

## Not A-Frey-ed of the Past

*Albert Frey house renovation project a learning experience for Palm Springs homeowner*

By Judith Salkin



*Ryan Tharp moved to Palm Springs in February and began renovating this 1946 Albert Frey house.*

As a student attending the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning, Ryan Tharp felt a connection to the work of midcentury modern greats, especially those who worked in Palm Springs.

After years of working in large cities such as New York, Amsterdam, San Francisco and San Diego, Tharp made the pilgrimage to midcentury mecca himself.

"I've never been happier," he said. "I can walk through my neighborhood and see the work of these men I've admired for years and it is very inspiring."

After nine years in San Diego, he moved himself and his design company, Tharp Studios, to Palm Springs in February, "just in time for Modernism Week." He began restoring a 1946 Albert Frey house.

"I've been coming out for Modernism Week since it started," Tharp, 40, said. "Moving here seemed natural because this is where the architects that I admire like Albert Frey, Donald Wexler and William Krisel lived and worked."

The 1,800-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath house is a long-term project for Tharp, who consulted with homeowner Tom Tappan of Chicago on his purchase.

"Tom wanted to buy a place as an eventual retirement house, but that he could use as a vacation rental in the meantime," Tharp said. "Tom is a 'Star Trek' kind of guy; he understands technology. When we started, he didn't really know anything about midcentury modern. "It's been a process helping him understand midcentury modern. But now he gets it."

The Frey-designed house in the Movie Colony East neighborhood was a diamond in the rough. At some time, a previous owner had added Spanish revival elements to the property, including an arch over the front gate. A subsequent owner who was a landscape designer stripped away the faux Spanish elements, and returned the small entry garden and a larger garden in the back of the house to vitality with drought-resistant desert plants.

The house, built in 1946 and originally 1,112 square feet, was enlarged to its current floor plan by Frey sometime in the mid-1960s. The L-shaped addition doubled the size of the living and dining areas.

Frey added contrast and texture by creating the addition out of brick, along with walls of sliding glass doors and clerestory windows that flood the large open space with light and views of the pool, lush backyard landscaping and the San Jacinto Mountains.

Tharp created defined areas with carpet tiles made from recycled products by Interface Carpets. For traffic flow and room aesthetics, he created a lounge/library area near the front door. The north wall of the space is dominated by a built-in bookcase designed by Frey. The lounge draws guests in and acts as a transition between the public areas and bedrooms. The dining area is warmed by a bright orange freestanding fireplace and a teak table that can easily seat eight. The dining area is doubled with a matching area on the covered patio beyond the sliding doors. The living area was moved to the back of the large room to take advantage of the mountain views.

One of the principles of Tharp's designs is to source local shops and artists. Sleek Danish Modern pieces include teak credenzas and cabinets, and couches and club chairs, all from JP Denmark in Cathedral City, which fits in with his green philosophy. "It's all vintage and recycled," he said. New Knoll Studio pieces from Eero Saarinen, resurrected from his original mid-century designs, are mixed in with the vintage furniture.

There's plenty of color, with shades of blue, green and orange for the upholstery and brighter colors in the throw pillows and outdoor pieces. "I wanted to create an environment that was bright, colorful and futuristic getaway so Tom and his vacation renters could feel they were in a place that was very uplifting."

The period art is by Googie master and Palm Springs artist, Nat Reed.

"We're far from finished," Tharp noted. "Next is replacing the air conditioning system and then the bathrooms and kitchen. We're also discussing the idea of adding a casita."

Tharp concludes, "My goal was to restore the entire house in a manner that pays respect to Albert Frey's original design. I think we're well on our way to accomplishing this."