

BETTER

A CONVERSATION WITH ARCHITECTS
LEO MARMOL AND RON RADZINER

TOGETHER

LEO MARMOL AND RON RADZINER

have spent the past 27 years working in tandem on some of the most innovative and challenging architectural projects in the U.S. and internationally, ranging from modernist ground up design and construction, to prefab structures that change the way people look at modular housing, to restorations of historically significant residential and commercial properties. Their award-winning Los Angeles-based company, Marmol Radziner, is a full service design-build firm, offering architectural design, interior design, landscape design and construction services to ensure a collaborative and seamless process from start to finish.

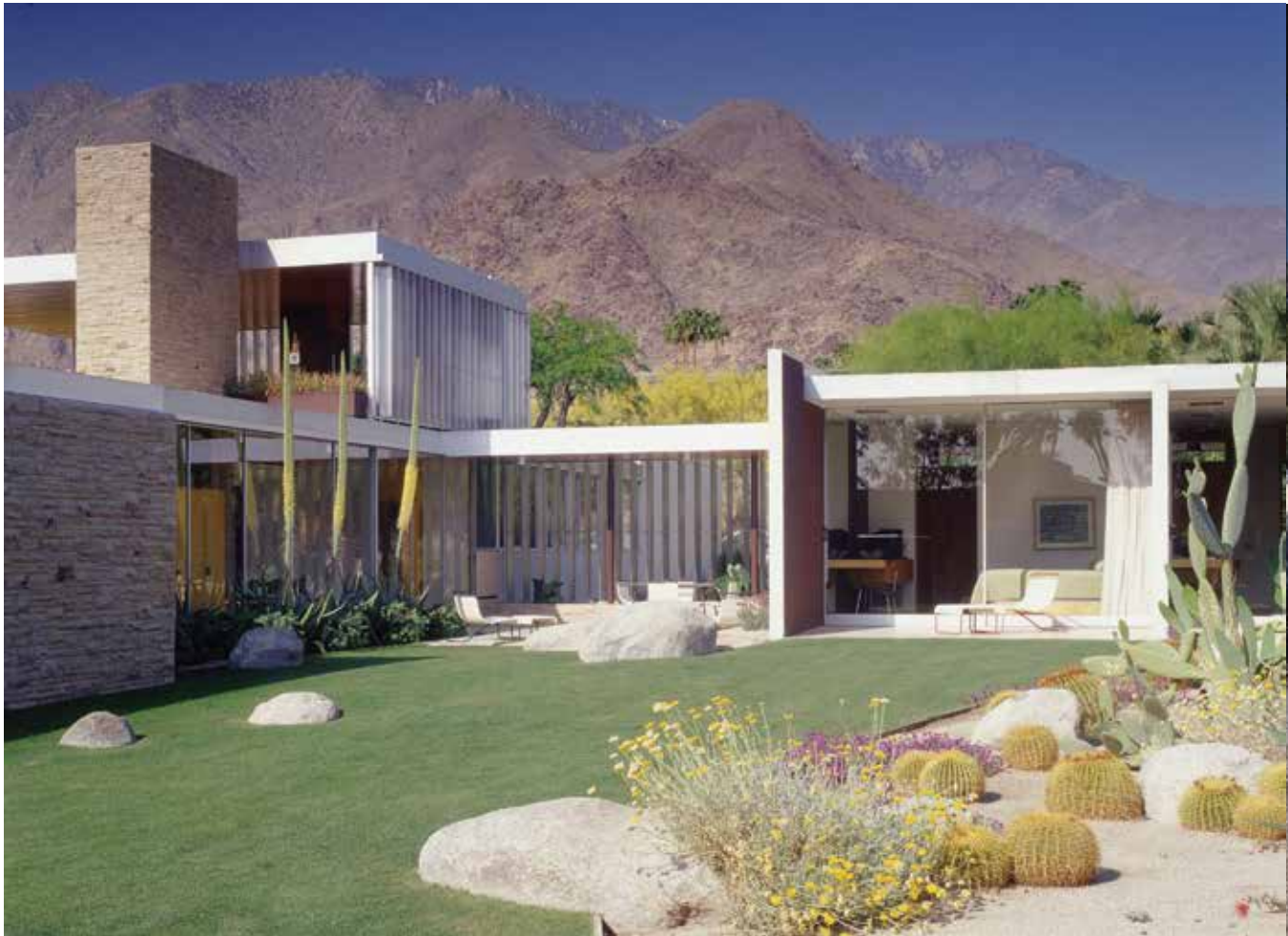
Much of the duo's work has taken place in Palm Springs, including extensive restorations of some of the most important residences in the area like the Richard Neutra-designed Kaufmann House and Albert Frey's Loewy House, both originally built in 1946. Fashion designers Trina Turk and Jonathan Skow brought in Marmol Radziner to complete a restoration of their Palm Springs home, a 1936 Streamline Moderne called the "Ship of the Desert" for its resemblance to a boat perched in the mountainside. Restoration of the 1960 Santa Fe Federal Savings & Loan building and conversion into the Palm Springs Art Museum's new Architecture and Design Center, Edwards Harris Pavilion was completed by Marmol Radziner in 2014, marking their first commercial project in the area. New construction projects include the Desert House prefab in Desert Hot Springs, made up of four house modules and six deck modules, and large residential properties in Rancho Mirage and La Quinta.

