



PALM SPRINGS MODERN

ARCHITECTURE: WILLIAM F. CODY

RESTORATION ARCHITECTURE: MICHAEL HAVERLAND AND THOMAS MORBITZER

INTERIOR DESIGN: DARREN BROWN

TEXT: MICHAEL WEBB

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID GLOMB



PALM SPRINGS HAS GROWN EXPONENTIALLY, SPRAWLING ACROSS THE Coachella Valley, but its character is still defined by midcentury modernism. Monuments, from City Hall to the airport and aerial tram stations, complement the second homes that were built here from the 1930s through the 1960s, when this was primarily a winter resort for movie stars and rich Easterners. Many of these residences have been lovingly restored but discoveries are still being made. A New York-based entertainment executive fell in love with the house that William F. Cody designed for millionaire socialite James Logan Abernathy in 1962. Working with architect Michael Haverland and interior designer Darren Brown, he has subtly enhanced the architecture and furnished it from his own modernist collection.

"I grew up in a midcentury home and still have the Eames rocker I played in as a child," says the owner. "I've owned and restored Carl Maston's house in West Hollywood and Frank Sinatra's E. Stewart Williams house in Palm Springs. It's an expensive addiction."

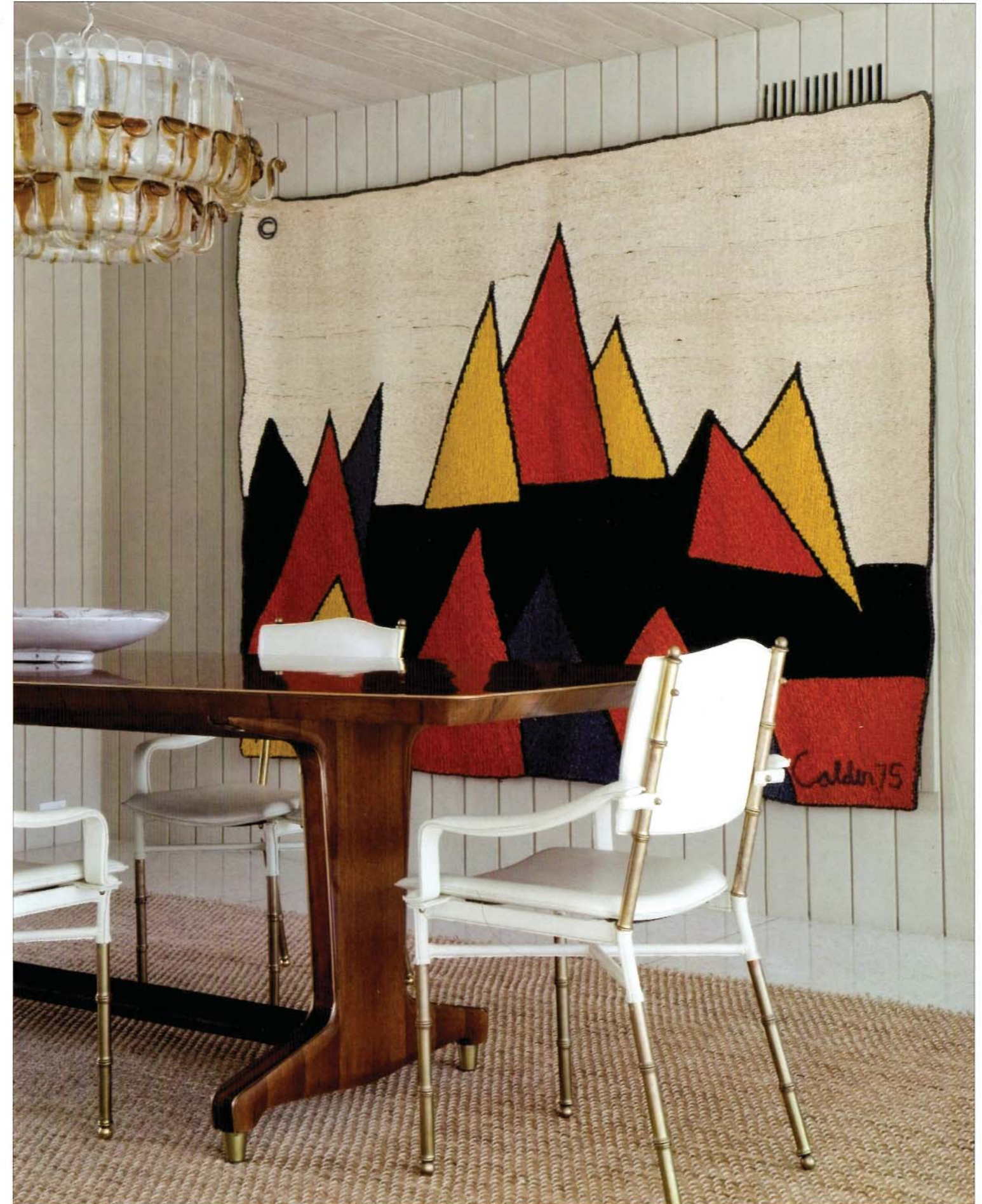
Cody was a bit of a maverick, a midwesterner (as were several of his peers in Palm Springs) who created glamorous hotels and country clubs as well as stylish residences. Like his mentor, Cliff May, he softened the rigor of modernism.





