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Palm Springs Life

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IN THREE SECTIONS

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KIRK and ANNE DOUGLAS

ARE THEY REALLY LEAVING PALM SPRINGS?

AND: The Desert Faces **Y2K**

The Player Behind the **Gary Player** Course

PLUS:

The **Glorious Art** of Gao Xiao-Hua

The Douglases, poolside, enjoy the Palm Springs lifestyle they helped make popular.

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BY HOWARD JOHNS

The Great and the Beautiful

For 42 years the Douglases have embraced the desert with a lust for life. Is it all coming to an end?

■ Anne and Kirk Douglas relax in the living room of their Palm Springs home. Atop the wall is a carved wooden piece from India as well as an African tribal piece. Inset: An abstract bronze sculpture from the William Holden Collection.

International-acclaimed actor. Best-selling author. Dedicated humanitarian. Kirk Douglas is all that — and more.

A Palm Springs icon, Douglas has lived here for so long he's almost part of the scenery. Tour buses make daily stops outside his home; fans ring the doorbell.

For years this energetic performer could be seen jogging several miles to get his morning paper, playing tennis with locals or posing for snapshots and signing autographs for starstruck out-of-towners. He has been a veritable one-man tourist promotion over the past four decades, extolling the virtues of the city he loves to virtually anyone who'll listen. And even though he is considering selling his treasured home and moving to Montecito, it is with mixed emotions because of his close ties. ("The longer I think about it, the more I want to stay," he says wistfully.)

Whether supporting his favorite charity or donating time and money to a worthy cause like the city library or museum, Douglas has always been there — ready and willing to lend a hand. He's now firmly a part of Palm Springs history.

In the process, Kirk and his wife, Anne, have become familiar faces to us all, both as friends and neighbors. Their warm smiles, genuine interest in people and heartfelt concern for the community continue to inspire residents and visitors alike who flock to this thriving desert Mecca. *continued*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN KAMINSKY

Palm Springs has been a big chunk of our lives," admits Douglas, seated on a comfortable sofa in the spacious living room of his estate. "So much has happened here," he says, recalling almost a half century in the desert.

It is a warm spring day and Douglas, the international star of countless Westerns, war movies and adventure epics, is dressed casually in a short-sleeved cotton shirt and slacks — quite a contrast from the costumes he wore as those bare-chested, sword-wielding heroes of his movies.

The advancing years have not dimmed his formidable appearance, despite his having suffered a stroke three years ago that left him with difficulty speaking. He is eager to talk about his life, his films and, most of all, his favorite house.

This is the place where Douglas spends most of his time when he's not working or reading film scripts. It's a gorgeous home, full of warmth and charm. Paintings by contemporary European and American artists, including Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein, adorn the walls.

There are African and pre-Columbian art pieces in every room and abstract bronze and metal sculptures throughout the garden. Valuable antiques are displayed next to cherished mementos from the actor's impressive career, along with framed family portraits and special keepsakes.

"Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn lived in this house for two summers," Douglas reveals with a twinkle in his eye, talking about the clandestine affair the two stars enjoyed under his roof. "They liked the privacy."

Who wouldn't feel the seductive touch of Venus in such a beautiful setting? It's the perfect place for a quiet vacation or a romantic honeymoon. Tracy and Hepburn were not the only ones who enjoyed themselves here.

Over the years many people from all over the world have been entertained in this elegant home, which is located in the Old Las Palmas neighborhood, just a few blocks from downtown. "Vincente Minnelli was married in this room," indicates Douglas with an impressive sweep of his hand, referring to MGM's famed movie director and husband of Judy Garland, the parents of Liza Minnelli.

"Senator Robert Kennedy. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Lady Bird Johnson," he continues. "They all spent weekends here."

Douglas glances around him, a look of pride and satisfaction on his chiseled, granite-like face. He turns and points to the patio and swimming pool. "My sons Michael and Joel played there," he says with a twinge of nostalgia, his eyes gazing into the water where his children once splashed. "We have so many memories."

Memories of good friends like Burt Lancaster, Gregory and Veronique Peck, Yul Brynner. Famous houseguests such as Billy and Audrey Wilder, Warren Beatty, Natalie Wood.

Kirk's wife, Anne, a petite blonde woman with a slender figure and vibrant blue eyes, plans to erect a plaque in honor of all the famous people who have passed through the doorway. It is a long list.

"I remember many years ago when it was my wife's birthday," Kirk recalls with affection. "Frank Sinatra insisted on bringing all his cooking utensils and ingredients to our house and making Anne an Italian feast that he served himself."

Douglas pauses, savoring the moment.

