

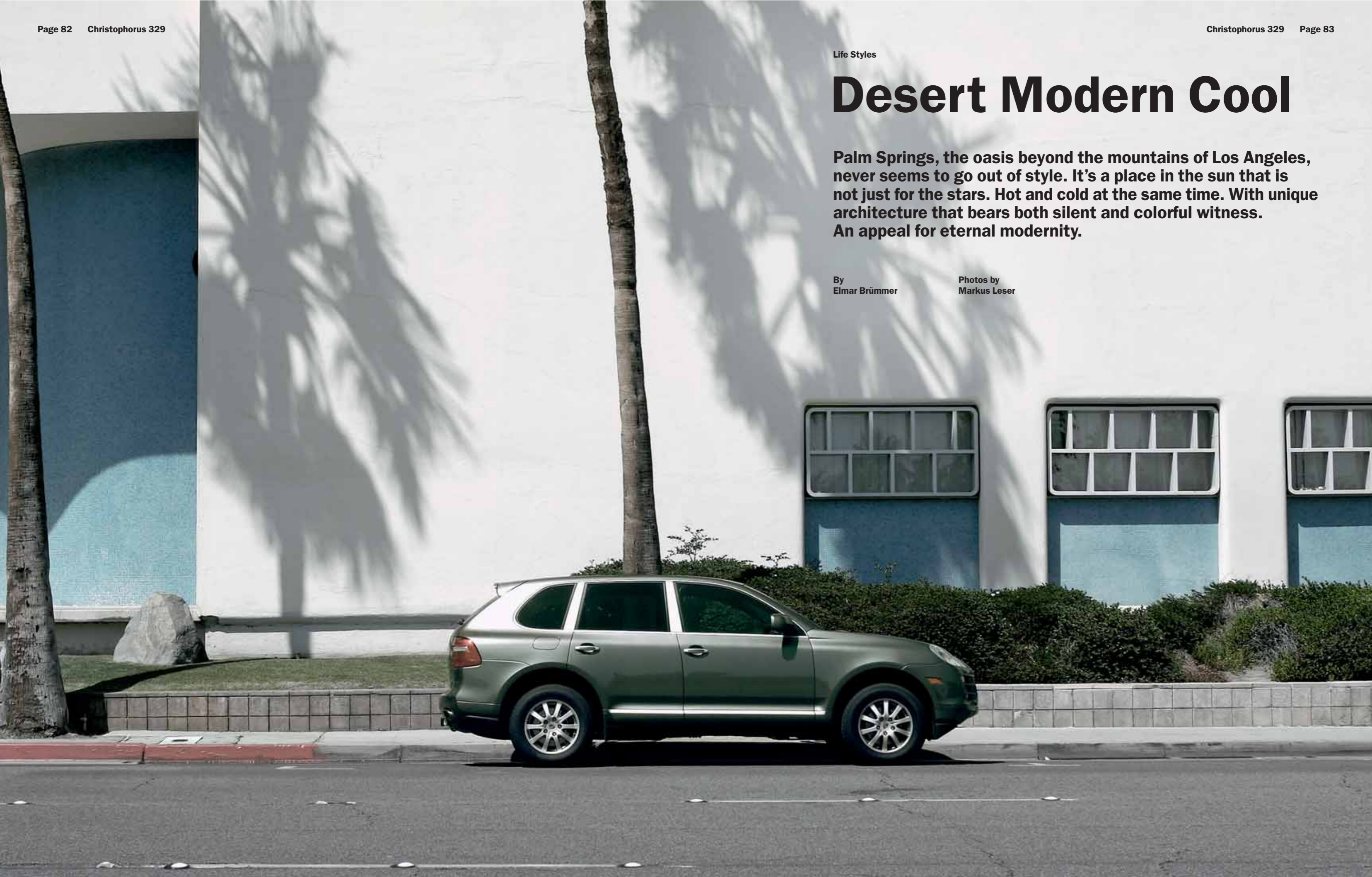
Life Styles

Desert Modern Cool

Palm Springs, the oasis beyond the mountains of Los Angeles, never seems to go out of style. It's a place in the sun that is not just for the stars. Hot and cold at the same time. With unique architecture that bears both silent and colorful witness. An appeal for eternal modernity.

