

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

# THE CLIFFORD AND MARIAN HENDERSON HOUSE 1947

73597 Pinyon Street, Palm Desert



Photo: Redfin.com

In 1947 Cliff Henderson, known as the Founding Father of Palm Desert and the developer of the Shadow Mountain Club, had this serene mid-century modern house built for himself and his actress wife, Marian Marsh, star of many films in the 1930s and 1940's. The house was built close to the Club and El Paseo with restaurants, motels and shopping.

Sited on an oversized lot with dramatic mountain views, the design uses breeze block inside and out, and has views of the pool and patio from nearly every room.

**ARCHITECT:**  
KAUFFMAN & EGGERS

**RENOVATION (1952):**  
WALTER S. WHITE

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:**  
TOMMY TOMSON

**ORIGINAL OWNER:**  
CLIFFORD & MARIAN  
HENDERSON

 **modernism week**  
Official Modernism Week Event



Photo: Redfin.com



Photo: San Diego Air & Space Museum

## Clifford Henderson (1895-1984)

Born in Iowa, Henderson graduated from the University of Southern California with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1917. He served in the 35th Ambulance Unit in France during WWI, then transferred to the 101st Aero Squadron.

After the war, Henderson settled in Los Angeles and was chairman of the ground arrangements for the Army. In 1928, he served as the first manager of the Los Angeles airport system.

He was involved in planning the Burma Hump air route, and also served as military governor of Dakar in North Africa.

With his brother Phil Henderson, he built the Pan-Pacific Auditorium in 1935-1936. The landmark Streamline Moderne convention center, designed by Los Angeles architects, Wurdeman & Becket, was the region's primary indoor venue with 100,000 square feet of exhibition space and seating for 6,000.

According to *The Desert Sun* "History: the Henderson Clan, founders of Palm Desert" by Sid Burks, September 29, 2017:

"Cliff bought several parcels of land south of the Indio Highway (Highway 111) and across the road from Palm Village, including the site of what had been the vehicle pool for General Patton's Desert Training Center. He was careful to conceal his intention to develop the land into an upscale community. He quietly amassed 1,622 acres.

Cliff formed the Palm Desert Corporation in March 1945. Investors included his old friend Edgar Bergen, Leonard Firestone, and other well-heeled friends and acquaintances.

The first order of business was to dig wells and develop the other infrastructure the fledgling community would need. Cliff wanted everything First Class. He predicted that "One day this will be the smartest address on the American Desert".

Cliff had the vision, raised the money and made it all work, but he had a lot of help. His brother, Randall had found the site and moved his publishing business there to become the first commercial enterprise in Palm Desert.

Randall helped develop the concept of Palm Desert, but he never promoted it in his magazine or participated in its development. Cliff's brother-in-law, Tommy Tomson, came to California to break into the movies. When that didn't work out, he became a self-taught landscape architect. Tomson did the landscape designs for Santa Anita Racetrack, Los Angeles Union Station, and Pan-Pacific Auditorium for his brother-in-law, Cliff. He did the landscape design for the homes of countless Hollywood big names, as well.

Tomson helped Cliff found Palm Desert by creating the overall site plan and street layout, as well as the landscape design for many of the businesses and residences. Two other brothers, Phil and Carl Henderson helped found Palm Desert. Cliff considered Phil to be not only a brother and business partner but his best friend. Carl was the "born salesman" and did the legwork of selling the lots to make the whole thing a reality. In 1951 it did become a reality when Palm Desert absorbed nearby Palm Village and officially incorporated as a city."



Photo: Desert Sun

April, 1978: Clifford W. Henderson, Father of Palm Desert  
at presentation of bust/plaque on El Paseo Drive.

## Marian Marsh Henderson (1913 - 2006)

Marian Marsh was born Violet Ethelrod Krauth in Trinidad, British West Indies (now Trinidad and Tobago), and came to the United States as a child. She followed her older sister into an acting career, and appeared in over 40 films from 1929-1942. She also appeared in several television programs in the 1950s. In her films, Marian Marsh starred opposite many of the leading men of the day, including John Barrymore. One of her best-known films is "Svengali", in which she is hypnotized by an evil character played by John Barrymore (bottom right photo).



