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MODERN MUSE

The owner of this mid-century house in Palm Springs enlisted the help of the original architect to restore its 1950s feel

Words KRISTINA RADERSCHAD Photography CHRISTIAN SCHAULIN

Exterior With its single-storey layout and sloping 'butterfly' roof, this home was at the forefront of California's Modernist design movement □



California's Palm Springs is a Mecca for mid-century-modern architecture. Iconic houses by Richard Neutra, John Lautner and Albert Frey cut sharp, angular silhouettes against endless blue skies, evoking an era when Monroe and Sinatra sipped Martinis by the pool.

This design gem – owned by Chris Menrad, who lives here with his Boston terrier Clem – is a striking 1950s example of a Krisel house. Born in 1924, architect William Krisel has completed more homes in Palm Springs than any of his contemporaries, and has designed some 30,000 residences throughout the United States. His 'House of Tomorrow' (1960), a recently restored experiment in modern living, is one of his most celebrated creations, famed as the honeymoon hideaway of Elvis and Priscilla Presley.

Chris bought his Krisel house at the turn of the millennium as a weekend escape from LA. He loved it so much that by 2011, he had moved in permanently and started renovating. As president of the Palm Springs Modern Committee – a group of like-minded Modernist home enthusiasts and owners set on preserving the area's iconic architecture – he took a sensitive approach and enlisted Krisel himself, then in his eighties, to oversee the project.

The house is located in Twin Palms: it was the first Modernist development in the area, which sports rows of identical dwellings. Krisel and the architect Dan Palmer designed the buildings in the late 1950s in collaboration with the Alexander Construction Company: together, they are credited with transforming the desert landscape and bringing Modernism to the masses. Chris's home has many features in common with its neighbours, including a 12 x 12m floor plan, open interiors, floor-to-ceiling glass and landscaped gardens. What sets it apart from the houses that surround it is a 'butterfly' roof, which has two slanting halves that meet in the middle.

Inside, the original colour palette of white, green and weathered brown has been retained, adding to an overall air of authenticity. Chris also chose to preserve the basic layout of main bedroom, two guest rooms and two bathrooms, but opened up the kitchen to the combined living and dining area. He has used large-scale design classics to demarcate key areas within the free-flowing space: Eero Saarinen's 'Tulip' table and chairs for Knoll (available from Aram Store; aram.co.uk) form a convivial eating zone, while a 1950s Dunbar sofa updated in □



Living space Bold, colourful art and photography lift the simple scheme. A print by Gerhard Richter hangs over the fireplace; the piece above the TV is by Christoph Morlinghaus and depicts New York's TWA airport terminal, designed by Eero Saarinen in the 1950s. Kitchen/dining area Birch plywood units are split into two zones: one for cooking, the other for preparation. The white 'Tulip' table and chairs are by Eero Saarinen for Knoll (try Aram Store) Stockist details on p185



THE 1950s HOUSES IN PALM SPRINGS BROUGHT MODERNISM TO THE MASSES

charcoal fabric by Maharam (maharam.com) and an 'Egg' armchair by Arne Jacobson for Fritz Hansen (available from The Conran Shop; conranshop.co.uk) set the scene for relaxation. In the main bedroom, a George Nelson 'Thin' bed and 'Pipistrello' lights by Gae Aulenti for Martinelli Luce (try Atomic Interiors; atomicinteriors.co.uk) create a relaxed, retro vibe.

Outdoors, Krisel has updated his original blueprint by reworking the front yard, which now features lily pad-like segments of lawn juxtaposed with crushed marble and green-grey gravel – a design that was inspired by the work of Brazilian landscape artist Roberto Burle Marx. 'I think the architect should be in charge of everything. I have never made a distinction between landscaping and architecture,' says Krisel. 'To me, the inside and outside of a building are not separate; a pane of glass is not a wall, but a visual continuation from indoors to out.'

Chris's collection of classic American cars keeps the Hollywood dream alive. He owns a 1963 silver Buick Riviera and a 1967 green Cadillac Eldorado, while his Mercury Montclair dates from 1958 – the same vintage as this inspiring house. psmodcom.org



Main bedroom Pops of red bring the original muted colour palette to life, while simple furnishings create a streamlined feel. Art by Manfred Müller (try Rose Gallery) hangs above a vintage bed by George Nelson. Try Atomic Interiors for a 'Pipistrello' light by Gae Aulenti for Martinelli Luce. Exterior Chris's collection of vintage American cars is in keeping with his 1950s home. The landscaping of the garden was inspired by the work of Brazilian artist Roberto Burle Marx. Stockist details on p185 