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Letting the sun shine right at the start is considered a poor way to start off a story. Pure kitsch. But right on the money. Palm Springs is kitschy, and kitsch is hip. So we have to take it the way it is. And not for the last time, either.

If you want to know what Hollywood was like in the old days, you need only drive out of the city toward the hinterlands. Just follow the call of the desert until the mountain landscape smooths out into the Coachella Valley and the sole shadows are cast by armies of enormous windmills. Bathed in sunlight 354 days of the year, this is a sight to behold. And there, where the streets are named after Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, and Bob Hope, lies the beginning and end of our architectural sight-seeing trip in the Cayenne.

Palm Springs is and has always been both hot and cool at the same time. Elvis and Priscilla spent their honeymoon here. Greta Garbo and Lauren Bacall took beauty naps and hosted cocktail parties. And even Albert Einstein found peace here. The history of this desert resort reads like a never-ending exercise in name dropping. The late Sonny Bono was the mayor for a while, and his widow Mary still keeps an office on Palm Canyon Drive as the

Building blocks:
Initially cool and distant, the desert architecture quickly becomes warm and inviting



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district's congresswoman. If Errol Flynn suddenly rode around the corner, no one would bat an eye. Some of the cars and drivers parading along the main drag of El Paseo in nearby Palm Desert look like they stepped straight out of his era.

Here is where Liz Taylor bought her fur coats (temperatures drop at night). And it is where Richard Nixon spent his vacations (far from Washington and the scandals). Palm Springs has always been conservative, yet tolerant at the same time. If those days saw

Doris Day, Charlie Chaplin, and Katharine Hepburn, these days might feature Kevin Costner and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Hollywood on vacation. In a theater on the main boulevard, the Palm Springs Follies still evoke the wide world beyond in their repertoire. Fortunately, the sense of extravagance back then was more than ample, for it left a good-sized party culture in its wake. And Palm Springs continues to build on that legacy. The 1930s, the 1950s, and now the new millennium. The desert is always in season. Palm Springs remains friendly and inviting, as if everything menacing were left behind in L.A. Wealth and retirement reign here, and are usually directly related to each other. And so this oasis of the art of living continues to flourish.

The sidewalk, of course, features its very own Walk of Stars. Yet, though they may seem like a backdrop, the buildings are the real source of life. Up on the nearby slopes, steel beams and generous glass facades reflect the sun's rays. Meanwhile, down in the valley, the architecture proves that even bulky cement blocks can appear playful if they're combined and painted with aplomb. Concrete geometry is quite capable of evoking feelings. Even the supermarket Ralph's owes its chic appearance to a clever ensemble of individual parts. It forms a stylish exit at the far side of the ▶



Frey Spirit Desert Modern Style

Architecture has always meant aura as well. Albert Frey, a native of Switzerland and student of Le Corbusier, played a prominent role in conjuring the aura of Palm Springs. The lines and strict ornamentation of his designs influenced the town and a style known as Desert Modern. Frey and his contemporaries Richard Neutra and William F. Cody were far ahead of their time. For its architectural heritage, Palm Springs was named one of the West's "Dozen Distinctive Destinations" for 2006 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

www.psmodcom.org; www.pspf.net

oasis and a counterpart to the spectacular diagonal lines of the famous gas station—unfortunately no longer in operation—at the entrance.

A typical feature of Palm Springs is its rediscovery of modernism. The jet set may come and go, but time stands still here. This may have something to do with a conjunction of opposites. The salt of the desert forms a strong contrast to the green of the golf courses. The ponderous bank and the colonies of fragile-looking motels may circle the soul of this place, but never capture it. A certain flighty character may well be to the liking of its inhabitants.

The white and pastel hues of the flat-roofed buildings stand in contrast to the azure blue of the kidney-shaped pools that could have been painted by David Hockney. Does reality inspire illusion, or is it the other way around? A magical place. Fashion photographers have discovered it, and Madonna bathes in the hot mountain springs. There's ample room for games of hide-and-seek as well as costume parties, and a glittering social life lends the dusty ambience a new sheen of chic. Palm Springs just keeps coming into fashion, while putting itself on stage every once in a while as well. This place simply refuses to age. Past its prime and faded, perhaps, but by no means bowed out. One only need scratch at the make-up a bit. ◀

**Geometry with unique chic:
Alternating between the ages**

