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Thrill Seeker
The San Jacinto Mountains loom large above James Harlan and Tom Early's 1968 Porsche 912 in Bahama Yellow. See *Resources*.

MOD, MOD, WORLD

An architect and an art director find the house of their dreams in sunny Palm Springs

BY **MICHAEL LASSELL**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JOHN ELLIS**



One Sunday afternoon, James Harlan and Tom Early were walking their dog

in the Historic Tennis Club neighborhood near their condo just off the main drag of Palm Springs. They weren't looking for a house, but a house, apparently, was looking for them. "We both loved it on sight," says Harlan, a native Chicagoan who moved to California to study architecture at USC. "They had just reduced the price, so we called a friend who was a real estate agent, and by Tuesday we were in escrow."

A small modernist gem by the little-known Long Beach-based architect Dean Davidson, the 1,600-square-foot three-bedroom home was built in 1965 and includes a front yard with a triangular pool that faces the San Jacinto Mountains. Looking somewhat like an updated

ranchero, it couldn't be simpler or more straightforward. "The house doesn't even have a front door," says Harlan, who once worked for the famed architect Frank Israel. "It's just a glass slider."

In fact, the house barely has walls, although it does have a deep front porch that runs the length of it, another feature that attracted the shade-loving Harlan, and floors made of pebbled concrete slabs separated by a grid of redwood dividers (they had previously been covered by carpet and Mexican pavers). "We got the agent to lift a corner of the carpet when we were looking at the house," Harlan confesses. Another significant plus factor: The pass-through kitchen was original and did not need major work.

Point To Point
An aggregate-concrete walkway stretches over the triangular pool to the house's patio and entry (THIS PAGE); the table and chairs are by Richard Schultz. (OPPOSITE) A vintage Daniel Wenger-designed leather chair and ottoman is situated on the patio outside the living room; the bronze sculptures are from Bon Vivant. See Resources.



Decor plays to the architecture: “The first piece we bought was a vintage Warren Platner rosewood dining table”

Not only is the house one of a kind, but it’s also the only one Davidson ever built in Palm Springs, a fact that was especially alluring to Harlan, a mid-20th-century design devotee who has lectured and published widely about California modernism. Harlan and Early split their time between here and an apartment in Pasadena, which is more convenient to Early’s work as an Emmy-winning art director for *Days of Our Lives* (he painted a lot of the canvases that hang in the house). Harlan, meanwhile, spends most of his time in Palm Springs, unless he’s working on a project in L.A.

“I think it’s ahead of its time,” Harlan says of the house, with its concrete entry path that bridges the pool—highly unusual among the modernist Palm Springs homes built during the 1950s and ’60s. “For me, it has more of an early-’70s vibe to it.” Accordingly, the rooms have been furnished with pieces that “play to the architecture.” The result is more Big Sur self-actualization center than Rat Pack pool

Totally Chill
In the dining area (OPPOSITE), a wood-and-chrome chandelier hangs above a rosewood-topped table and bronze-finish chairs designed by Warren Platner. The living area (ABOVE) includes Togo sofas from Ligne Roset and Nate Berkus for Target ottomans. See Resources.



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Eclectic Set
 In the den (ABOVE), a sofa from Design Within Reach is complemented by a Donghia fabric wall hanging, a canvas by Steve DeGroot, and a carved wooden sculpture from Kenya. In the master bedroom (LEFT AND OPPOSITE), a vintage tufted leather armchair sits in a corner and a 1960s Polish tapestry hangs above the bed, which is dressed in a Missoni Home for Target coverlet. See Resources.





Collective Memory
 Sample tiles hang on the kitchen wall (ABOVE); the faucet is from Arwa. Tom Early's *Ballerina* is installed above the bed in the guest room (LEFT); the mohair-covered chair is from Minotti. In the dining area (OPPOSITE), artwork scored at vintage stores is showcased above a sideboard fashioned from three Ikea kitchen cabinets. See *Resources*.

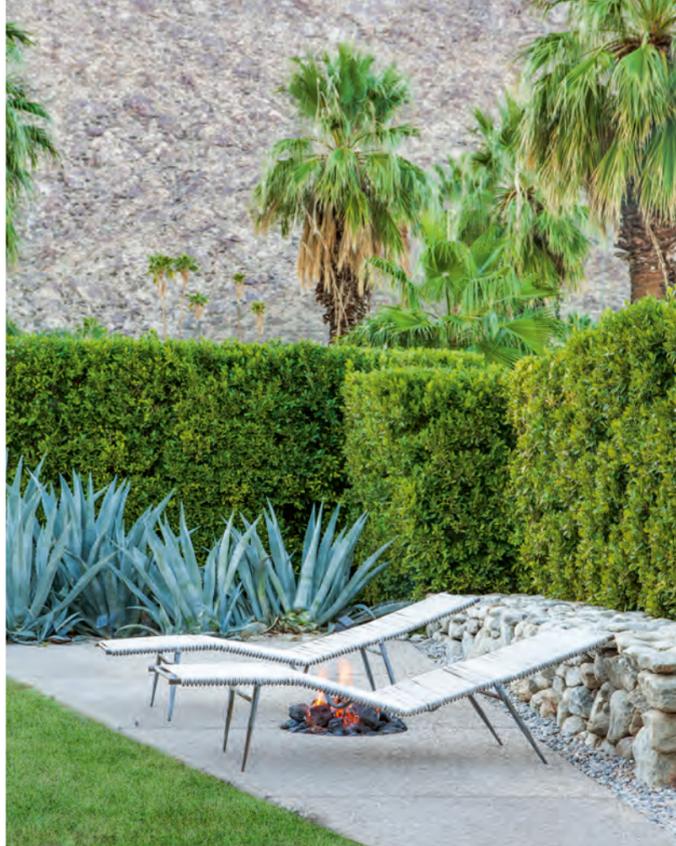


The look is more Big Sur self-actualization center than Rat Pack pool party, but elevated above straight-up bohemianism

party, although there's a rational asymmetry and some elegant decorating choices that elevate it above straight-up bohemianism.

"I think the first piece we bought was the vintage Warren Platner rosewood dining table," says Harlan. Other furnishings that evoke the macramé and earthenware era are Togo sofas, designed by Michel Ducaroy for Ligne Roset in 1973, deeply textured Nate Berkus ottomans for Target, and a wood-and-chrome chandelier. Harlan ingeniously contrived the "sideboard" in the dining area from three Ikea kitchen cabinets designed to go above refrigerators.

Harlan and Early have both studied at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico, where Harlan took a class in glassmaking and began to craft jewelry. A converted mobile home, parked on an adjacent lot, now serves as his studio, surrounded by entirely appropriate dry-stack walls made of stone excavated on-site. He later started making large-format



Take The Plunge
 The pool area in the front yard is punctuated by unobstructed views of the San Jacinto Mountains and Gary Dwyer's *Red Bird* (THIS SPREAD). In addition to its unusual bridge, the pool includes a sunken stair. See *Resources*.

hanging pieces that he calls Rays, which fashion designer Trina Turk fell in love with during a local modernism tour. Now she sells them in her Palm Springs store.

Not only does the deceptively humble house suit its new owners, but so does the neighborhood. "You'd never know it when you're here," says Harlan, "but you're right near downtown, so it's very walkable. And there's nothing that can be built that will ever block our view of the mountains from the front of the house. I have an office around the back, but I live at the table right by the pool." ❁

Looking somewhat like an updated rancharo, the house barely has any walls. In fact, it "doesn't even have a front door. It's just a glass slider"