Here, the pair reflects on designing together in the desert for more than two decades.



RON RADZINER, FAIA, AND LEO MARMOL, FAIA

PHOTO BY TIM MELIDEO



ABOVE: THE KAUFMANN HOUSE IN PALM SPRINGS, DESIGNED BY RICHARD NEUTRA AND COMPLETED IN 1946; MARMOL RADZINER COMPLETED AN EXTENSIVE RESTORATION OF THE PROPERTY IN 1998, INCLUDING 3,200 SQUARE FEET OF THE EXISTING HOUSE AND LANDSCAPING, AS WELL AS THREE ACRES OF SITE DEVELOPMENT

ACROSS: THE HARRIS POOL HOUSE AT THE KAUFMANN HOUSE – A 1,200-SQUARE-FOOT NEW DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION PROJECT COMPLETED BY MARMOL RADZINER IN 1998

PALM SPRINGS STYLE: How did you begin working together?

RON RADZINER: We met as students at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. We lived together in a co-op in an old hotel, where we played around with the building, tampering with the structure, cutting skylights, stairwells, and doorways. We called it “the Ark.”

LEO MARMOL: After graduation, I continued to work in construction, while Ron went and got a master’s from the University of Colorado. Ultimately, we both worked for other architects but came across little things on the side that we could do together, and in 1989, we formed Marmol Radziner.

RON RADZINER: Leo and I were very compatible, and slowly, over time, things developed, and we eventually had the opportunity to work with great clients.

PSS: What are your respective roles?

LEO: I am the managing principal, so I oversee the architectural project management and all aspects of the firm’s design-build capabilities and oversee the construction process.

RON: And I am the design principal. I lead the design of every project to help establish a unique architectural identity and forge strong connections between interior and exterior spaces.

PSS: What was your first project in Palm Springs?

RON: Our first project in Palm Springs was the restoration of Richard Neutra’s Kaufmann House from 1946. When the client called us in 1992 saying that she had just purchased the house and would like to speak to us about doing the restoration,

PHOTO BY TIM STREET-PORTER



we were excited simply to get to see the house, let alone get to do any work on it.

PSS: How do clients typically find you?

LEO: We have been fortunate to have a client base that largely comes from referrals and press.

PSS: Do you have a favorite past project in the desert?

LEO: Our prefab prototype, Desert House. As a prototype, the house was an invaluable step toward developing our abilities to design and produce prefab homes. We found that people who did not respond well to modern buildings seemed to appreciate this inarguably modern structure. The number of inquiries we continue to get from location scouts, I think, testifies to the enduring quality of the house.