"This is a wonderful house," he exclaims. The actor's two dogs, Danny and Banshee, playing at his feet, bark excitedly. He leans down and pets them. A maid opens the patio door; the dogs run out onto the lawn.

Douglas watches them chase each other from the window and smiles. "The desert is a good place to live," he says, nodding his famous head. "It's completely different from New York or Los Angeles. You can relax here."

Although Douglas has never made a film in the desert, it still plays a large part in his creative process. "Most of my autobiography was written right here," he says, referring to *The Ragman's Son* and *Climbing the Mountain: My Search for Meaning*. "I feel I do a lot more of my creative work here," he adds, "in addition to relaxing."

And relaxing is what Kirk and Anne Douglas like to do when they come here on weekends or between pictures. "When I'm here, I do a lot more exercise," he says. "I play golf, I do calisthenics and I swim." (The Douglases are members of O'Donnell Golf Course and Tamarisk Country Club.)

Anne, however, prefers to play tennis at home and have barbecues. "We don't go out much," she says, joining her husband on the sofa, "because we do a lot of that in LA."

Whether entertaining guests at their home or dining out at fine restaurants, like Le Vallauris or Sorrentino's, the Douglases — because of their celebrity status and philanthropic reputation — are among the city's premier social set. There are always special occasions and exclusive gatherings for them to attend.

■ **The front hallway of the Douglas manse takes the visitor through a geographical tour of the arts. One is initially greeted by Walter Emroy's 1968 sculpture "Unicycle Man." The carousel horse is from a defunct Italian carnival. The wall carvings are from Italy and the deer above the flagstone wall is from the Philippines. The large painting is Warren Brandt's "Reclining Figure," 1964.**

But when they get a chance, this devoted show-biz couple looks forward to the simple pleasures in life such as watching TV. "In the evenings Kirk and I enjoy a cocktail in front of the fireplace," Anne says. "It's a chance for us to talk about what we've each been doing during the day."

Kirk and Anne's enduring marriage, one of Hollywood's great success stories, has spanned almost as many decades as Kirk's own acting career. They met while Anne, who speaks four languages, was involved in public relations for various film productions in Paris in the early fifties. She was in charge of protocol and foreign delegations at the Cannes Film Festival where Kirk was a frequent and well-known visitor.

They were married in 1954 and have two sons: Peter, a producer, writer and director and Eric, an actor. Kirk's other two sons Michael and Joel are from his first marriage to British actress Diana Dill.

"The secret to a happy marriage," Anne reveals, "is sharing. Kirk makes his own artistic decisions and I make the financial ones. But we consult each other on important issues and do most things together." Kirk agrees. "You have to trust to make a marriage work."

The Douglases' home has become an annual meeting place for family, friends and neighbors. Each year Kirk and Anne look forward to regular visits from their sons, as well as their grandchildren: Michael's teenage son Cameron (who is Anne's godson) and Peter's two young children Kelsey and Tyler.

"At Thanksgiving I fly them all to Palm Springs and we have four days together," says an ecstatic Kirk. "My grandchildren live in Montecito so we have been spending some time there and some time here."

Anne recalls when her husband first took her to Palm Springs in the mid-fifties. "He told us we were going to the desert," she says with a smile. "When you hear the word *desert* you think of the Sahara. Then you fly over Palm Springs and you see all those patches of blue and green which are swimming pools. Within two hours of arriving Kirk and I rented bicycles and we've never wanted to leave since."

Kirk echoes her feelings. "You know, I've spent so much time here that I never want to leave."

It was a love of tennis that brought the health-conscious actor to the desert more than 50 years ago, back when tennis was the film capital's favorite sport. "I would drive down from Los Angeles to the Racquet Club," Kirk reminisces, who made his first trip here in 1946.

After checking into his hotel room, Kirk would eagerly hit the courts where, along with fellow actors George Montgomery, George's wife Dinah Shore, William Holden and Lucille Ball, he played in regular celebrity tournaments at the posh establishment. "Van Heflin got me in there," he says, commenting on the Racquet Club's strict Members Only policy.

From 1934 to 1959, under the expert stewardship of its owner and co-founder Charles Farrell, the Racquet Club with its four tennis courts, Olympic-size swimming pool, first-class restaurant and world famous Bamboo Bar (designed by ace Paramount director Mitchell Leisen) was a magnet for Hollywood's elite.

Stars such as Bing Crosby, Cary Grant and Ginger Rogers had private bungalows. Marilyn Monroe was discovered there.

