

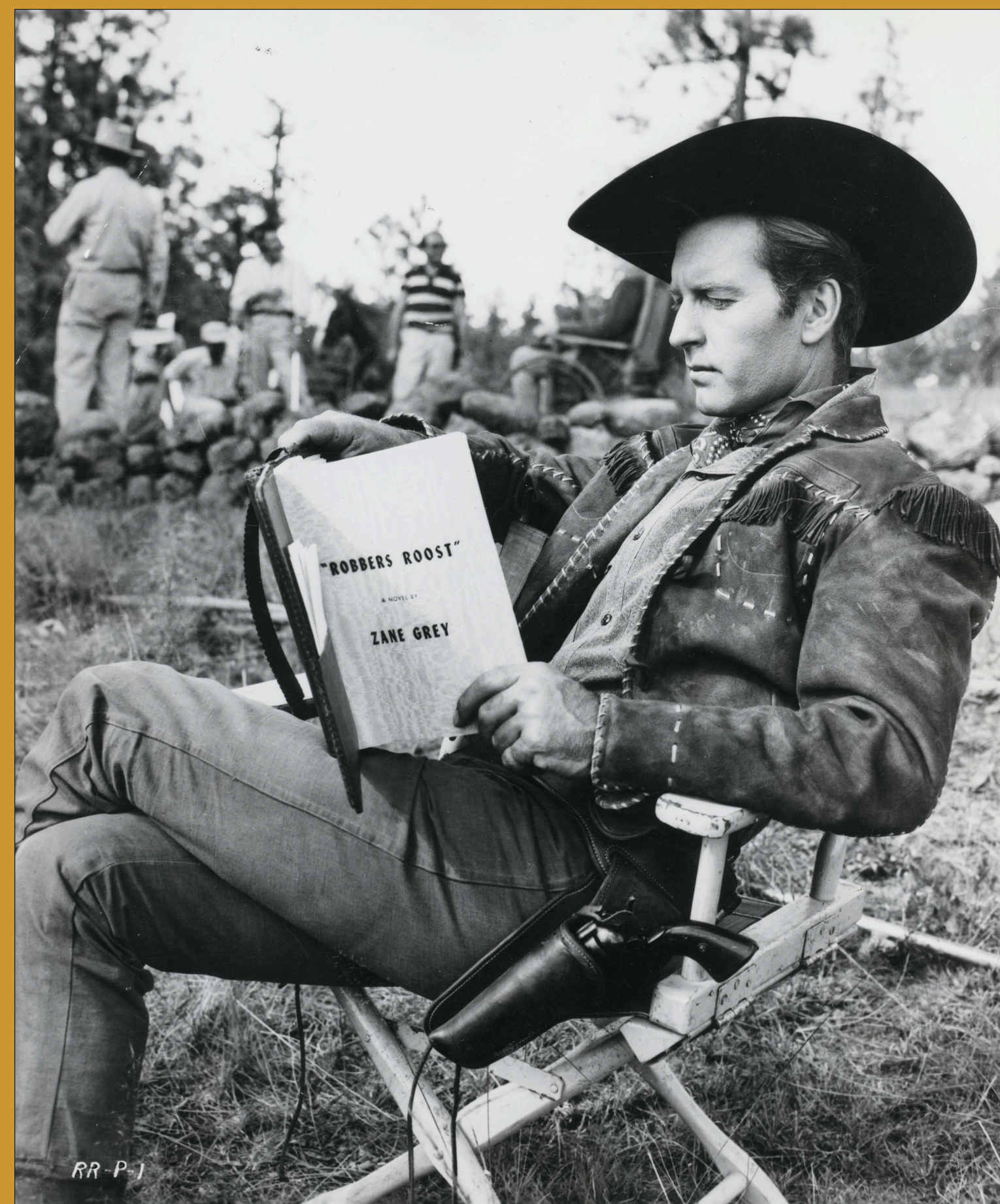
MONTGOMERY

meets MODERNISM

Two Americas

The Spirit of the West

For many Americans, the trauma of World War II generated a sense of nostalgia for the rugged, heroic cowboy of the Western frontier. Hollywood was no exception and the Western film genre dominated theaters from the early twentieth century to the 1960s. With a mythic



George Montgomery on the set of *ROBBERS ROOST*, 1955. Story by Zane Grey, United Artists release.

vision of the West, these films celebrated cowboys, vilified Native Americans, and featured the vast landscapes of the American frontier.

Known for portraying the handsome cowboy in films that featured the Old West, George Montgomery was also an art collector, sculptor, and furniture craftsman. Many of the objects in this gallery were either collected by or created by Montgomery himself. In 1943 Montgomery married singer/actress Dinah Shore and they divided their time between Hollywood

and Palm Springs. Soon after, he established a cabinet shop and worked with as many as 20 cabinet makers for nearly 40 years designing and crafting traditional furniture that favored early American styles. Influenced by the work of master artist Charles Russell, Montgomery also began creating bronze sculptures of fellow actors as well as "cowboys" and "Indians." The art he collected, including Navajo weavings and paintings of the American West, featured traditional Western themes and motifs.

Although a key feature in traditional Western films, the white male cowboy of popular culture is not entirely accurate. Historically the American cowboy is based in the vaquero traditions of Northern Mexico and there were numerous Mexican-American and Native-American cowboys. The profession also attracted a significant number of African-American freedmen after the Civil War.



George Montgomery and Dinah Shore, 1945

The Modern Spirit

While many Americans embraced historical ideals and traditions, others looked toward the future. In the aftermath of World War II, the United States experienced unparalleled economic growth and development inspired by advances in science and technology. By the 1950s, America found its place on the world stage and was developing its identity as a global superpower.

In the arts, modernists abandoned traditional decorative and representational forms. With roots in early twentieth century European movements in painting and architecture, American modernists employed bright colors, elegant geometric forms, and new industrial materials. This postwar spirit of optimism expressed itself with an unprecedented sense of possibility in the future.

Southern California was a hotbed for midcentury modernism in art, architecture, furniture, and design. On the West Coast, artists such as Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg epitomized the best of abstract modernist painting. Palm Springs

became known for its innovative modernist architects such as Albert Frey (pictured above), William Cody, Richard Neutra, Donald Wexler, and E. Stewart Williams (architect of the Palm Springs Art Museum), to name a few. They adapted contemporary materials, styles, and techniques that became as much of a tourist attraction as Palm Springs's dry climate, mountain vistas, and swimming pools. Integrating indoors and out, their modernist buildings transformed this small desert village into a model for new designs for living.



Modernist architect Albert Frey is photographed by Julius Shulman in 1956 at Frey House I (with second-story addition), Palm Springs. ©The J. Paul Getty Trust



In 1938 Julius Shulman photographed the Grace Lewis Miller House, Palm Springs, designed by architect Richard J. Neutra. ©The J. Paul Getty Trust

Palm Springs

Incorporated in 1938 (the same year as the founding of the Palm Springs Art Museum), early twentieth century Palm Springs was a typical Southwestern desert town known as a place for healing and renewal. Just over 100 miles from Hollywood, it became increasingly popular as a stylish community for the entertainment industry. Many moving here built houses that celebrated the past, combining Spanish Colonial style with pueblo adobe building traditions. Others brought a passion for the new, designing sleek, modern houses notable for their clean lines, use of glass, and their inventive use of industrial materials. By the 1950s, Palm Springs was America's foremost desert resort. Today, Palm Springs has again become a top tourist destination known for its confluence of historical and modern styles, spirits, and attitudes