## Henry Eggers, FAIA, Kaufmann, Lippincott & Eggers

Henry Lawrence Eggers was born in Denver, Colorado. Earning his bachelor's degree in architecture from Cornell in 1933, Eggers spent much of his life in the Los Angeles area. During the years 1946-1948 he was a partner in the firm Kaufmann, Lippincott & Eggers. In addition to his work at Shadow Mountain in Palm Desert, Eggers designed the 1957 White Shadows House in Thunderbird Heights in Rancho Mirage.

# The Design Team

## Gordon B. Kaufmann, Kaufmann, Lippincott & Eggers

Gordon B. Kaufmann was born and educated in England, moved first to Canada and finally Los Angeles where he first rose to attention with his design of Greystone (1928), the largest private residence in Southern California at the time. He is best known for his large-scale works including Santa Anita Park (1934), Hoover Dam (1935), the Los Angeles Times Building (1935), and the Hollywood Palladium (1940), among other important Southern California landmarks.

Gordon Kaufmann and Henry Eggers were in partnership for a brief period (1946-1948). Their partnership designed the Shadow Mountain Resort and Club, and it is assumed that they also designed Clifford Henderson's home a few steps away from the Club on Pinyon Street.

## Walter S. White, AIA

There is some evidence that Walter S. White designed some exterior modifications to the Henderson House in 1955 - possibly removing a carport, reconfiguring the driveway and adding an extension. Information on Walter S. White can be found at:

<http://www.adc-exhibits.museum.ucsb.edu/exhibits/show/walterwhite/introduction>

## Tommy Tomson, Landscape Architect

Cliff Henderson's brother-in-law, Tommy Tomson, designed a landscape plan for Cliff's home on Pinyon Street.

Tommy Tomson laid out the streets and major plantings for the business district, El Paseo. He also designed the landscaping for the Shadow Mountain Resort and Club, as well as for the homesites for sale in and around the Club in South Palm Desert.

Below is a landscape plan by Tommy Tomson for the Henderson House, but it is not known if the plan was implemented.