Farrell's constant promotion of the city earned him the sobriquet "Mr. Palm Springs." The effect was not lost on Douglas who got to know the club's charismatic owner, even recuperating there from a bout of pneumonia in 1952.

"This was an oasis for people in the movie industry," Kirk remembers. "You were sure to see a lot of stars like Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy. Edward G. Robinson was standing by the pool puffing a cigar."

He shakes his head in disbelief.

"Errol Flynn! I couldn't believe it," gasps Douglas, recalling the popular Tasmanian devil who had women fainting in droves. "He sauntered in, teeth gleaming, skin bronzed, muscled like a Greek god, a tennis racket in one arm and a stunning nymphet clinging to the other. The Racquet Club is what made Palm Springs."

At the time, Douglas was a young up-and-coming dramatic actor. His wavy blond hair, piercing blue eyes and prominent cleft in his chin were unusual qualities in a leading man back then. His first film roles opposite Barbara Stanwyck in the classic film noir *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* and Robert Mitchum in *Out of the Past* sizzled with raw emotional intensity. Such performances mesmerized audiences of the day and impressed the critics.

Kirk received his first Oscar nomination as the ambitious prizefighter who punches his way to stardom in the outstanding boxing saga *Champion*. It was a role the passionate actor was born to play and it made him a star.

Fame had another benefit for the handsome Douglas: It turned him into a major sex symbol. He was romantically linked to Gene Tierney, Joan Crawford and Marlene Dietrich, dated Rita Hayworth, Lauren Bacall and Patricia Neal and was briefly engaged to Italian actress Pier Angeli. ("One look at Kirk and I was a goner," Bacall told the crowd at the recent Fifth Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards in March where she presented him with the Lifetime Achievement Award. "It was Instant Crush.")

Douglas was nominated for a second Oscar as the tough movie producer who falls in love with a troubled actress in the superb *The Bad and the Beautiful*. He often played unscrupulous and desperate characters driven by lust or greed.

But Douglas' image as the relentless extrovert was just a work of fiction. "I was never a champion like the characters I played," he confesses. "I was acting out the role of someone I wanted to be."

Throughout his early life Kirk was conscious of this class distinction, the haves, or in his case, the have-nots. "My parents were illiterate Russian Jewish peasant immigrants. I was one of seven children and their only son," he explains. "We had nothing." These humble beginnings gave Douglas the drive and determination to succeed in a highly competitive business.

■ The painting above the living room fireplace is by Antony Padovano. "It's hanging upside down," Anne confides, "because it goes better with our furniture that way." The painting, incidentally, changes color as you move past; it turns red as you go right, blue as you turn left. Inset: Kirk, still *Champion*. "I wish I hadn't made a collage of those movie posters," Anne says of the "wallpaper." "They were really valuable before I cut them up."

The Years with Kubrick

■ **Kirk helps establish Kubrick by appearing in *Paths*.**

Stanley Kubrick was a conservative 28-year-old filmmaker whose third film as a director, *The Killing*, about a daring racetrack robbery, had been a small hit when Kirk Douglas encountered him in 1956.

Born in the Bronx section in New York of Jewish parents, Kubrick was a shy, quiet man with an intellectual mind, according to his biographer Vincent LoBrutto. He spoke with an Eastern accent, chain smoked and read voraciously.

He did not look like a typical Hollywood director. He had pale skin, large eyes and short uncombed hair (he was not then bearded). He dressed like a magazine photographer — his previous profession — and had no interest in fashion. His whole life seemed to revolve around films.

Kubrick had made several documentaries; his first film *Day of the Fight*, which explored the world of boxing, had been bought by RKO. Acknowledged as a camera virtuoso for his crisp, evocative images, Kubrick had two other feature films to his credit, the low-budget *Fear and Desire* and *Killer's Kiss*.

Kubrick and his partner James Harris had been trying to interest MGM in a book called *Paths of Glory*, about three World War I soldiers who were executed for cowardice. They met with producer Dore Schary but he was unimpressed. So Harris-Kubrick took the idea to United Artists; the studio informed them that it would not consider the script until it was rewritten or a top star was attached — what's known in the industry as "insurance."

Enter Kirk Douglas, whose company Bryna Productions was looking for new properties. Douglas had seen *The Killing* and wanted to meet the director. "What other projects do you have?" Douglas asked. Kubrick told him about *Paths of Glory*, describing the plum role of the disillusioned army colonel who leads a mutiny. Douglas read Calder Willingham's literate script and was convinced he had to do the film.