RON: The pool house for the Kaufmann House. The owner needed a place to house the contemporary conveniences that the restoration philosophy for the house did not allow, and, terrified as we were to be building in such close proximity to Neutra's masterpiece, we found an elegant solution. Some of our favorite projects are often guest or pool houses

because our ideas can remain pure in these smaller auxiliary structures.

PSS: What has been your most challenging work in Palm Springs?

LEO: All of the restoration projects have been challenging because it's often difficult to balance the academic demands of preservation with the personal lifestyle desires of our clients. And preservation projects seem to attract a wide range of public responses that are often judgmental and critical and lack the understanding of the process and particulars of a project.

RON: The Kaufmann House, because it had been so severely altered from its original state. The house had more than doubled in size through additions by previous owners over the nearly 50 years since it had been built. It felt bloated and unseemly because of the changes, but even through the wall-to-wall carpeting and wallpaper, moments of amazing beauty were clearly visible.

PSS: After so many years of projects in the desert, how many miles do you think you've logged from LA to Palm Springs?

LEO: It's about 240 miles roundtrip between West

LA and Palm Springs. We've been going to Palm Springs for the last 24 years, 10-15 times per year. The five years we were working on the Kaufmann House, we were going four times a month. That's easily 100,000 miles.

PSS: What are you working on now in the area?

RON: We recently completed a restoration of a 1969 Buff and Hensman house originally built for the actor Laurence Harvey. We did the architecture, construction, interiors, and landscape. In La Quinta, we are just finishing up a new build in The Madison Club.

LEO: I'm in Palm Springs often for Palm Springs Art Museum Board of Trustees and Downtown Palm Springs Park Committee meetings. The committee is currently participating in the development of a new downtown park and event space in Palm Springs.

PSS: The term "modernism" is thrown around a lot these days. What does modernism mean to you?

LEO: Rather than a style, modernism is more of a lifestyle, or a perspective on how to live in a way that is more considered and uses less material to achieve more.

RON: Modernism is something that's looking to the future. It's an optimistic process. Modernism reduces down to simplification, respect for materials, and integration with nature.

PSS: Do you have a dream restoration project in Palm Springs?

LEO: Any of the modern buildings along Palm Canyon Drive in the heart of downtown. Downtown Palm Springs is so much in need of a preservation perspective to counter the

traditional development desire to start anew.
RON: I have always been really drawn to the Union Bank building at the southeast corner of S Indian Canyon Drive and Ramon Road. I particularly like its concrete-like bricks and would love to be able to work with it.

PSS: If you could live in any Palm Springs area home, which would it be?

RON: The Max Palevsky House on West Cielo Drive designed by Craig Ellwood.

LEO: Right across the street from that, the Edris House by Stew Williams.

PSS: Your Los Angeles office is amazing! Would you ever consider a satellite office in Palm Springs?

