

State of California — The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
DISTRICT RECORD

Primary #
HRI #
Trinomial

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*NRHP Status Code: 5S1

*Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder): *Tamarisk Ranchos*

D1. Historic Name: *Tamarisk Ranchos*

D2. Common Name: *Same*

*D3. **Detailed Description** (Discuss overall coherence of the district, its setting, visual characteristics, and minor features. List all elements of district.):

Located in central Rancho Mirage, just north of the Tamarisk Country Club, the Tamarisk Ranchos is a cluster of 16 single-family homes with communal grounds and swimming pool. Constructed in 1958, the homes define a large rectangular area bordered by Los Pueblos Way on the north, Tamarisk Lane on the south, Palm View Road on the east, and Pinto Palm Way on the west. The primary elevations face the central, park-like, pool area which is cooperatively-owned by the Tamarisk Ranchos residents. There

(See Continuation Sheet 2 of 3.)

*D4. **Boundary Description** (Describe limits of district and attach map showing boundary and district elements.):

Tamarisk Ranchos is a rectangular district bordered by Los Pueblos Way on the north, Tamarisk Lane on the south, Pinto Palm Way on the east, and Palm View Drive on the west. The boundary includes all of the following contributing resources (listed by address and Riverside County parcel number).

*70-417 Los Pueblos Way: APN 674095002
70-435 Los Pueblos Way: APN 674095003
70-451 Los Pueblos Way: APN 674095004
70-465 Los Pueblos Way: APN 674095005*

*36-903 Palm View Drive: APN 674095006
36-927 Palm View Drive: APN 674095007*

*36-904 Pinto Palm Way: APN 674095016
36-928 Pinto Palm Way: APN 674095015
36-966 Pinto Palm Way: APN 674095014*

*70-400 Tamarisk Lane: APN 674095013
70-418 Tamarisk Lane: APN 674095012
70-436 Tamarisk Lane: APN 674095011
70-450 Tamarisk Lane: APN 674095010
70-466 Tamarisk Lane: APN 674095009
70-470 Tamarisk Lane: APN 674095008*

In addition, one non-contributing property (70-401 Los Pueblos Way) lies within the boundaries.

*D5. **Boundary Justification:**

The district boundaries include all of the homes originally constructed in the Tamarisk Ranchos cooperative living development, 15 identified as contributing and one as non-contributing (70-401 Los Pueblos Way). All of the properties were built by Lou Halper's Devon Construction Company as one development in 1958. Although each is a single family residence, all of the properties share a common design philosophy, similar floor plans, amenities, and relationship to the communal grounds and swimming pool. The boundaries also include the communal grounds and facilities.

*D6. **Significance:** Theme: *Country Club Era*
Period of Significance: *1951-1973*

Area: *City of Rancho Mirage*
Applicable Criteria: *C*

(Discuss district's importance in terms of its historical context as defined by theme, period of significance, and geographic scope. Also address the integrity of the district as a whole.)

The Tamarisk Ranchos district is architecturally significant as a well designed and intact example of a property type apparently unique to Rancho Mirage in the Coachella Valley area. Cooperative single-family residences, each privately owned but sharing grounds and a swimming pool, is an unusual permutation of a multi-family residential complex. The Tamarisk Ranchos were developed by Lou Halper's Devon Construction Company in 1958. Plans were originally drawn by architect William Krisel, but

(See Continuation Sheet 2 of 3.)

*D7. **References** (Give full citations including the names and addresses of any informants, where possible.):

*Alan Hess and Andrew Danish, Palm Springs Weekend, Chronicle Books, 2001.
1972 Palm Springs "Yellow Book" Directory.
Interview with Dr. Henry L. Jaffe, October 22, 2002.*

(See Continuation Sheet 3 of 3.)