A meeting was arranged in Palm Springs with Harris, Kubrick, their agent Ronnie Lubin, Douglas and his agent Ray Stark (whose client list included Marilyn Monroe and Richard Burton). A deal was made but United Artists was still unwilling to commit to the film. "Stanley, I don't think this picture will ever make a nickel," Douglas is credited with saying. "But we have to make it." *continued on page 54*

The late producer Hal Wallis, a longtime resident of Rancho Mirage, was the man who discovered Douglas and signed him to a personal contract. A top producer who had worked for high-powered studio bosses Darryl Zanuck and Jack Warner, both of whom once owned homes in Palm Springs, Wallis was the man responsible for making the definitive wartime love story *Casablanca*, which catapulted its two stars Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman into the big time.

Renowned as a shrewd businessman with an infallible eye for talent, Wallis was instantly taken by Kirk's impressive physique and animal magnetism. "He had worked for Western Union, eked out a living as a waiter at Schrafft's and had just come out of the Navy when I met him," Wallis recalled in his autobiography *Starmaker*.

According to Wallis, it was Lauren Bacall who urged him to take a peek at Douglas who was appearing in a small Broadway play, *The Wind Is Ninety*. The year was 1945. "I went to see it in a record-breaking June heat," said Wallis, adding that "Kirk had a jauntiness, a self-confident grace that commanded attention." He was hooked.

Wallis produced several of Douglas' early movies and the two became lasting friends. "Kirk," noted Wallis, "never gave me any trouble nor was there any hint in his personal life of the savage quality that gave such color to his performances on film."

Those performances included a brilliant portrayal of the suicidal Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh in *Lust for Life* (his third Oscar nomination), and a tubercular Doc Holliday in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, opposite his good pal Burt Lancaster, a fellow Hal Wallis discovery. The two actors remained lifelong friends and appeared in seven movies together such as the exciting political thriller *Seven Days in May* and, most recently, the affectionate gangster spoof 1986's *Tough Guys*.

Although hard-edged roles were his specialty, Douglas was likable and appealing in the entertaining, fantasy-adventure *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. He was sympathetic, too, in socially-important films such as *Paths of Glory* with its powerful anti-war message. (See sidebar at left.)

Douglas went on to fight memorable bloodthirsty battles in the large-scale historic epics *Ulysses*, *The Vikings* and *Spartacus*, where he led a spectacular revolt of slaves against Rome.

That last one was a daring and controversial film that pitted Douglas against the Hollywood establishment. An outspoken liberal, Kirk was among the first actors to form his own production company, called Bryna (named for his mother), to protect his artistic freedom. In addition, he helped break the Hollywood blacklist — which was denying employment to 300 actors, writers and directors because of their political beliefs — by hiring jailed Communist writer Dalton Trumbo and giving him full screen credit for his superb script for *Spartacus*.

"I'm glad I made the decision to give Trumbo credit," Douglas says today. "I could not have stood the hypocrisy of not using his name." At the time it was not a popular decision. Douglas risked ridicule and even censure for his actions. Thirty years passed before his courageous stand was finally recognized and noted by the American Civil Liberties Union.

In 1991 Universal Studios spent $1 million on a widescreen reissue of *Spartacus*, restoring scenes of violence and implied homosexuality that had been objected to by the Legion of Decency, a Catholic censorship board.

Douglas was at the peak of his career as a rugged Hollywood leading man when he and Anne purchased their desert home, located on Via Lola, in 1957, three years after it was built.

This fine example of California-style desert modernism originally belonged to Robert Howard, a wealthy Los Angeles sportsman and investor.

A big handsome man with an eye for beautiful women, Howard had inherited $5 million from his father, Charles Howard, Jr., the son of a Buick automobile dealer and turf man who owned the famous racehorse Seabiscuit.

In 1939 Howard married Andrea Leeds, a wholesome movie starlet who was nominated for an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in the biting backstage drama *Stage Door*, co-starring Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers. Andrea retired from the screen to devote more time to her husband; she later ran an exclusive jewelry store on Palm Canyon Drive which sold expensive gifts, jewelry and *objets d'art*.

In 1951 Bob and Andrea Howard moved permanently to Palm Springs and bought the Colonial House, a luxury hotel on the corner of Indian Avenue and Via Colusa. It was an impressive structure with white colonnades and a red tile roof. The long verandahs provided dramatic vistas of the surrounding mountains and nearby village.

Built in 1936 by Al Wertheimer, a member of Detroit's notorious Purple Gang, who owned The Dunes in Cathedral

Photo by Allen Lane

City, the hotel featured a high-class restaurant and bar, as well as an underground gambling casino which could be reached only through a secret passageway.

Prominent local architect Stewart Williams and interior designer O.E.L. Graves were hired to remodel the plush hotel, adding an additional 50 rooms and parking. It reopened for the 1952 season as Howard Manor, now the Palms.

