

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: Frey House II

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:
The Architecture of Albert Frey

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 686 Palisades Drive

City or town: Palm Springs State: CA County: Riverside

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D

<p>_____ Signature of certifying official/Title:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>_____ Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>_____ Date</p>
<p>_____ Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: METAL, WOOD, GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Frey House II is situated on a steep and rocky slope 220 feet above Palm Springs. Albert Frey designed this small, one-story dwelling for himself in 1963. A rectangle of steel frame construction with plate glass windows, the house is capped by a corrugated metal shed roof. The interior steps up from the bedroom to a dining/living area, small kitchen, bathroom, and guest room. A large boulder enters the house from the north, becoming a divider between bedroom and dining/living area. The house sits adjacent to a retaining wall of terracotta-colored concrete block forming a platform containing a swimming pool and a space below for a carport. A small guest room designed by Frey was added to the west end of the residence in 1970. Upon Frey's death, the house was bequeathed to the Palm Springs Art Museum and is carefully maintained, exhibiting a high level of integrity.

Narrative Description

For Albert Frey, Mount San Jacinto was an imposing presence that, in his architecture, demanded to be addressed. It was the western view to which buildings in the alluvial basin of Palm Springs were designed to face. By the late 1950s, after 25 years of looking up at the

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mountain, Frey decided he would live there and look down. It took five years to find the right parcel, which was purchased from a man who thought it too steep to build on. Known as Frey House II (Frey House I on the valley floor has since been demolished), it soars 220 feet above Palm Springs. Begun in 1963 and completed in 1964, the house exemplifies Frey's design philosophy that a building should meld into its desert environment.

Located on a steep slope with natural rock outcroppings, Frey House II consists of two distinct elements (**Figure 2**). A retaining wall of poured concrete and terracotta-colored concrete block presses against the hillside, forming a platform containing a swimming pool and a space below for a carport. Typical of his post-World War II designs, the double-stacked concrete blocks are aligned and, at the carport, corners are cut at a diagonal at every other paired row. Steps lead from the driveway to the deck, which is enclosed by a concrete block railing interspersed with square openings.

In contrast, the house itself is light and airy, a pure rectangle of steel-frame construction and plate glass, with corrugated metal used for the roof, overhang, ceiling and walls (**Figure 3**). The house is set precisely on an east-west axis. The thin shed roof angles downward toward the south, capping the composition, its slant precisely calibrated to take advantage of the angle of the sun (**Figure 4**). Said Frey of the deep overhangs, "The plan was designed so that, for instance, the glass walls are not exposed to the sun in the heat of summer. That's what determined these overhangs. In winter, when the sun is much lower, it comes in and helps heat the house. I never need any heat after the sun comes up because the sun warms it."¹ As for his use of metal, "The weather is too hot for wood. Metal doesn't retain heat—it cools off in minutes."²

Inside the house, the concrete floor—dyed to match the local soil—steps down from the kitchen to the carpeted dining/living area following the slope of the terrain. Separating the sleeping area from the dining/living area is an enormous boulder that penetrates the house anchoring it to the environment (**Figure 5**). North facing glazing traces the rock's contours. Frey noted, "Its gray granite probably took thousands of years to make this color. I have very strong opinions about the connection between architecture and nature."³

Consistent with Frey's belief in economy of space, the house contains seating, a dining area, and storage that are all built in. Careful attention was paid to color. Said Frey, "I used a blue ceiling because it blends with the sky. It makes it very restful. And then, as you see, the yellow curtains are like the blossoming encilia flowers."⁴ The blue, perforated corrugated metal ceiling utilized by Frey appeared in other buildings such as the interior lobby of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway Valley Station.

In response to an interview question in 1986 about how his use of color was lost in the black and white photography that represented the house in publications of the time, Frey replied "Yes,

¹ Jennifer Golub, *Frey 1 + 2* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 74.

² Adele Cygelman, *Palm Springs Modern* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1999), 134.

³ Frances Anderton, "A Desert Prophet Wins New Disciples," *New York Times*, September 17, 1998, F11.

⁴ Golub, 74.

