



# Desert Wave House

Walter S. White · Palm Desert, CA · 1955

While never achieving the same renown as Palm Springs modernists like William Cody or Donald Wexler, Walter S. White had a significant impact on the fast-developing Coachella Valley. Having worked in the offices of noted Southern California architects Rudolph Schindler, Harwell Hamilton Harris, and Albert Frey, he nevertheless forged a career as a designer, builder, and developer in the California desert, where he created sustainable, often affordable dwellings before moving to Colorado Springs in 1960. Indeed, he designed at least 48 homes in Palm Desert, a town southeast of Palm Springs, alone.

White's most famous residence in this district is his Desert Wave House (aka Miles C. Bates House), a home and studio for Miles C. Bates, an extroverted artist and cement-fortune heir known for throwing lavish parties and driving his gullwing Mercedes convertible. Shaped like a wave, the home's profile carefully traces the curving silhouette of the San Jacinto Mountains behind it.

White, who drew on technical expertise gained from working at Douglas Aircraft Co., patented the home's so-called "roller-coaster roof." Created with wooden dowels, it is held in place by a composite beam, and floats atop a combination of cement brick, sliding glass walls, and clerestory windows. Freeing the roof from the plan, he was able to maximize views while providing shelter from the harsh elements.

A series of additions by later owners, followed by a number of unoccupied years, threatened the home's structural and material integrity. In 2018, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. That year, L. A.-based Stayner Architects purchased the property and began restoring it to its original condition, giving this unique home a fresh lease of life.

White patented his wave-like roof structure, which appears to levitate above the house.