

# atomic ranch

MIDCENTURY MARVELS



SUMMER 2007



- mc preservation
- family rancho
- rock solid texas
- streng story

\$5.95 \$7.95 can  
On sale until August 31, 2007





The dining room has several Saarinen pieces, including the low coffee table bought at Retro inferno in Kansas City and two orange cushion-topped stools. McGuire just discovered that his dinette set is an early Burke model by attending the 2007 Palm Springs Modernism Show. The chrome wall sculpture by Greg Clark is vintage, while the sputnik chandelier is new and the reproduction bullet planters are from Hip Haven. The original kitchen was part of the prefabricated core of the house. McGuire has accessorized with new items—a Nelson clock, retro-style bar stools and Fiesta ware—and a vintage rotary-dial phone.

Although the Palm Springs steel houses appear to be custom-designed, all seven share an identical floor plan. Wexler added variation by means of three different rooflines (flat, zigzag or “folded plate,” and inverted U-shape), variations in the carport configuration and the orientation of each house on the lot. Additionally, the flexible design of interior non-load-bearing walls permitted the option of a third bedroom and for other rooms to be adjustable in size.

The houses were designed to be mass-produced for middle-class affordability. Promotional materials at the time cited that the steel homes could be assembled in three days. They were advertised to be impervious to heat, warping, rotting, swelling, termites, earthquake and combustion. They were also designed to be virtually carefree: one advertisement claimed that the only required maintenance tool was a garden hose.

“At the time we designed them, they were second homes not intended to be lived in at 110, 120 degrees,” Wexler says. “The Palm Springs area has since become a year-round community and if we were to do them now, we’d design them for more energy efficiency. There was very little air conditioning at all then and the fact that we had air conditioning in the homes was a plus.”

The first three of the seven steel houses, including this one, broke ground in late 1961 and opened to the public in March 1962. The homes ranged in price from \$13,000 to \$17,000, comparable to the conventional wood-frame houses that Alexander was building in the adjacent Racquet Club Estates. However, the planned tract of 38 houses was never completed. Shortly after the first three were built, another company bought CalCor and raised the price of the steel components. This decreased the profit margin for the Alexanders, who, after completing four more houses, cancelled the project.

Over the years, subsequent owners altered the steel houses with inappropriate additions and modifications, rendering some of them unrecognizable. One doubled in size, receiving layers of concrete block and wood siding to turn it into an adobe style. In the late 1990s, the homes were rediscovered by new owners who, recognizing their architectural and historical significance, began restoring the original modernist appearance by







The kitchen is virtually original, with recently refurbished cabinetry and new flooring. The window wall to the backyard was pushed out several feet by POs; luckily they were sensitive to the Strengs' stylistic details.