architectural, or engineering design, detail, craftsmanship or use of materials.

Although the subject property is a fine example of Desert Modern architecture, in terms of innovative design, detail, craftsmanship or use of materials it does not appear to rise to the level of significance necessary to meet this criterion.

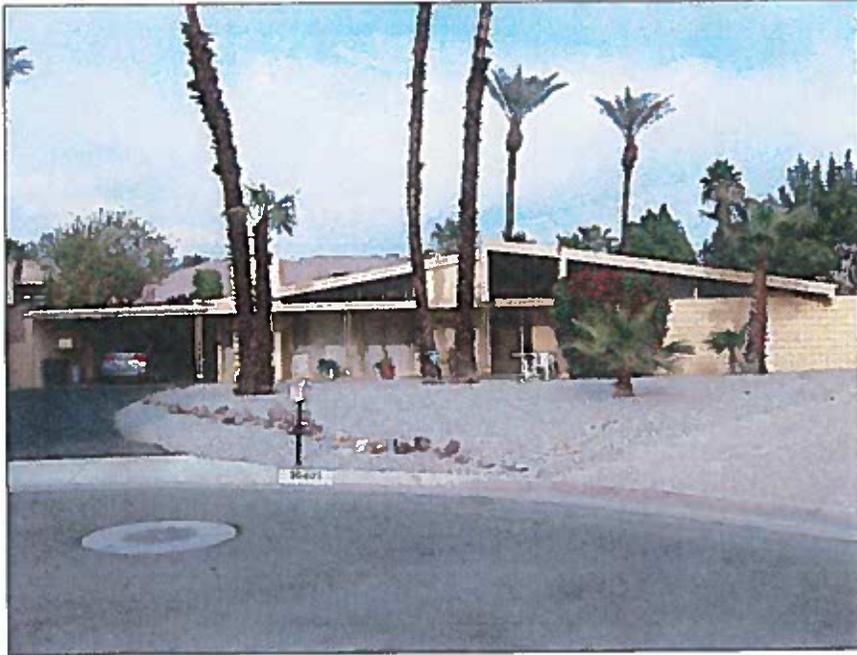
15.27.070(B)(8) The subject site contains an unusual natural feature.

The subject property does not meet this criterion.