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color is so important because it ties in with the surrounding nature. For instance, these technical materials, like metal, become more dramatic when you look at the rock behind me, which is natural. It makes a rather exciting contrast.”⁵

To provide accommodations for guests, building permits confirm that Frey designed a small guest room at the west end of the house in 1970 costing approximately \$4,000. Like the original house, it was of masonry and steel construction with a steel roof, and is fully compatible with the earlier composition.

The ethereal nature of Frey House II differs greatly from the Arthur Elrod Residence designed four years later by John Lautner at a similar elevation across the basin in Palm Springs’ Southridge neighborhood. That house was built almost entirely of concrete, including the roof. Of it Frey later commented when queried, “The more weight you have, the more movement [in earthquakes]. Lautner’s is a very nice exciting house. He did a wonderful job with concrete. I prefer to use lighter materials.”⁶

Frey built his second house on a restricted budget. “I’m much more interested to get the most for the least money” he said. “It’s a challenge that way. It’s easy to splash and spend a lot of money, but that’s not very interesting. Economy after all controls many things.”⁷ This philosophy expressed itself in the buildings Frey designed in the Coachella Valley from the 1940s through the 1960s. Frey avoided using expensive materials such as marble because he believed that they were inappropriate for the desert environment. “Materials should be used in a simple way,” he said, “and not try to pretend to be more than what [they are].”⁸

As relates to integrity, the original design, materials and workmanship of the dwelling are unchanged except for the presence of a modest addition at the west end of the house that Frey designed in 1970. Location and setting are as they were since construction, and, given its long association with Albert Frey as his own residence, it is imbued with the feeling of the architect’s presence.

⁵ Golub, 73.

⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁸ “Prickly Pears” oral history project, Palm Springs Public Library, videotaped interview with John Porter Clark and Albert Frey, 1986, 1:14:35.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1964

Significant Dates

1964

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Frey, Albert

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Frey House II is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C at the local level of significance in the area of Architecture. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of residential architecture associated with the modern movement as interpreted by Albert Frey for the desert environment of the Coachella Valley. Frey House II meets the registration requirements of *The Architecture of Albert Frey* Multiple Property Submission in association with the historic context “Desert Modern Design in the Coachella Valley, 1934-1965.” Its period of significance corresponds with the building’s construction in 1964.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Frey House II exemplifies the distinctive characteristics of Albert Frey’s approach to residential design in the desert. It is constructed of sandblasted terracotta-colored concrete block, features corrugated metal for its roof and exterior cladding, large plate glass windows, and a shed roof with deep eaves. Begun in 1963 and completed in 1964, with an addition in 1970, the house epitomizes Frey’s design philosophy that a building should meld into its desert environment. As a dwelling designed for himself, Frey House II is exceptionally modest in size and appointments, incorporating the desert landscape—a large boulder—into the sleeping and living space. The house is without applied ornamentation or historical references, expressing Frey’s belief in an economy of materials in architectural design.

Frey House II is significant within the oeuvre of Albert Frey and fits within the “Desert modern design in the Coachella Valley 1934-1965” historic context presented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form. The subject property, exhibiting high integrity, is a key example of the residential building property type that is readily identifiable as the work of master architect Albert Frey. The property meets National Register Criterion C because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of residential architecture associated with Albert Frey and is the work of a master architect.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

As indicated in *The Architecture of Albert Frey* Multiple Property Documentation Form.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University of California, Santa Barbara
- Other

Name of repository: Palm Springs Art Museum

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one acre

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 33.823364

Longitude: -116.553432

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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property is located at 686 Palisades Drive, Palm Springs, Riverside County, California at the terminus of Palisades Drive. Its legal description is POR BLK 30 MB 009/432 SD MAP OF PALM SPR APN: 513-110-020

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with 686 Palisades Drive.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Peter Moruzzi/Architectural Historian
organization: _____
street & number: 2018 Griffith Park Blvd. #114
city or town: Los Angeles state: CA zip code: 90039
e-mail petermoruzzi@gmail.com
telephone: 213-706-0151
date: December 30, 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

