

Architectural Exhibition Features Work of Donald Wexler at Palm Springs Art Museum

Exhibition includes a full-scale sectional steel house model in the museum and runs Jan. 29 – May 29, 2011



December 1, 2010 (Palm Springs, CA) -- The Palm Springs Art Museum will feature the exhibition *Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler*, highlighting the many significant works this renown mid-century architect designed in his career. The exhibition runs from Jan. 29 – May 29, 2011 and features a full-scale sectional steel model built inside the museum, illustrating the prefabrication system that Wexler used in the design of his famed “steel houses.” A catalogue, available for purchase at the Museum Store.

details Wexler’s rich history and includes essays by co-curators, Lauren Weiss Bricker, Ph.D., professor of architecture, Cal Poly, Pomona, and Sidney Williams, curator of architecture and design, Palm Springs Art Museum.

Image: Donald A. Wexler, AIA, *Palm Springs International Airport*, 1965, Palm Springs, CA, photograph © Glen Wexler, 1978

About the exhibition



Donald Wexler practiced architecture during what he calls the “golden age” of California architecture from the immediate postwar years through the 1970s. This was a time when architects enjoyed considerable freedom to employ new materials and technologies in their search for functionally beautiful architecture. The extremes of the desert climate forced Wexler to develop a sustainable architecture, which was not only successful functionally, but achieved a timeless aesthetic appeal. During a career that spanned almost six decades, he designed

numerous houses, condominium complexes, as well as banks, office parks and schools. A large map in the exhibition identifies the number and range of his projects throughout the Coachella Valley, showcasing more than 90 Wexler-designed structures, including the Palm Springs International Airport, the residence of actress Dinah Shore, the Bank of America building and the Spa Bath House (now the Spa Hotel).

Image credit: Wexler and Harrison, *Steel House*, 1962, photograph © Juergen Nogai 2010

The primary objects in the exhibition are drawn from the Donald Wexler Collection, housed in the ENV Archives-Special Collections, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and include original presentation drawings, working drawings, photographs and models. These are augmented by a number of professional photographs and new models fabricated by Cal Poly students, including the full-scale sectional steel model and a video that will provide visitors the experience of viewing a Wexler-designed home.

About Donald Wexler

When the City of Palm Springs was incorporated in 1938, the same year the museum was founded, the community at the base of Mount San Jacinto was essentially a village. By the time Don Wexler moved to Palm Springs in 1952 to practice architecture, the population had expanded to over 10,000 residents. He understood the possibilities for a young architect in a growing community. Along with the other modern architects William Cody, Albert Frey, John Porter Clark, E. Stewart Williams and Rick Harrison, his partner in architecture practice for nine years, Wexler said, "There was a collective sense of we could do anything— we could accomplish anything— we could experiment."

The steel houses for which Wexler has been so widely recognized are examples of that forward thinking. Using a systems approach to steel fabrication and construction combined with a refined sense of design, these 1,400 square-foot houses are emblematic of Wexler's career where he continually sought both functional and beautiful design solutions. His many projects included schools, residences, civic buildings, office complexes, and the Palm Springs International Airport. Wexler's decision to limit his work to the desert community and to keep his practice small resulted in an astounding body of work that has enhanced our built environment immeasurably.

This exhibition includes many drawings from the Donald Wexler Archive housed at Cal Poly Pomona and ten models created by Dr. Lauren Bricker's architecture students. The collaboration of the museum and the university is an enriching experience for both institutions and makes possible this celebration of Don Wexler's almost sixty years of practice. The models depict Desert Springs Middle School, Raymond Cree Middle School, Sunny Sands Elementary, Desert Water Agency, Pro Park, Palm Springs Pavilion, Palm Springs International Airport, Dinah Shore house, Bank of America and the Spa Bath House.

In conjunction with the exhibition Don Wexler has generously gifted several drawings to the museum's architecture and design collection of the Wexler Family House. He wanted the museum's archive to hold the drawings of his house that he designed in 1955. The house expanded as his family grew and because of the flexible design, the 1965 three-bedroom addition is seamless.

A current Wexler project is currently under way in the Hamptons area of New York. Developed by Marnie McBryde, the project is called Hamptons Modern and is the first time classic California architecture has been brought to the Hamptons, updated to reflect today's need for more open living spaces (see rendering below). This new project features relaxed, yet sophisticated residences and is completed in summer 2011 on a 1-acre East Hampton site overlooking a pastoral 10-acre reserve. The 3,600



square foot, 4 bedroom, 4 ½ bath homes are designed for easy indoor/outdoor living and entertaining -- a combination which McBryde's research shows is in great demand across a wide demographic, including young professionals, empty nesters, and anybody looking for an easy way to downsize from a larger home. McBryde plans up to 50 houses priced at \$3-4 million each, at individual locations throughout the Hamptons. The first

house will be a deft adaption of the Palm Springs home that Wexler designed for Dinah Shore.

In conjunction with the exhibition the museum's Architecture and design Council will offer a symposium and tour that will examine Wexler's legacy of outstanding functional and environmentally-sensitive design. Entitled *Donald Wexler and His Legacy*, the event will be held on Saturday, February 26, 2011 from 9 a.m.-6 p.m. To attend, call the museum's Box Office at 760.325.4490. Thomas S. Hines, author and historian, will give the keynote address; David Nye, professor and chair of American Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, will present a lecture on architectural innovation; and a panel moderated by Sidney Williams, with contemporary architects Linda Taalman, Barton Myers and Lance O'Donnell will discuss Wexler's influence on their current practice. An afternoon motor coach tour will visit Wexler and other architects' houses, concluding with a cocktail reception. Prices for the event are: \$50 for the symposium and lunch and \$225 for the symposium, lunch, tour and cocktail reception.

Organized by the Palm Springs Art Museum and California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, this exhibition is funded in part by the museum's Architecture & Design Council, CALCRAFT Construction, Mitre & Bevel, Escalante Architects, Helene Galen, Daniel Patrick Giles, Hamptons Modern, Thomas Jakway and Stephen Tripp, Harold Matzner, Brian McGuire, Ph.D., the City of Palm Springs, Modernism Week, Weldon Color Lab, American Institute of Architects/California Desert Chapter, and Friends of Donald Wexler.

Located downtown in an architecturally-significant building, the Palm Springs Art Museum features compelling exhibitions and a robust permanent collection of modern, contemporary, Native American, Western and Mesoamerican and glass art in 28 spacious galleries and in its two outdoor sculpture gardens. The museum offers educational lectures, films and an assortment of programs and art workshops for all ages. The museum's Annenberg Theater features outstanding musical performances. The museum is open six days a week; Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Thursday from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. with free admission from 4 – 8 p.m. sponsored by the City of Palm Springs. Admission is free to members; youths 12 and under and active-duty military and their families. Regular admission is \$12.50 for adults; \$10.50 for seniors 62 and over; and \$5 for adult students. For more information, call 760.322.4800 or visit www.psmuseum.org.

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