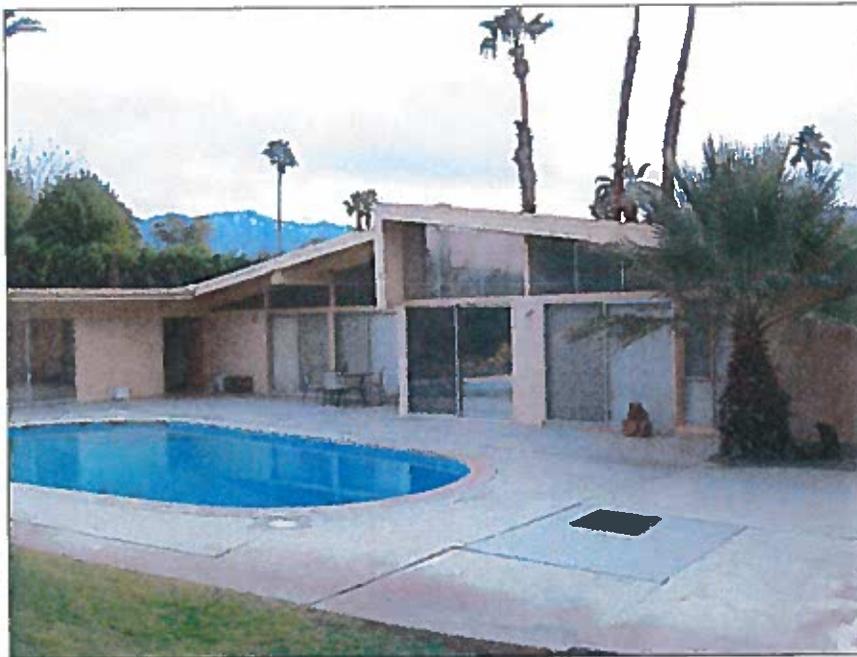
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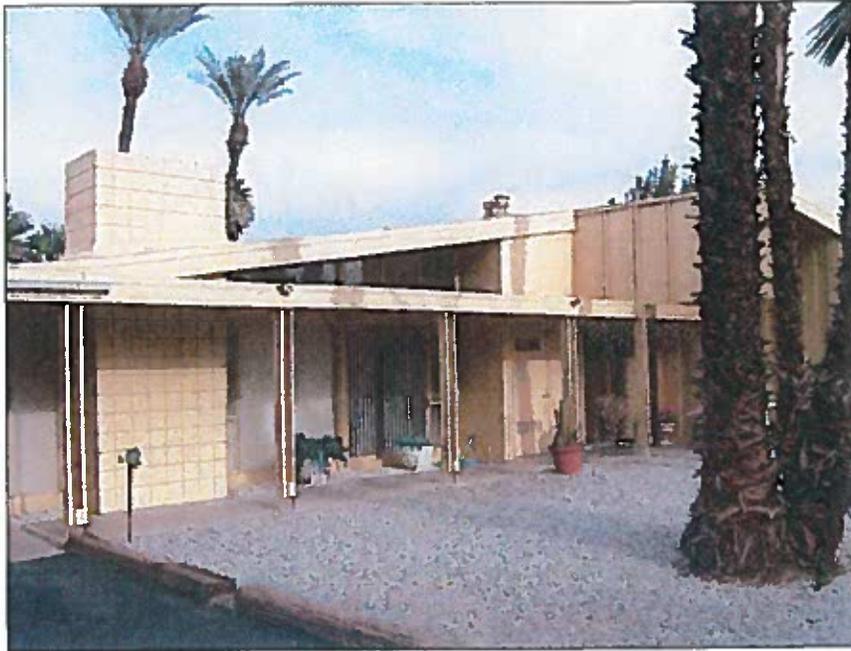
PHOTOGRAPHS



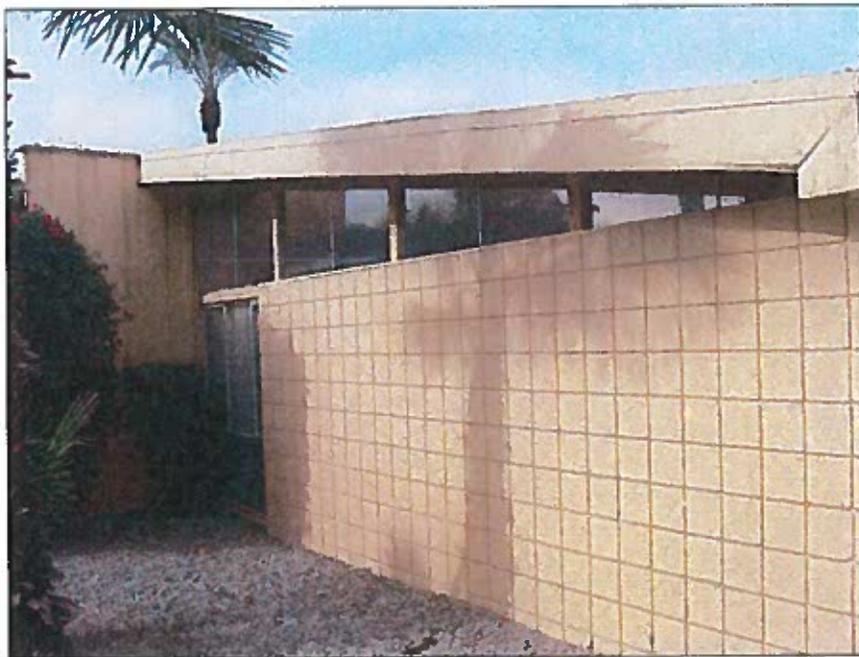
Primary (south) elevation, looking north.