The Howards also began developing land they owned on Via Lola. The area, originally known as Las Palmas Estates, was first developed in the 1920s. Its quiet, tree-lined streets and close proximity to Mt. San Jacinto had long been a haven for members of the Hollywood film community.

Among the world-famous celebrities who lived there were thirties matinee idol William Powell, singer Rudy Vallee, actor Alan Ladd and the Douglases.

Howard selected local architects Donald Wexler and Richard Harrison to design a new home for his family. A Minnesota native, Wexler had come to Los Angeles while studying architecture. After he graduated, Wexler was hired by leading contemporary architect Richard Neutra as a draftsman in his Silver Lake office. *continued on page 34*

■ **Movie memories, memorable roles. Atop: The new re-release poster for the classic *Spartacus*. At left: the poster art for the all-star *Cast a Giant Shadow*. Following two pages: Paradise Found in Palm Springs, the breathtaking backyard of the Douglas estate. Oh, the stories those palms could tell!**

In 1952 Wexler came to the desert and went to work for William Cody, the chief architect of Tamarisk Country Club. While working for Cody, Wexler met another young architect named Richard Harrison and they became business partners. One of their first commissions was Bob and Andrea Howard's house in Palm Springs.

The builder was Robert Higgins, "one of the leading contractors in the desert," according to *Palm Springs Life*'s precursor *The Villager*. Higgins built Frank Bogert's Palm Springs residence and also constructed Desert Braemar, a senior community of 100 homes in Rancho Mirage.

Bob Howard's home was typical of most single-family residences of the day: It had low ceilings, lots of glass and flagstone walls. "It was a modern wood frame, post-and-beam structure with an asphalt and gravel roof," recounts Wexler, who later designed TV star and recording artist Dinah Shore's glamorous home on Hermosa Place.

"Richard was really instrumental in the design of Bob Howard's house. He oriented the living space to avoid the sun and chose building material that complemented the desert," explains Wexler. "We also designed Robert Higgins' own home on Mesquite Avenue, which was one of the first houses built in Deepwell," he reveals.

In 1956 Howard, whose health had been declining since undergoing a major operation several years before, sold the house to Robert Higgins and moved his family a few doors down the street. Higgins then sold the house to Kirk Douglas.

(Howard's health worsened and he died of kidney failure in a Las Vegas hospital in 1962. He was 45. Andrea Leeds survived her husband by two decades; she died in 1984.)

When Kirk and Anne Douglas bought the house, they immediately saw its potential and began making plans to enlarge it. "It was a little house and we intended to make it bigger," remembers the actor, who purchased land at the rear of the property so he could add on a tennis court.

After moving in, the Douglases became one of the street's most recognizable residents. They were in good company: Their immediate neighbors included El Mirador owner Ray Ryan, who had a suite in the Sunset Tower Apartment Hotel, independent film producer Edward Small and Hollywood film executive Leo Spitz. Donald Duncan, the parking meter magnate, lived behind them on Hermosa Place.

Other famous residents throughout the years have included Jeanette and Winthrop Rockefeller, the former governor of Arkansas and Nelson's brother, and MCA chairman emeritus Lew Wasserman, one of Kirk's former agents.

Another important homeowner was Sidney Korshak, the powerful Los Angeles labor lawyer who defended Al Capone's gang and had close ties to the Chicago underworld. Korshak's list of clients included Santa Anita racetrack, Hollywood Park and the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Korshak wanted to sell Kirk and Anne a piece of the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas. They had graciously declined. "After a barbecue at Sidney Korshak's home one day, I walked into the kitchen and was astounded to see George Raft doing the dishes," says Douglas. "I backed out and mentioned this to Sidney. He said, 'Oh, George likes to do that!'"

Sitting in the plush living room of the Douglases' home today, it's easy to imagine the glitz and glamour of cocktail time in old Palm Springs, when hosts served martinis and hors d'oeuvres and guests sang and played the piano.

"Did you know Moss Hart lived next door?" asks Kirk, describing the renowned playwright and theatrical director of *My Fair Lady* who was married to actress and TV game show staple Kitty Carlisle. "Jack Warner's daughter Barbara lived down the street," he gestures. "Around the corner was Liberace and Elvis Presley. Dean Martin lived three blocks away."

Palm Springs has seen a lot of changes since the Douglases arrived in town.

"When he first moved here," Anne explains, "the houses on our street had septic tanks so I took up a collection and we eventually got sewer lines put in. I also had the telegraph poles removed and the cables placed underground. But it wasn't easy. Many homeowners didn't want to pay for it."