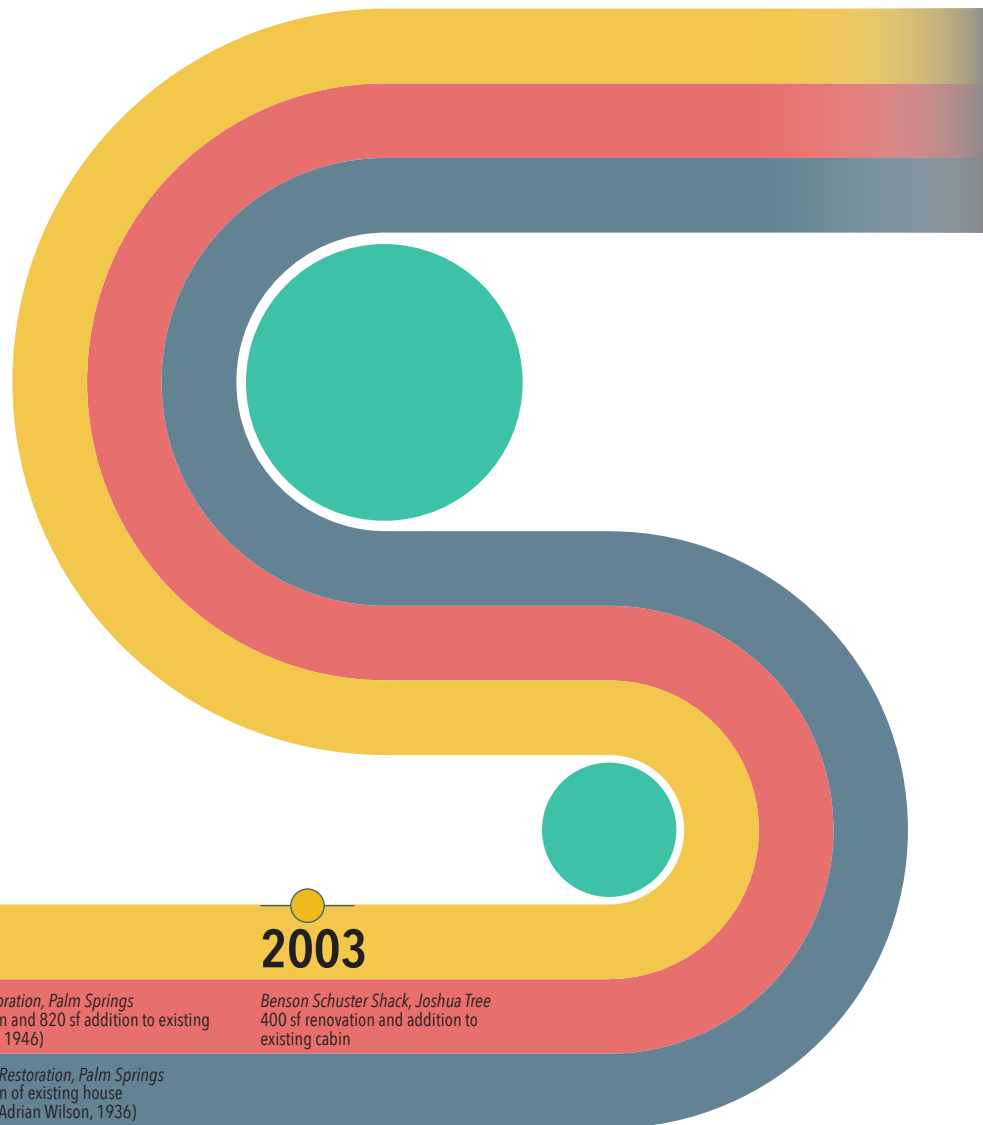
RON: We've considered it, actually. Having

a little space in the desert would be great, but it's really not that bad of a drive from L.A.

PSS: What's next for Marmol Radziner?

RON: We seem to be headed toward more commercial retail and hospitality projects, including a resort in Puerto Rico. We also have a couple of projects in Europe and Asia: a residence in Amsterdam and Oliver Peoples boutiques in London and Osaka.

LEO: In California, we're serving as the preservation architect on the Century Plaza Hotel, and designing residences in San Francisco, where we have a satellite office; Malibu; Santa Monica; Nichols Canyon in the Hollywood Hills; and La Jolla. Ron is building a new home for himself and his family in Mandeville Canyon, and it is amazing! ■



1998

Kaufmann House Restoration, Palm Springs
3,200 sf restoration of existing house and landscape with three acres of site development (Richard Neutra, 1946)

Harris Pool House, Palm Springs
1,200 sf new pool house at Kaufmann House site

2000

Loewy House Restoration, Palm Springs
2,900 sf restoration and 820 sf addition to existing house (Albert Frey, 1946)

Ship of the Desert Restoration, Palm Springs
3,600 sf restoration of existing house (Erle Webster and Adrian Wilson, 1936)

2003

Benson Schuster Shack, Joshua Tree
400 sf renovation and addition to existing cabin



THE DESERT HOUSE, A 2,000-SQUARE-FOOT PROTOTYPE
PREFABRICATED HOUSE IN DESERT HOT SPRINGS
COMPLETED BY MARMOL RADZINER IN 2005

