

All about fashion and 'Palm Springs Label'

Iconic designers honed styles at desert shops

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Today, the El Paseo Shopping District boasts a wide spectrum of stores and boutiques that feature West Coast fashion at its finest, but during the mid-century some of the biggest names in fashion were featured in a multitude of high-end shops scattered up and down Palm Canyon Drive.

Los Angeles-based fashion icons like J.W. Robinsons, Bullocks Wilshire, Saks Fifth Avenue, Haggarty's and Desmond's had satellite stores in Palm Springs, which carried fashions that catered to a demographic like the shoppers in Beverly Hills and Newport Beach.

Palm Springs' socialites clamored to see the latest in seasonal lines from top local designers including Bess Bender, Dorothy Gray and Edith Morre, just to name a few. Local country clubs planned fashion shows and local charities benefitted. The models who graced the runways at Thunderbird Country Club, Tamarisk Country Club, Shadow Mountain Country Club and Eldorado Country Club, as well as the Riviera Hotel, the Oasis Hotel, the Spa Hotel and El Mirador were some of the top fashion models working on the West Coast.

For decades, Barbara Foster choreographed fashion shows for many of the most significant local charity events in the greater Palm Springs' area. Foster gathered a group of models who lived locally. Many of the models Foster selected were tall, blonde and slender. There were able to glide down the runway in a bathing suit, an evening gown or a full length mink coat. She employed many well-known models including Barbara Marx (eventually known as Barbara Sinatra), Helen Dzo Dzo, Carrie Craig and Nelda Linsk.



Barbara Foster preparing for a fashion show sponsored by Bullock's Wilshire Palm Springs c. 1960. PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

A style, sometimes referred to as the "Palm Springs Label," emerged from these fashion shows that incorporated the best of domestic and imported designs in women's clothing for all occasions including at home wear, sportswear, suits, dresses, evening dresses

and wraps, all tailored to the desert's climate. The "Palm Springs Label" was a term coined in the debut of the Palm Springs Life's fashion section in the September 1961 edition. It was like an invisible tag that defined the casual but elegant outfits found in many of the de-



Robinson's at The Desert Inn c. 1955. PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

signer salons on Palm Canyon Drive. It became a term that was recognized throughout the fashion world.

By the early 1970s, shopping malls replaced many of the stand-alone department stores. The Desert Inn Fashion Plaza was built in 1967 in the same location as the new downtown development under construction today. It was described as "cold stark and uninviting—the antithesis of Palm Springs." It was the beginning of the end for the fashion mecca located on Palm Canyon Drive and one after another stores closed or moved to a new location, the elegant shopping district on El Paseo in Palm Desert.

Foster, one of the most outspoken and memorable of Palm Springs' First Ladies, will talk about the time when Palm Canyon Drive was known as one of the most beautiful shopping streets in the nation. She will share her memories of the evolution of high fashion in Palm Springs with a lecture and slideshow presented as a fundraiser for the Palm Springs Historical Society on Tuesday, December 5 at 6 p.m. at the Camelot Theatre. Tickets are available online at pshistoricalociety.org or by calling 760-323-8297, \$10 for members and \$20 for non-members.