The street is full of history. "Sidney and Alexandra Sheldon's first home on Via Lola once belonged to Henry and Nancy Ittleson," says Anne, referring to a famous New York financial family who pioneered mental health research and whose multi-million dollar endowments promote the fine arts. (Henry was chairman of CIT Financial Corporation.) She continues: "The Sheldon's second home, which they use as a guest house, is next door. It had belonged to the Rockefellers who purchased it from Kitty Hart after Moss died."

Long-lasting friendships were also forged here. "The Douglases have been good friends of mine for a very long time," recalls their neighbor Bernice ("Bee") Korshak. "My husband and I were staying with Frank Sinatra when Kirk and Anne showed us a house that was for sale on their street. Sidney wasn't looking to buy a house but they convinced us." She pauses. "They even threw a party for our 25th wedding anniversary."

James and Peggy Greenbaum of Rancho Mirage have known the Douglases for more than 20 years. Formerly neighbors — they owned the Dinah Shore home on Hermosa Place which was sold three years ago to Broadway composer Jerry Herman of *Hello, Dolly!* fame — the two couples have remained extremely good friends.

And it's all because of adjoining tennis courts!

"When we moved in," says James Greenbaum, a well-known Louisiana businessman and local philanthropist, "we decided to build a tennis court and that's how we met Kirk. He would throw our balls back over the fence."

Then there was the incident of the missing grapefruits. "Every now and then our dogs would start barking and we'd look outside and see Kirk picking fruit off the trees," says Greenbaum, laughing. "So we bought them some trees. We thought it was cheaper than having them raid our lawn!"

After the Douglases finished adding their own tennis court, there would be matches going on both courts all day. "For five years we had the Anne Douglas Tennis Tournament, a competitive but friendly get-together of food and fun," says Greenbaum.

One of the regular players was Paul Shepard, a handsome young Realtor with an excellent backhand. When it came time to sell two lots of land Kirk owned in the neighborhood, he called Paul and a fast friendship developed. "That's how we met," Shepard says today. "I found a buyer for those lots. We started talking tennis and they invited me over!" (It is this same Shepard who is handling any sale of the Via Lola house, should the Douglases decide to pack up.)

When the Douglases asked the city planning commission for permission to install lights on their tennis court so they could play at night, their request was denied because they were told it would create an "undesirable noise problem." Anne Douglas herself met with the city manager Donald Blubaugh and approval was finally granted. "He said to just go ahead and do it," remembers Anne, whose affectionate nickname throughout the neighborhood is "The Mayor of Via Lola."

Every chance they got, the Douglases did something to improve their property and in doing so they helped preserve the local architectural history. "They enlarged the dining and living areas, and added skylights," says Realtor Shepard. "They also enclosed the garages to make another guest suite and added a three-car carport. In addition, they created a new facade with interior atriums."

Today, the luxurious 4,420-square-foot home sits on almost an acre of land. There are dual master suites plus two guest suites with private patios, a large living area with fireplace and wet bar and an updated gourmet kitchen with maid's quarters. There's also, Shepard is eager to point out, a gym, steam room, sauna, separate guest house, tennis pavilion, pool room and spa.

"The kitchen was the last room that we remodeled," says Kirk. "It became an obsession for me. I was constantly after the plumbers, carpenters, painters and cabinetmakers. Now it's finished."

An art to their lives: The Douglases' outdoor garden is a festival of sculpture. At top: John Kearny's metallic ox, made from automobile bumpers. Middle: "Banjo Man" by Gene Logan. Above: The small sculpture in the home's front atrium, depicting a young boy pulling a cart, is also by Logan.

Art is one of Kirk and Anne's main interests. They were encouraged to collect art by Anne's friend, actor Edward G. Robinson, who owned one of the world's largest private collections of French Impressionist paintings, and by the famed writer-producer Billy Wilder, himself a noted art collector, who directed Kirk in the searing condemnation of tabloid journalism, the ahead-of-its-time *Ace in the Hole*, also known as *The Big Carnival*.

"The first artwork I ever bought was a lithograph by Toulouse-Lautrec," Kirk recalls with collector's pride, describing his earliest acquisition, a rare, black-and-orange portrait of Montmartre bistro owner Aristide Bruant.

"It was 1948; I paid $500 and gulped when I did it. That was a lot of money to me back then. I still have the portrait."

Veteran Palm Springs character actor Marc Lawrence, Kirk's friend and co-star from *I Walk Alone*, helped him frame the poster which Douglas hung over the fireplace in his home. "I made him buy his first important pieces of art when we were in Europe together," recalls the gravelly-voiced Lawrence today. "He has a good eye for what's valuable."