PHOTOS BY JOE FLETCHER



TRINA TURK AND JONATHAN SKOW IN 2001 AT THEIR PALM SPRINGS HOME, A 1936 STREAMLINE MODERNE DESIGN CALLED THE "SHIP OF THE DESERT" THAT WAS RESTORED BY MARMOL RADZINER IN 2000

ACROSS: PLANS FOR THE SANTA FE FEDERAL SAVINGS & LOAN BUILDING RESTORATION TO CONVERT THE SPACE TO THE PALM SPRINGS ART MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN CENTER, EDWARDS HARRIS PAVILION; THE TOP PLANS SHOW THE ORIGINAL LAYOUT, WITH THE CURRENT MUSEUM PLANS BELOW



2005

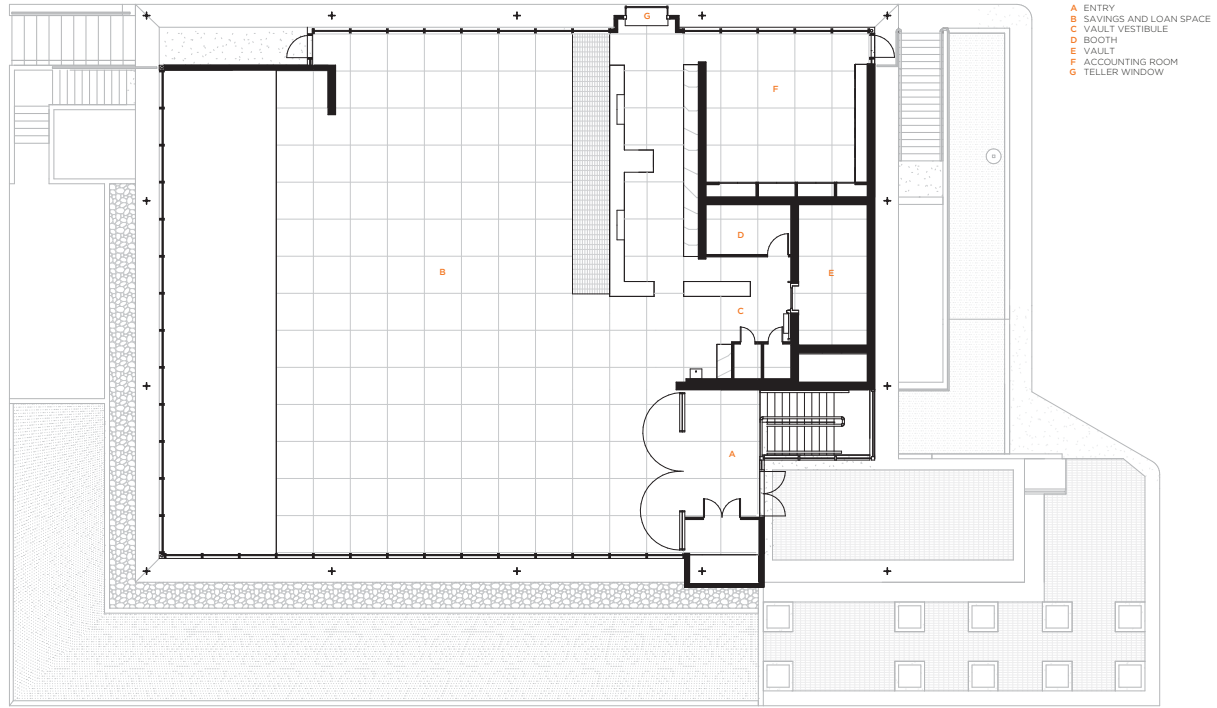
Desert House, Desert Hot Springs
2,000 sf prototype prefabricated house