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Photo Log

Name of Property Frey House II
City or Vicinity Palm Springs
County Riverside
State California
Photographer Peter Moruzzi
Date Photographed October 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0001.tif
Context view, camera facing northwest
- 2 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0002.tif
South elevation, carport, camera facing northwest
- 3 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0003.tif
Primary (south) elevation, camera facing west
- 4 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0004.tif
Primary (south) elevation, camera facing northwest
- 5 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0005.tif
Rear (north) elevation, camera facing southeast
- 6 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0006.tif
Rear (north) elevation, camera facing south
- 7 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0007.tif
South elevation, camera facing northeast
- 8 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0008.tif
Detail, corner of carport, camera facing northeast
- 9 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0009.tif
Interior view, living/dining area, camera facing east
- 10 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0010.tif
Interior view, sleeping area, camera facing southwest
- 11 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0011.tif
Interior view, kitchen, camera facing west

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12 of 12 CA_Riverside County_Frey MPS_Frey House II_0012.tif
Interior view, kitchen, camera facing east

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- Figure 2 West and south elevations, looking northeast, 1965.
- Figure 3 South elevation, looking west, 1965.
- Figure 4 North elevation, looking south, 1965.
- Figure 5 Interior view, living/dining area, looking east, 1965.

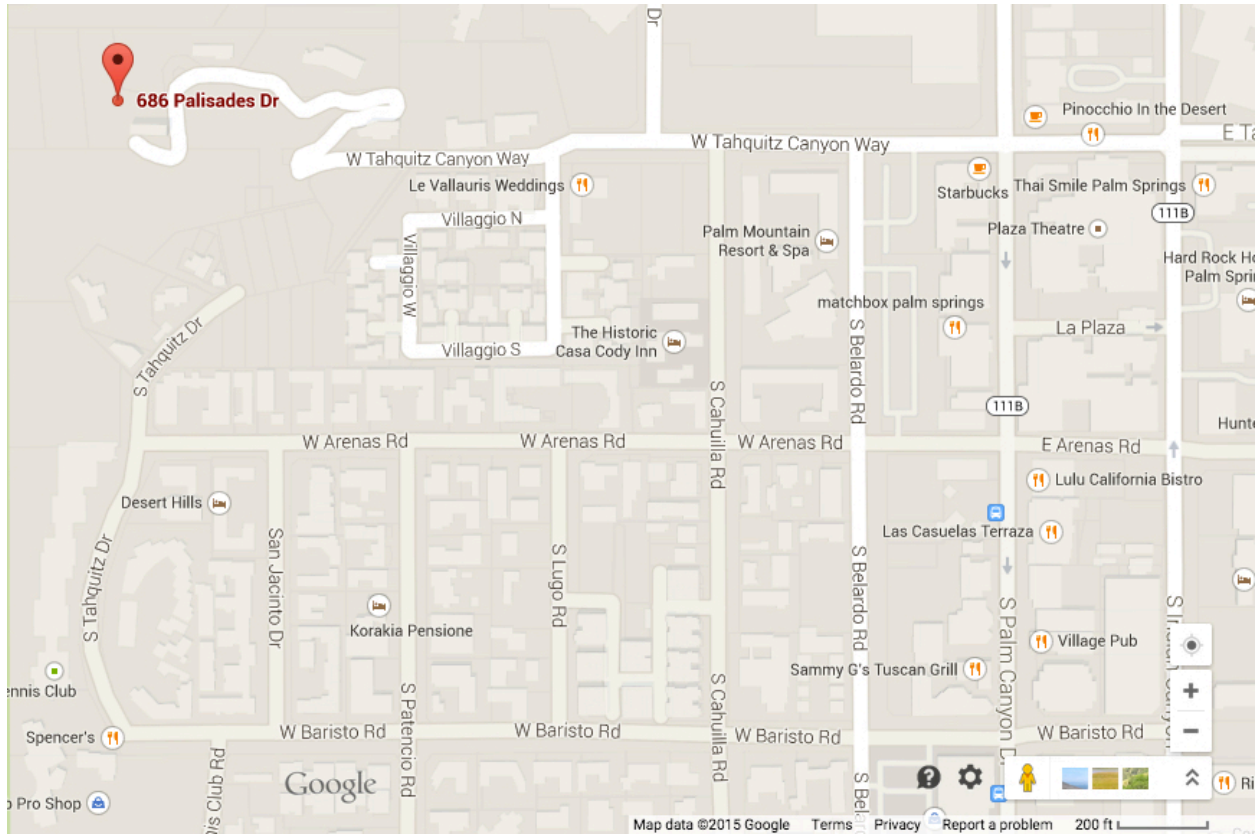
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Location Map