For example: An original clay vase by Picasso which Anne bought for $150 is now worth an astounding $100,000.

"Art was one of the subjects that bought us together," Anne says. "Then after we were married it became a joint venture. I saw a painting and Kirk said we should buy it."

It was the beginning of an extensive art collection, including works by Dubuffet, Braque, Vuillard, Mondrian, Chagall, Picasso and Miro that would be worth millions of dollars eventually. "I couldn't live without art," says Anne. "Paintings are like children. You get attached to them."

But even children grow up and leave home.

In 1990 the Douglases sold the majority of their impressive art collection at Christie's in Manhattan. Among the 40 drawings, prints and canvases auctioned were a Chagall ($1.5 million), Picasso ($600,000), Balthus ($900,000) and 16 other masterpieces. Proceeds from the sale of these paintings went to the Douglas Charitable Foundation, which the couple started in the early sixties. *continued on page 47*

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The Foundation currently is restoring neglected playgrounds in Los Angeles schools to give children a clean, safe place to play. "Anne and I firmly believe that playing not only leads to better learning," says Kirk, "but is one of the basic rights of childhood that we should all work to protect."

Douglas is a strong advocate of education. "When I was a kid, reading was very important to me," he says. (He grew up reading Horatio Alger stories and later taught his own mother to read.) "I have spent my whole life reading and I still do. I think it's very important for kids to read."

Throughout his long and distinguished career, Kirk Douglas has made films that highlight his concern for the oppressed and underprivileged. "Whether it's *Lust for Life* or *Spartacus* or *Paths of Glory*," he explains, "all my films have something important to say."

Kirk traveled to Israel to make *The Juggler*, *Cast a Giant Shadow* and *Remembrance of Love* that dealt with Jewish religious and political issues. His favorite is the contemporary Western *Lonely Are The Brave*. "I love that film," he says.

More recently, Douglas championed the rights of the elderly in the TV movie *Amos* about the abuse of patients in a nursing home and attacked the stigma of dyslexia in *The Secret*. In the process he has made good by doing good, taking roles that pricked the social conscience of America. And along the way he made himself a fortune. But he never lost sight of the true values in life and he never forgot his roots.

"If you have more than other people," suggests Douglas, "you should share it. After all, what can you do with money? You spend it, you give it away or the government takes it. I come from abject poverty, so all my life I have felt obligated to help other people."

That's why the Douglases support so many charities. They know what it's like to be poor.

"Some people are scared by fame or success," says Kirk. "I think you should be grateful, as my wife and I are, for any good fortune that you have had."

Since 1963 Kirk and Anne have visited more than 45 countries around the world as goodwill ambassadors on behalf of the U.S. State Department, talking about the importance of democracy and freedom. In 1981 President Jimmy Carter presented Kirk with the Medal of Freedom in recognition of his outstanding diplomatic work. Kirk has also been honored by governments in France, Italy and Portugal. In 1990 he was made an *Officer de la Legion d'Honneur* for his distinguished service to France in arts and letters.

Closer to home, the Douglases have always been loyal and enthusiastic supporters of Palm Springs. Whether throwing out the first ball of the season at the Angels Stadium, back when the city hosted the minor league franchise, or hosting one charity event after another, they remain among the city's biggest boosters.

In 1992 Kirk and Anne Douglas were named Palm Springs Citizens of the Year in recognition of their support of Desert Hospital (now Desert Regional Medical Center), Palm Springs Desert Museum, Temple Isaiah, the Desert AIDS Project, Parks for People and the Palm Springs Youth Center. *continued on page 48*

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The late former Mayor Sonny Bono announced that he wanted to change El Cielo Road, a half-mile loop near the Palm Springs Regional Airport to Kirk Douglas Drive, but the city voted against it. Letters of support poured into a local newspaper.

Famous Palm Springs resident and former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Don Meredith said, "Only a street named for Kirk Douglas? How about a mountain?"

But the city remained firm in its decision. Officials said it would be too expensive and inconvenient to residents. But it didn't stop the outpouring of love and affection.

"Kirk has been one of our most active citizens," praises former Palm Springs mayor Frank Bogert. "Every time we had a function, he appeared."

Kirk was on hand, for example, when Desert Regional Medical Center held a special screening of *Here's to the Winners*, a medical documentary which depicted the hospital's various facilities and services. Douglas, who narrated the film, presented the $2 million check on behalf of the hospital's foundation to then-chairman Howard Wiefels for the purchase of new MRI imaging equipment. Telegrams were received from stars such as Frank Sinatra congratulating Douglas on the occasion.