*D8. **Evaluator:** *Peter Moruzzi, Teresa Grimes, Leslie Heumann*

Date: *November 20, 2002*

Affiliation and Address: *Leslie Heumann and Associates, 600 N. Sierra Bonita, Los Angeles, CA 90036*

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*Recorded by: Peter Moruzzi, Teresa Grimes, Leslie Heumann

*Date: 11/20/02

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***D3. Detailed Description (Continued):**

are three basic roof configurations (flat, low-pitched front gabled, or butterfly), exteriors (stucco, natural rock, board and batten) and two floor plans (3 bedrooms/3 baths, or 2 bedrooms plus den and 2 baths). Each house is approximately 1,900 square feet plus a garage. One of the houses (70-436 Tamarisk Lane) was originally the manager's residence and is smaller than the others. Windows are aluminum-framed casement, sliding, and floor-to-ceiling glass. Some elevations have clerestory windows. Rafters are visible beneath deep eaves. The rectangular houses have open floor plans with indoor-outdoor access through large sliding glass doors. Exterior and interior chimneys are thin brick or natural rock. Many of the houses pushed out the mostly glass wall of the living and dining area by enclosing the adjoining covered terrace. This alteration has not adversely affected the integrity of the houses as the original windows, sliding glass doors, and clerestories were utilized. The meticulously maintained park-like grounds include a large number of mature date palms which may predate the development. The communal swimming pool is now fenced. The buildings are mostly original and in good condition except for 70-401 Los Pueblos Way which is non-contributing due to extensive and unsympathetic exterior alterations.

The following properties, listed with original owners if known, contribute to the significance of the district and are documented individually on Primary Records:

70-417 Los Pueblos Way: Unknown
70-435 Los Pueblos Way: Unknown
70-451 Los Pueblos Way: Unknown
70-465 Los Pueblos Way: Unknown

36-903 Palm View Drive: Unknown
36-927 Palm View Drive: Lou Halper

70-400 Tamarisk Lane: Harry Robbin

70-418 Tamarisk Lane: Larry Weingarten / Dr. J. Marmorston

70-436 Tamarisk Lane: Unknown

70-450 Tamarisk Lane: Jules Goldstone

70-466 Tamarisk Lane: Unknown

70-470 Tamarisk Lane: J.A. Minow

36-904 Pinto Palm Way: Alfred Tugend
36-928 Pinto Palm Way: Groucho Marx
36-966 Pinto Palm Way: Alfred Hart

Individual properties and the district as a whole have maintained a high degree of integrity.

D6. Significance (Continued):

the Los Angeles based developer utilized in-house architects in designing the houses that were ultimately built.

The history of Tamarisk Ranchos centers around a small group of the founding members of the Tamarisk Country Club: developer Lou Halper, City National Bank owner Al Hart, comedian Groucho Marx, producers Alfred Tugend and Harry Robbin, and attorney Philip Eisendrath. Instead of each building custom houses along the golf course, they decided to have Lou Halper build modest houses around a communal park and swimming pool on property one block west of the golf course. During the 1960s and 1970s, other Tamarisk Country Club members purchased houses at Tamarisk Ranchos including agent Jules Goldstone, Oscar-winning producer/screenwriter Larry Weingarten, J.A. Minow, Joseph Checkers of Chicago, Oscar-winning director Alfred Lushing, Hal Meyers, and attorney Hy Raskin. Raskin had co-chaired Adlai Stevenson's election campaign and later served as West Coast campaign manager for John F. Kennedy. Many were also members of the Hillcrest Country Club in Los Angeles.

Barbara Marx purchased Groucho Marx' house after her divorce from Zeppo Marx. The house remained in her name after her marriage to Frank Sinatra. The manager's house at 70-476 Tamarisk Lane was occupied by several couples until it was sold when an outside property management firm took over. Until 1968, other than the managers, there had been no full-time residents living at Tamarisk Ranchos. Today most of the owners are full-time residents. The original CC&Rs stipulated that prospective buyers be interviewed as to their suitability, a policy which has since been eliminated. Longtime resident Lois Jacobs, daughter of previous owner Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Checkers, remembers that residents "had families with young children and grandchildren" and that "vacations of weekends in Rancho Mirage meant fun around the pool with games and picnics." Resident historian Rita Terras concludes, "As a community we are older and less sociable. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to bring back the friendly community spirit that, in the early days, seems to have been the key to the well-being of Tamarisk Ranchos' owners and occupants."

