

# E. STEWART WILLIAMS

A Tribute to His Work and Life

PALM SPRINGS  
PRESERVATION FOUNDATION



Williams designed two structures for Coachella Valley Savings and Loan, the first in 1956 and another in 1961. The second building, at the corner of Ramon Road and Palm Canyon Drive, won the Portland Cement Association award for creative use of concrete for Williams & Williams.

Collaboration played a part in many of Williams' larger commercial projects and was important in the original design of Palm Springs City Hall as well as the Aerial Tramway. City Hall's first phase was a joint venture in 1956 between Williams, Williams and Williams and the firm of Clark, Frey and Chambers. Later additions in 1964, '72 and '84 were all done by Williams, Williams and Williams or Williams, Clark and Williams.

Crafton Hills Community College in Yucaipa was Williams' largest and most comprehensive project of his career. Started in 1966, and built in stages with the final phase completed in 1976, it was done in collaboration with partners Roger Williams and John Porter Clark and the Riverside firm of Armstrong and Poper. The design won a first award of excellence in 1973 from the Inland California Chapters of the A.I.A. Originally asked by the board of trustees to evaluate four different sites, the architects initially rejected the chosen site because of its difficult terrain and remoteness from sewer, water and utilities. However, the trustees found it impossible to reject the gift of the land to the district. So, Williams again made careful study of the surrounding environment and the intended use of the facility in orchestrating the lay-out of the buildings. Native vegetation was left intact wherever possible and the hills were carefully contoured to match the surrounding topography. It was decided all buildings would be concrete because of natural fire hazards in the region. Many new trees were incorporated into the site.

Other large projects included the Riverside County Administration and

RIGHT: Graff-Radford house, Rancho Mirage, designed in 1989 when Williams was 80.  
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BELOW: Design of Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa was a collaborative effort of Williams, Clark & Williams along with the Riverside firm of Armstrong and Poper.

FAR RIGHT: The Riverside County Administration and Courts building, 1964.  
PHOTOS BY JULIUS SHULMAN, © J. PAUL GETTY TRUST.  
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Courts Building of Indio in 1964 and several buildings for Santa Fe Savings and Loan of San Bernardino in 1970 and 1976.

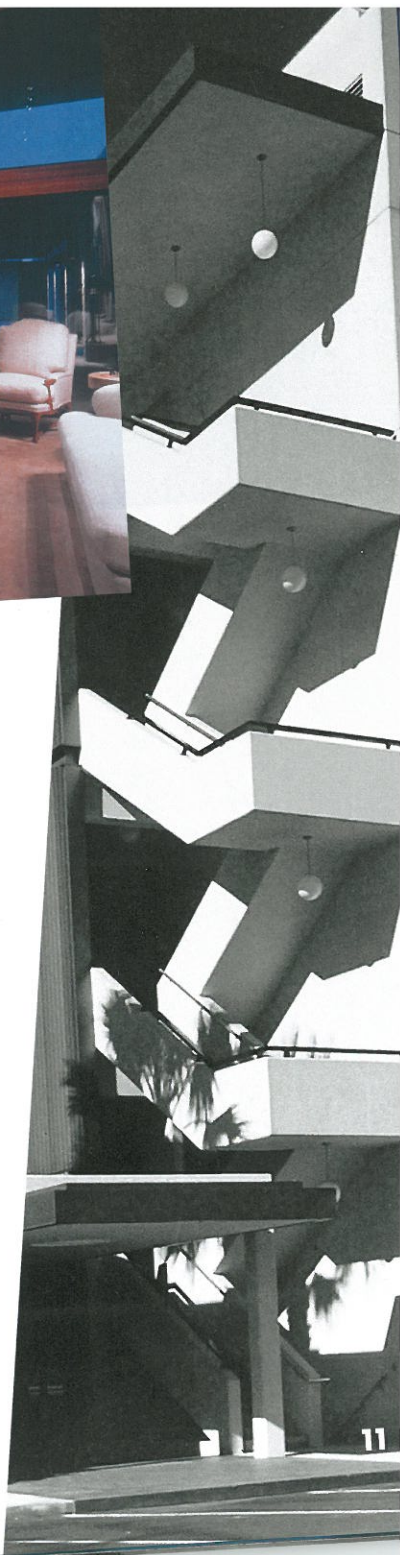
Williams' work during this period focused on commercial projects, however, he continued to design an occasional house. The outstanding ones include the 1957 Koerner House, 1960 Sutter House, 1963 Kenaston house, 1986 Erik & Sidney Williams House, and late in his career, the 1989 Graff-Radford House.