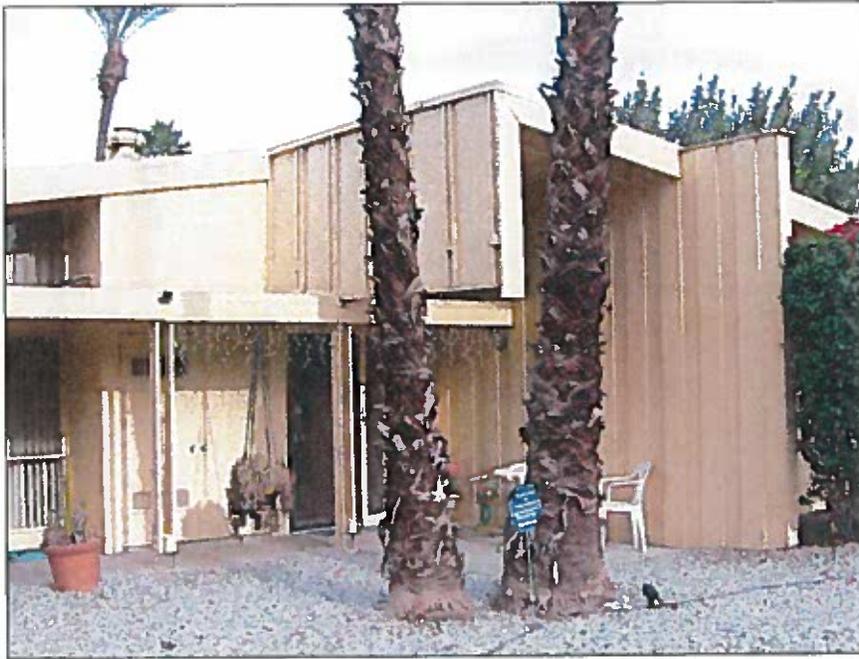
Rear (north) elevation, looking southwest.



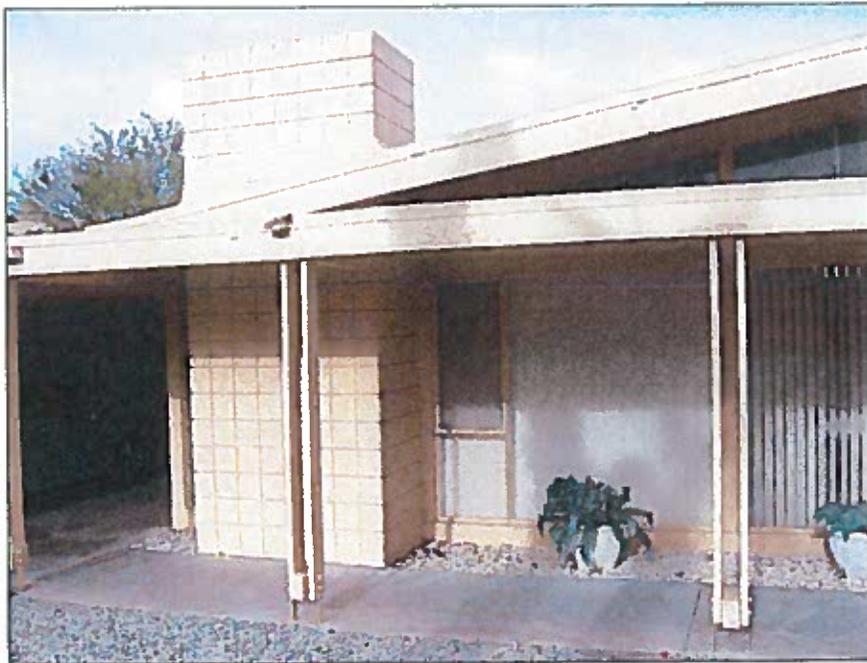
Primary (south) elevation looking northeast.