(See Continuation Sheet 3 of 3.)

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*Recorded by: Peter Moruzzi, Teresa Grimes, Leslie Heumann

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D6. Significance (Continued):

Approximately five additional examples of this property type ("Cooperative SFRs") were built in Rancho Mirage. The block adjacent to Tamarisk Ranchos to the north, with an identical lot and communal pool layout, is occupied by another Cooperative SFR development from 1961 whose house designs are not as distinctive or architecturally compelling as those at Tamarisk Ranchos. Although Lou Halper apparently subdivided the parcel, he sold the property to another developer who subsequently constructed the houses and communal facilities. Also at Tamarisk, the Tamarisk Fairway on 10th Cooperative SFRs consists of eight large houses sharing communal grounds, a swimming pool, driveways, and carports and was built in 1969-1970. Near Thunderbird Country Club, Architect Richard R. Leitch designed the 39 single-family residences with a common recreational area including swimming pool, dressing rooms, and volleyball court in the Tierra Del Sol Tract in 1958. Says Leitch, the communal recreation area, "new at the time," was the first of a number of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) that were the forerunners of condominiums. Also near Thunderbird, the Early Times Road/Country Club Drive Cooperative SFR (1957) consists of ten houses, many quite large, arranged around a squared "O" with rear elevations opening to the shared park and swimming pool. In this example, several homeowners have added private swimming pools to their homes. Finally, the Thunderbird Palms grouping (circa 1961) consists of 28 residences scattered within a large area and sharing several swimming pools and common grounds.

Each of these Cooperative SFRs were experiments at combining the best aspects of single-family housing and community living. Inherent in the cooperative plan is the belief that a country club/resort atmosphere naturally encourages socializing in common areas before retreating to private dwellings. It speaks of a time when communal swim parties, afternoon barbecues, and evening cocktails were appropriate resort activities. In the case of both Tamarisk Ranchos and the Tamarisk Fairway on 10th groupings, the initial owners were almost all members of the Tamarisk Country Club, hence the built-in social connection. Evidently, however, the concept of Cooperative SFRs gave way to condominiums with their increased density, common walls, and apartment-like atmosphere.

Architecturally, the Tamarisk Ranchos were clearly influenced by William Krisel and Dan Palmer's designs for the Alexander Company. According to Krisel, Lou Halper paid Krisel to do the overall masterplan, then Halper's in-house architects designed the various houses. Not surprisingly, the completed houses bear a striking resemblance to Palmer and Krisel's Alexander homes being constructed at the same time in the Twin Palms area of Palm Springs. In fact, the three Tamarisk Ranchos' roof forms: flat, low-pitched front gable, and butterfly, were the same three profiles Palmer and Krisel designed for Twin Palms.

Among the Cooperative SFRs in Rancho Mirage, the Tamarisk Ranchos and Tamarisk Fairway on 10th properties are the best remaining examples of the type in terms of condition, architectural style, integrity, setting, workmanship, and association. The Tamarisk Ranchos residences appear to be almost entirely original on the exteriors and the only alteration to the grounds is the relatively minor fence enclosure of the pool. As an excellent example of this new type of Modern tract housing that characterized Rancho Mirage from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, the Tamarisk Ranchos appears eligible for designation as a historic district under an existing or proposed local ordinance (a "5S1" National Register Status Code).

*D7. References (continued):

Adele Cygelman, *Palm Springs Modern*, New York, Rizzoli International Publications, 1999. pp. 112-115.

Interview with Richard R. Leitch FAIA, October 28, 2002.

Interview with Rita Terras, Phd, November 11, 2002.

Interview with Jean Penn, November 11, 2002.

Palm Springs Villager advertisement, March 1958. p. 29.

1958 and 1959 Palm Springs Directories.

City of Rancho Mirage Building Permits.

Interview with William Krisel, November 15, 2002.

Rita Terras, "A History of Tamarisk Ranchos," self-published research, 2002.

Jean Penn, "Life at Tamarisk Ranchos," self-published article, 2002.

Tamarisk Ranchos Sales Brochure, 1958.

Tamarisk Ranchos aerial photograph, circa 1959.