

The ABCs of Midcentury Modern Architecture in Palm Springs

A primer on the postwar design movement that came to define the architectural landscape of Palm Springs.

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The sweeping roof of the Palm Springs Visitor Information Center, designed by Albert Frey, is known as a hyperbolic paraboloid.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDRIK BRODÉN

You have finally acquired the midcentury modern home of your dreams. Now, visiting friends and family want to know all about it — from its distinctive butterfly roof to the renown of its architect (likely William Krisel) and its mysterious lack of a basement.

Although you don't profess to be an architecture aficionado, you do regard yourself as a savvy consumer and well-informed citizen of our architectural mecca. A more-than-minimal grasp of midcentury modern architecture is increasingly essential here: [Modernism Week](#) unfolds over a fortnight in February, preceded by a tantalizing week of programming in the fall, and the Palm Springs Art Museum's Architecture and Design Center offers year-round programming.

The lexicon that follows is designed to assure you a passing grade in any Midcentury Mod Arch 101 course and to empower you to answer guests' questions, whether about who's who among midcentury modern architects, the movement's forebears, or the pros and cons of slab construction.

Brise soleil, French for "sun blocker," is an exterior feature designed to reduce heat gain inside a building. It is realized by employing movable louvers of wood or metal positioned to obstruct the midday sun (see the E. Stuart Williams–designed Architecture and Design Center) or by fixed deflectors of pierced concrete block such as those that form the façade of Parker Palm Springs.