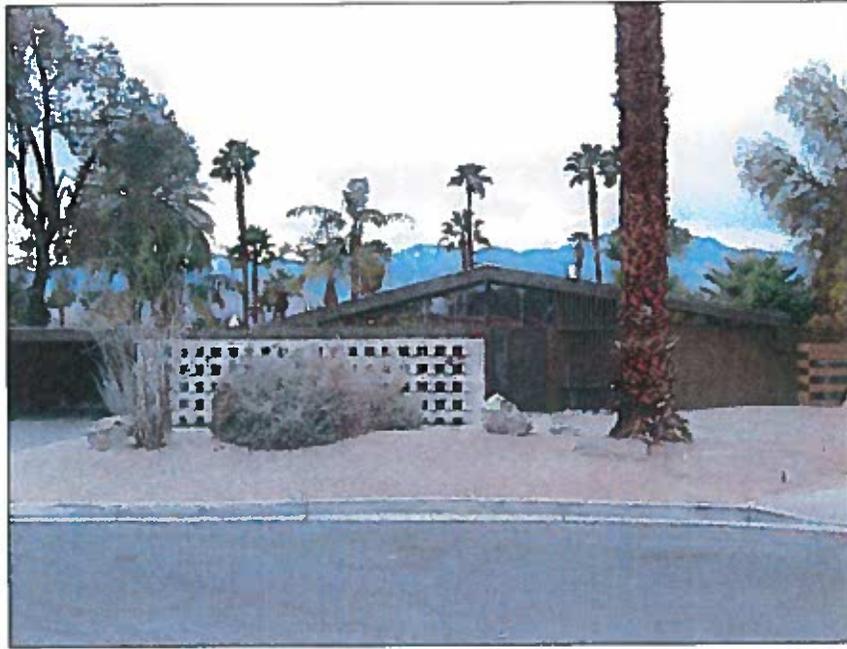
South elevation, square concrete block and clerestory detail.



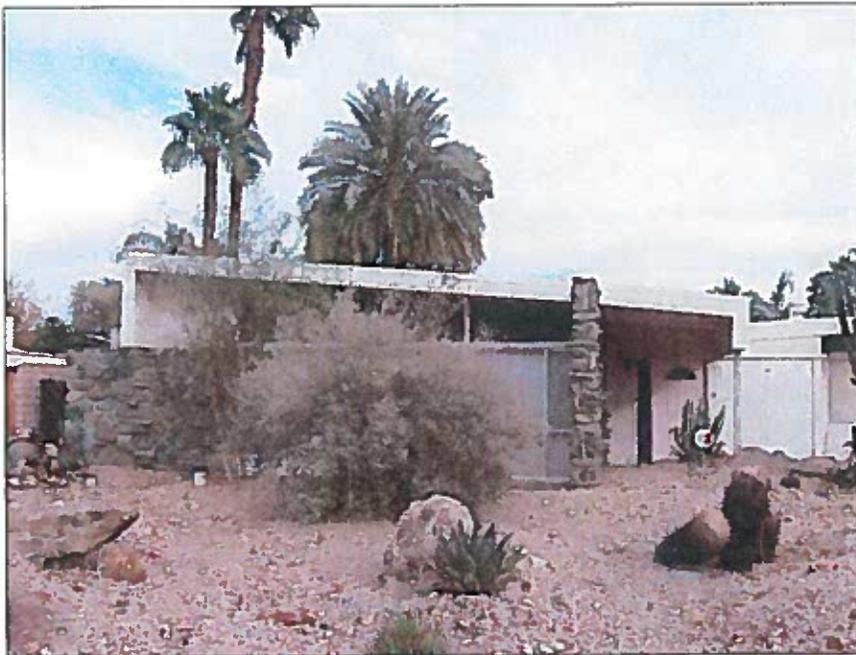
Primary (south) elevation, folded sun shade "flap" detail.



Primary (south) elevation, square concrete block chimney, covered entrance walkway, front windows.



36-421 Sandsal Circle.



36-468 Sandsu Circle.



36-421 Sandsu Circle.



36-420 Sandsu Circle.