Scott Residence, Palm Springs
Renovation updating Walt Disney's former home 1948

2008

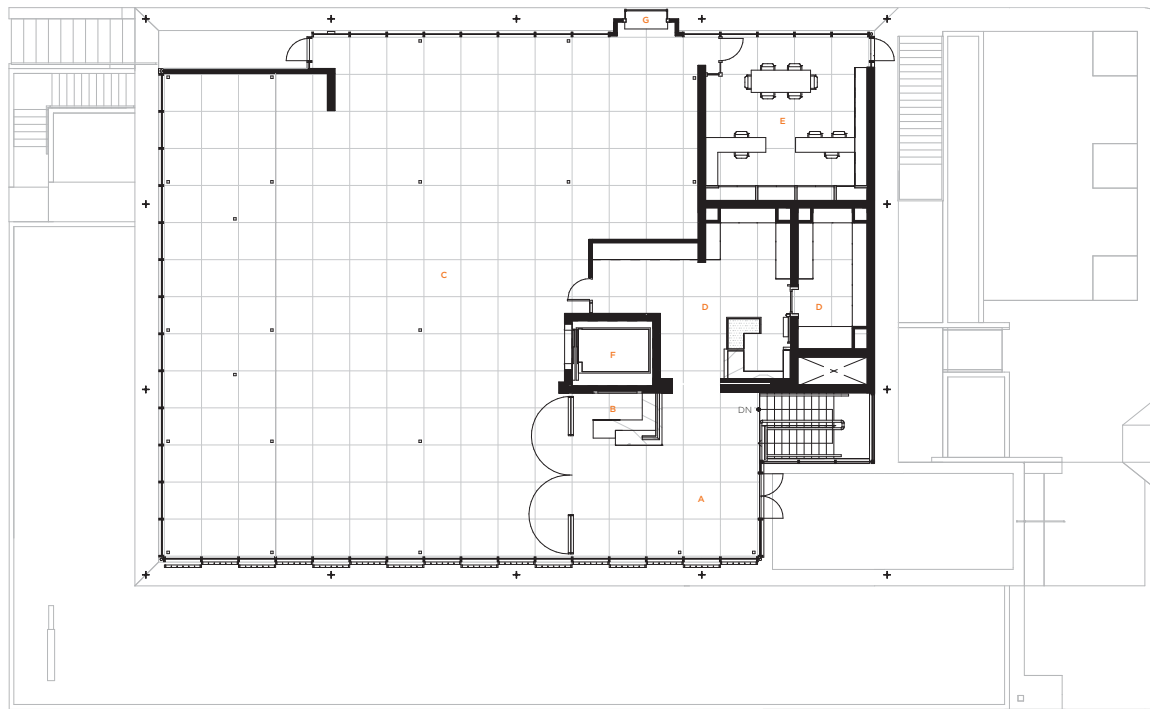
Austin Residence, Rancho Mirage
6,500 sf new single-family residence

Malkin Residence, Rancho Mirage
Remodel of 6,300 sf existing single-family home with 100 sf addition



EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

0 5 20



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

0 5 20



- A ENTRY
- B RECEPTION
- C GALLERY
- D THE VAULT - MUSEUM DESIGN STORE
- E CURATORIAL OFFICE
- F ELEVATOR
- G TELLER WINDOW



RENDERING OF THE
ROSS RESIDENCE, AN
8,700-SQUARE-FOOT NEW
RESIDENCE IN LA QUINTA
BY MARMOL RADZINER

2014

Ford Estate Restoration, Rancho Mirage
6,300 sf restoration of President Gerald Ford and Betty Ford's
former home (Welton Becket, 1977)

*Santa Fe Federal Savings & Loan Restoration (Palm Springs Art Museum Architecture
and Design Center, Edwards Harris Pavilion), Palm Springs*
Architectural design and landscape design (E. Stewart Williams, 1960)

2015

Harvey House Restoration, Palm Springs
Architectural design, interior design, construction,
and landscape design (Buff and Hensman, 1969)

Ross Residence, La Quinta
8,700 sf new single-family residence



THE LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF
MARMOL RADZINER

RENDERING AND OFFICE PHOTO COURTESY OF MARMOL RADZINER