Latitude: 33.823364

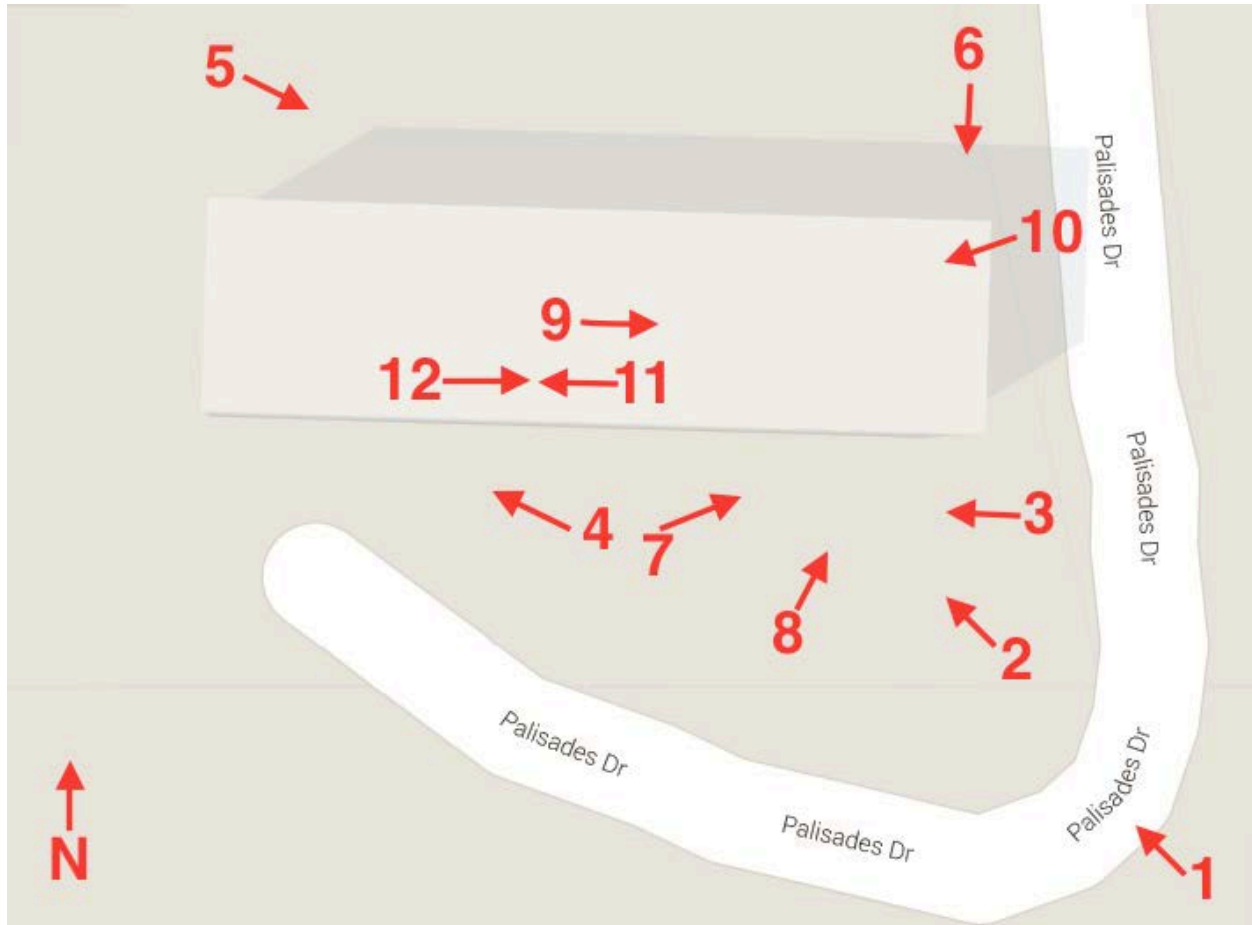
Longitude: -116.553432



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Sketch Map/Photo Key



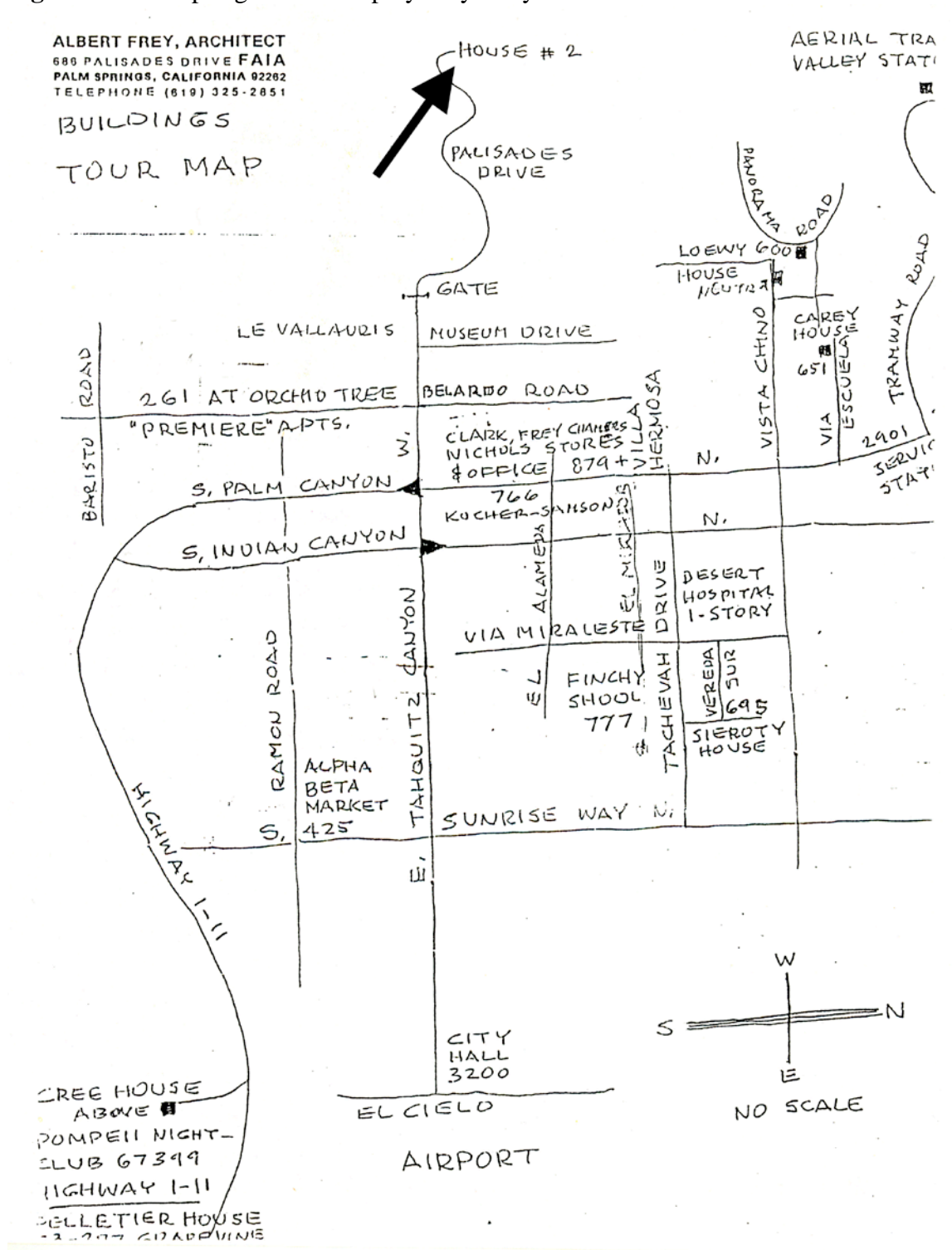
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Figure 1. Palm Springs sketch map by Frey. Frey House II indicated with arrow.



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Figure 2. West and south elevations, looking northeast, 1965.



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Figure 3. South elevation, looking west, 1965.



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Figure 4. North elevation, looking south, 1965.



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Figure 5. Interior view, living/dining area, looking east, 1965.



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