THE ABERNATHY HOUSE IS DISTINGUISHED BY ITS HIPPED, cedar-shingled roofs. Two L-plan wings radiate from corners of the central living pavilion, with its pyramidal roof. Project architect Thomas Morbitzer, contractor Peyton Ray and the owner researched the plans in the Cody archive and so faithfully restored the finishes that the house was named a Class 1 Historic Site by the City of Palm Springs. Terrazzo was repoured, and sandblasted Douglas fir wall paneling was extended into the former service areas, but most of the work was out of sight. Custom double glazing replaced the single panes and all the electrical and plumbing was upgraded. The only addition was a detached pool pavilion that exactly mimics the rest of the house.

"A lot of designers hate working with me," confesses the owner. "Almost everything but the upholstered pieces comes out of my collection of midcentury American and European furniture." Brown is more diplomatic. "The owner is a very unusual person because he is so specific and knows exactly what he wants. That's refreshing; few clients have a vision. I had to understand his collection and how to make it all work in terms of color and texture. I wanted to avoid modernist clichés, and give the interiors a handmade quality."







NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER REMOVED FROM THE STEREOTYPE of 1950s modernism—biomorphic shapes on spiky legs, brash colors and jazzy patterns. And it's a world away from the old-fashioned décor of drapes and ponderous furniture that appears in a *Palm Springs Life* photograph of the original scheme. "This is a place that is all about sun, brilliant light and the presence of nature," says Brown. "I wanted the interiors to feel happy and contain a few memorable gestures. Everything has to be in scale—you don't want the decoration to overwhelm the architecture."

The living room, with its high-pitched ceiling, is the most dramatic space and a demonstration of how disparate pieces can be juxtaposed to good effect. Monteverdi Young cabinets and a classically inspired marble-topped coffee table flank a pair of Dunbar sofas. A pair of African stools and a bronze sculpture designed by Philip and Kelvin LaVerne over the fireplace add interest. Tying this assembly together is the carpet, Brown's reinterpretation of an archival Edward Fields design. The dining room is dominated by a vibrant Alexander Calder tapestry—an explosion of fiery colors. There's a 1950s Italian dining table and brass side chairs by Jacques Adnet, reupholstered in cream leather.

In the master bedroom, Charles Hollis Jones Lucite side tables play off a massive wood headboard by George Nakashima. A pair of Marco Zanuso armchairs flank a vintage Dunbar coffee table with a flower-shaped marble top. The master bathroom has the original sunken tub, a new free-edged wood vanity, loosely inspired by Nakashima, and a chaise by Bruno Mathsson. In the office, a vintage red leather armchair and ottoman by the Brazilian designer Sergio Rodrigues joins a Brandon Herman photo of a swimmer in a pool—an homage to David Hockney—and Pedro Friedeberg's giltwood Hand & Foot chair. Brown had the inspired idea of placing a pair of Indonesian marble elephants as guardians of the pool, and arranging a group of Lawson-Fenning upholstered chairs around the firepit.

Though the house was in good condition when the new owner found it, the garden had been poorly maintained. Tree stumps littered the grounds and a giant eucalyptus that was diseased had to be removed. In its place, landscape designer Marcello Villano installed drought-resistant plantings and clumps of cacti to offset the smoothly trimmed lawn. The magic of Palm Springs, with its crystal air and soaring mountains, is encapsulated within this estate. ■ *Michael Haverland Architect*, 212 780 9188, michaelhaverland.com; *AM/MOR Architecture*, 212 729 8853, arch-ammor.com; *Darren Brown Interior Design*, 347 262 4124, darrenbrown.com; *Marcello Villano Garden Design*, 760 401 0452