A Palm Springs Desert Museum Gala saluted Kirk and Anne for their dedication to the museum. Friends Walter Annenberg, President Gerald Ford and Marvin Davis were among the guests whose contributions raised more than $300,000.

"Anne and Kirk Douglas have provided significant support for the museum for decades," says Janice Lyle, executive director of the museum. "They were very generous during the renovation of the Annenberg Theater and Anne Douglas continues to serve on the Museum's Board of Trustees."

The Douglases also marched in the first Desert AIDS Walk in an effort to increase awareness and help educate the public about the disease. "Gays are a vital force in the arts," says Douglas, who has lost many close friends to the virus. "They have made tremendous contributions in theater, dance, movies and music."

At a United Jewish Appeal fund-raiser held at the home of his friend and neighbor James Greenbaum, Douglas demonstrated his wry sense of humor. "They said they needed another speaker," Douglas told the star-studded crowd which included Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz and comedian Milton Berle. "One thing the Jews don't need is another speaker," he kidded.

This love of life is not lost on his good friends.

Says President Ford, a close pal of the Douglases, "Kirk is a delightful individual. I think Anne is terrific. They're really a super couple."

"Walter and I have been pleased to count Anne and Kirk among our dearest friends in the Palm Springs area for many, many years," adds close friend Leonore Annenberg. "Being around them is always great fun."

The tributes keep growing.

In the last decade, Douglas has received, in addition to the Screen Actors Guild award mentioned above, the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award, the Kennedy Center Honors and a special Oscar for 50 years as a creative and moral force in the motion picture industry. But it was not all roses.

During this time Douglas was forced to re-evaluate his life. In 1991 he miraculously survived a helicopter crash that killed two other people when a small plane collided with his helicopter during take-off at Santa Paula airport, 50 miles northwest of Los Angeles. "Why didn't I die?" he questions. The tragedy still haunts him.

Although Douglas was reared an Orthodox Jew and yet abandoned formal religion as a teenager, it was after the helicopter crash that he took a renewed interest in his religion. His first novel *Dance With the Devil* touched on these concerns. The title is explained by a character in the book, a Holocaust survivor. "If you lapse into bitterness," the character tells a girl in a refugee camp, "you lock arms with the devil and he makes you dance to his tune."

Other trials have strengthened this renewal.

"When I had my stroke," he reveals about the incident that occurred three years ago, "I thought, 'Oh my God, my life is over.' But it's not. Life goes on."

Indeed, the strong-willed actor did not sit in a corner or get depressed over the setback. Instead, after a long period of adjustment he went back to work.

With a vengeance: He recently returned from Reno, Nevada, where he co-starred with Dan Aykroyd and Lauren Bacall in *Diamonds*, his 82nd film, to be released later this year. And his seventh book, *Young Heroes of the Bible*, will be published in the fall. There are even plans to team Kirk and his superstar son Michael in a forthcoming film.

It is an exciting and productive time in the resilient 82-year-old performer's life and he couldn't be happier. "You should never give up," he insists. "You should always try to reach out, to learn more and to do more, because life is about growth."

Talk turns to the Clinton-Lewinsky affair and, as expected, Douglas doesn't mince words. "I think most people in public office would lie about having an affair," he offers. "But it's not important who a person sleeps with," he argues. "It's their actions and deeds."

Even though the trial is now history and President Clinton was acquitted, Douglas thinks the country is in danger of a new sexual McCarthyism.

"I once asked my son Michael if he would consider going into politics," Kirk says, "and he laughed. He said, 'Sure, Dad, and they'll say I smoked marijuana in college — and I inhaled! Then they'll talk about every love affair I had and didn't have.'" Douglas sighs. "Things are crazy."

After a period of estrangement, father and son are now on excellent terms. "When Michael starred in five blockbusters in a row, I wrote him a note. He told me it's the only note of mine that he kept. It simply said, 'Michael, I'm more proud of how you handle success than I am of your success.' That showed me that he had kept a sense of reality."

Today, they're the best of friends. Says the elder Douglas: "I think Michael is one of the finest young actors we have." He pauses and rubs his chin. "You know, it's difficult to overcome affluence. Some people get famous too quickly. They haven't paid their dues. But all my sons are doing well in the business. I'm extremely proud of them."

The children and grandchildren are the main reasons that the Douglases are considering leaving their home of 40 years. Their reluctance is palpable, however. "Every time we come back here," Kirk reflects, "we say maybe we won't sell the house, after all.

"It's such a beautiful place." ***PSL***