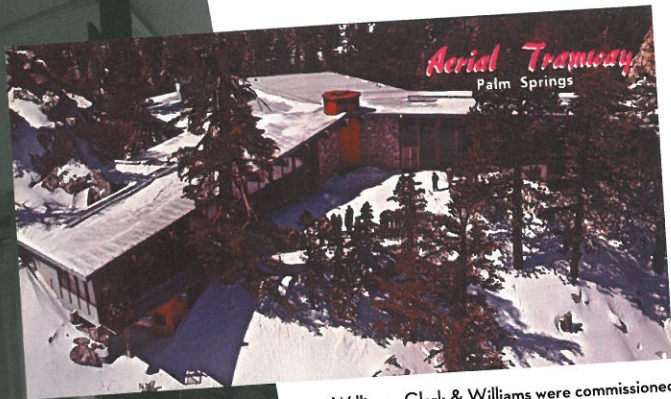
## A PROLIFIC CAREER

Although an avowed modernist heavily influenced by the International Style, Stewart Williams always charted his own course. Through his interpretation, he eschewed its rigid tenet and approached architecture with an open mind. Williams had great respect for Mies Van der Rohe's work and appreciated the graceful lines of his houses and the way in which he invited the outdoors inside.

Williams labored with each design to make the building appear to grow out of its site. The beauty of the materials used in his buildings always predominated. When asked about the essence of his style, Williams said over and over again, "Let the natural beauty of the materials be the thing you see."

- Andy Sotta





Williams, Clark & Williams were commissioned for the mountain station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, 1963. It was a daunting feat, requiring the use of helicopters as no roads ran to that elevation. Williams' design is perched lightly on its site. Built of wood, glass and stone, the building opens up to its rocky site with stone decks and stairways allowing visitors to take in the spectacular views of the valley below and the adjacent forest.

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Sliding neatly into a recess on the rear of the house, the pool literally became part of the living area with the outside portion covered by Williams' trademark redwood trellis. Both Kiner and Bligh houses were heavily published at the time, bringing Williams much attention.

Florsheim shoe store designed by Williams in downtown Palm Springs featured a unique undulating wood-slat ceiling. His love for Scandinavian design and natural materials are very evident throughout the space. Boulders were incorporated into the display window while shoes were displayed on large slabs of flagstone and on a weathered mesquite tree trunk. With state of the art lighting, the store was indeed a show-stopper along Palm Canyon Drive.

Heeding the advice of his father, Williams pursued commercial work which comprised the majority of

his projects from the mid-fifties through his retirement in 1990. In addition to the aforementioned projects, Williams' work included: Palm Springs High School gym, 1947; Palm Springs baseball stadium, 1949; the original Desert Hospital, 1950; Palm Spring City Hall (with Clark and Frey), 1955; Palm Springs High School auditorium, 1956; both the Palm Springs High School library and College of the Desert gymnasium and pool, 1958.

### 1957 - 1972 WILLIAMS & WILLIAMS 1972 - 1990 WILLIAMS, CLARK & WILLIAMS

From the late fifties until the early seventies, Williams practiced with his brother Roger, later joining forces with fellow desert architect, neighbor and friend, John Porter Clark, in 1972. The outstanding and impressive body of work from this period in Williams' career includes: Santa Fe Federal Savings building on

LEFT: The aluminum shade screens of Santa Fe Federal Savings & Loan, corner of South Palm Canyon Drive and Baristo Road, 1957.

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Palm Canyon Drive; a second bank building for Coachella Valley Savings and Loan; the design of the Aerial Tramway mountain station; Crafton Hills College in Yucaipa and the new Palm Springs Desert Museum.

Santa Fe Federal Savings hired Williams to design a new office building on Palm Canyon Drive in 1957. He responded brilliantly with his one story light steel structure

that appears to float above ground (see photo at far left). Wrapped in floor-to-ceiling glass, the structure was protected from the harsh desert sun by sliding metal screens manufactured by Northrup industries. Interior floors were terrazzo and the main lobby was accented by metal grills of Anotec grating which could be closed at night to secure the main business area of the bank when the entry lobby remained open for community meetings on the lower level. A simple stairway of terrazzo steps with a sculptural stainless steel handrail descended to the basement floor. Williams and Williams received a special citation for the design from the Inland California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

BELOW: Palm Springs High School with the Williams-designed gymnasium on right.  
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Florsheim Shoes on Palm Canyon Drive featured weathered wood and boulder displays. An undulating wood slat ceiling was key to dramatic lighting effects.

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