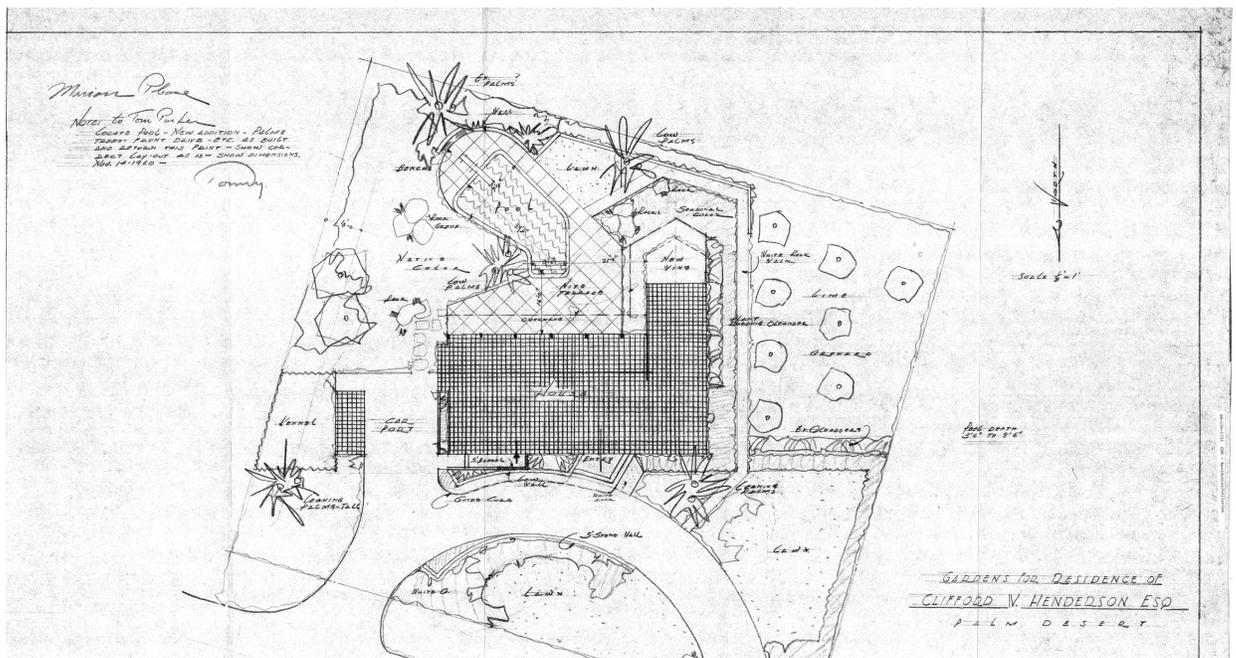
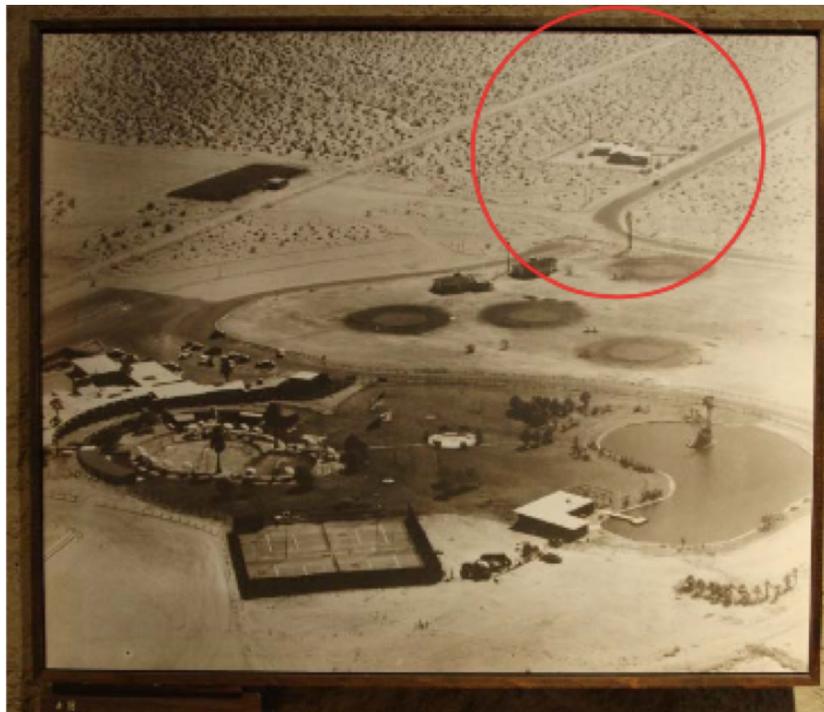


Photo: Gail Thompson, Gayle's Studios. Courtesy Shadow Mountain Resort Collection



Photo: Gail Thompson, Gayle's Studios. Courtesy Shadow Mountain Resort Collection

# Construction



Aerial photo from the early 1950s showing the Henderson House in relationship to Shadow Mountain Club and Resort. Photo from Historical Society of Palm Desert collection



# The House



Photos: Zillow.com



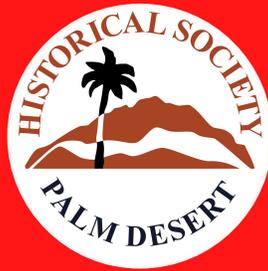
# The House



Photos: Zillow.com

# HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

One in a series of monographs created by the Historical Society of Palm Desert's Architecture and Design Committee celebrating the many architecturally-significant homes in Palm Desert.



## Museum Address:

Located in the Old Palm Desert Fire Station  
72-861 El Paseo Drive, Palm Desert

Open Friday - Monday October through May  
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Free Admission

## Mailing Address:

PO Box 77, Palm Desert CA 92261-0077

[www.hspd.org](http://www.hspd.org)

760-346-6588

501c.3 Federal ID 95-3326699