

2021 Travel Program

Santa Fe

Led by Carlos Jiménez, Stephen Fox, Jack Murphy, and Carolyn Landen, RDA's 2021 domestic tour explored the cultural landscapes of northern New Mexico. The tour began at architect John Gaw Meem's Los Poblanos in Albuquerque, where historian Chris Wilson spoke about the 20th-century invention of a modern architecture based on New Mexico's historic adobe building culture.

In Santa Fe, sites visited included Meem's Museum of Spanish Colonial Art; the mysterious, walled White Building downtown; the National Park Service's adobe Southwest Regional Office of 1941; and the Roque Lobato House, an eighteenth-century adobe with Arts and Crafts interiors.

Participants also experienced works of new architecture. Design journalist Helen Thompson spoke at a hillside house designed by Rice Architecture alumnus Stephen Beili. Another Rice Architecture alumnus, architect James Horn, and his partner, Beverley Spears, welcomed visitors to two of their houses as well as to the campus of the Lannan Foundation.

Beyond Santa Fe, participants visited sites in Chimayó, the Georgia O'Keeffe House and Studio in Abiquiú, and Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy's Dar al Islam Islamic Education Center, realized in adobe vaults. An especially convivial experience involved viewing multiple rainbows at sunset framed by the monumental cantilevered concrete portal of the home of English architect John Young and his wife Tanya in Galisteo.

Concluding the tour, participants walked through Pearl Hall, the architecture building at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Dean Robert Alexander González, a Texan, persuaded Pearl Hall's celebrated architect, eighty-five-year-old Antoine Predock, to join and speak with the group.

Santa Fe and northern New Mexico presented a world of contrasts to Houston. RDA travelers had the opportunity to examine and experience the qualities that make this landscape and its architectures so memorable and compelling.

—Stephen Fox



Photos by Jack Murphy.

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Palm Springs

Led by Donna Kacmar, Stephen Fox, Jack Murphy, and Carolyn Landen, RDA's 2022 domestic tour visited Palm Springs. The city is an oasis in the arid basin-and-range landscape of the American Southwest, where natural hot springs and native desert fan palm trees provide water, shade, and greenery amid desert mountains. Initially developed in the 1880s as a health spa for those suffering from tuberculosis, Palm Springs was reoriented by local entrepreneurs to focus on affluent tourists from Los Angeles during the 1920s. Palm Springs's architecture reflects these transitions: from palm-thatched adobes to Spanish colonial revival resorts to mid-century modern houses and commercial buildings of the postwar period.

Palm Springs has a complicated history. Half of the city's territory occupies the reservation of the Agua Caliente Band of the Cahuilla nation. "Indian land," as it is called locally, is located on alternating square-mile blocks rather than in a single parcel. Thus, there are two Palm Springs that are contiguous but not overlapping. Moreover, the town has two populations: one during the winter season and the other as full-time residents, including summers when temperatures soar over 110 degrees.

RDA's tour focused especially on Palm Springs's rich legacy of mid-20th-century modern architecture. Tour participants visited works by Albert Frey, E. Stewart Williams, William F. Cody, and Donald Wexler, as well as new architecture by Lance O'Donnell of o2 Architecture. A visit with landscape architect James Burnett of OJB, a presentation by landscape historian Steven Keylon, and an excursion into the nearby Palm Canyon provided additional opportunities to learn about the area's built and natural environments.

Palm Springs conceals layers of history, tension, and ethnic and class conflict beneath its welcoming exterior. It is this inner tension that gives the community's extroverted architecture its edge.

—Stephen Fox



Photos by Jack Murphy.