

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Meiselman, Moyer built with personality

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"Another Meiselman home-building project is readied for construction...as a bulldozer churns up...property (for) builder Jack Meiselman...and designer Jack Moyer. The new 57 – home development is incorporating features recommended by the city's proposed new subdivision ordinance, including partial under-ground utilities, sidewalks and street landscaping."

Sprawling communities of homes built in the years after WWII all around the country seem natural enough now, but they were an innovation at the time. Subdivision tracts of building lots and "tract homes" were a new way of living for the booming American population.

"Meiselman is entirely optimistic concerning the future of residential construction in the Palm Springs area. He believes that second homes will be as popular within the next few years as are second family cars today. Also, that the shorter work week, which may lie just ahead, plus non-stop completed freeways lo Los Angeles and all major metropolitan areas, is bound to make this area the number one winter living section of the nation."

That optimism was shared by an industrious population and fueled by what would now be considered modest expectations. Advertising bothered to boast about the most of humble of features.

"Here will be constructed just 45 new luxury homes, bearing a price tag of only \$19,900 to \$21,500. Outstanding feature of these homes will be the fact that all have one of the two baths placed so that those coming from the patio or pool may enter it from the rear yard. This will be a 'must' in desert home construction from now on...."

"Other desirable features are: Refrigerated cooling and forced air heating; built-in range and oven; automatic dishwasher; garbage disposal; completely fenced yard and play area; two car port; masonry fireplace; two sliding doors to pool area, from the living room and



The Spider House. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JONATHAN HALPERN

master bedroom. Also, breakfast bar; formica counter tops; Sandalwood Youngstown kitchen cabinets; vinyl asbestos tile floors in kitchen and bathrooms; cement walks and patios; large storage areas. In and paid for will be curbs, gutters and paved streets. A pool can be added for only an extra \$1000 down."

These atomic-age homes were designed for Meiselman by John P. "Jack" Moyer, an innovative and interesting young architectural designer who arrived on the desert in 1952. Like his contemporary William Krisel who was working for the Alexander Company, Moyer's designs were clever and created the illusion of custom-built residences despite a rigorous production program that allowed the quickest of assembly.

"Six models are now under construction at Meiselman's Palm Lane development, located at Sunset Way and Andreas. These may be viewed as they progress, and orders are being taken both for Palm Lane, for 30-day move-in, or in Chino Palms, for those who can wait 90 days or more for occupancy."

Meiselman would build 49 homes in Palm Lane Estates between 1956 and 1958. He would build 45 homes for his Chino Palms between 1958 and 1959

mountain to Palm Desert Highlands on Highway 74 just west of Silver Spur Ranch where, amazingly, Moyer would design two more new houses for both clients.

Further up the mountain in Pinyon Crest, Moyer designed an home so distinctive it would be featured in Architectural Digest in spring 1964. The "Spider House" featured huge buttresses radiating out from the central core of the home, creating an encircling patio, and the unmistakable impression of a gigantic arthropod perched on the hill.

Miriam Moyer, Jack's wife created the interiors in a restrained rainbow of reds, pinks and oranges. In the 1960s, Moyer started his own company, El Toro Development, building dozens of speculation homes in Palm Desert. Miriam gained a reputation as one of the finest interior decorators around and would go on to teach at College of the Desert (for their own sprawling ranch, they restored and furnished a period revival hacienda-style home in La Quinta that was featured in The Los Angeles Times).

Moyer was practicing in the modern vernacular of his contemporaries like William Krisel, Donald Wexler and Ric Harrison, but his style was distinctive as epitomized in the heavy exterior, spider-like, vertical beams. This can be seen in his 1959 Gayle Building on the 100 block of East Palm Canyon, which is now the El Mirasol restaurant. Moyer's fanciful buttresses, and perforated screens caused passing motorist to stop and stare. The etiology of his style is rumored to have started when he was exposed to Bauhaus sensibilities during the war in Germany.

The Desert Sun exclaimed in 1958, "When history records the names of those who have helped build the City of Palm Springs, the name Jack Meiselman will be high on the list. Meiselman has built homes and developments in this area, including such now famous communities as Desert Palms Estates, Luring Sands Park, Winterhaven, Deep Well and others." Certainly, his collaborator John P. "Jack" Moyer should also be duly noted and appreciated in that history.



From left to right: Mr. and Mrs. Jack Meiselman. COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

would see 45 homes and in 1959 and 1960 Alejo Palms would get 57 homes — all designed by Moyer. In all he would design some 200 homes in the desert during his career and he was the exclusive designer for Meiselman from 1958 through 1962.

Living in Palm Desert, Moyer was a member of Cliff Henderson's architectural committee. In 1956 Moyer designed two actual custom houses exactly one lot apart from each other in Palm Desert for George Walling and Jack Blair. By 1960 both Walling and Blair sold their homes and moved up the