

“I am an architect.

Today I sketched the preliminary plans for a large country house which will be erected in one of the most beautiful residential districts in the world, a district of roomy estates, entrancing vistas, and stately mansions. Sometimes I have dreamed of living there. I could afford such a home.

But this evening, leaving my office, I returned to my own small, inexpensive home in an unrestricted, comparatively undesirable section of Los Angeles. Dreams cannot alter facts; I know that, for the preservation of my own happiness, I must always live in that locality, or in another like it, because... I am a Negro.” – Paul Revere Williams, 1937

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque 775.546.1464 y presione 1969#

Janna Ireland on the Architectural Legacy of Paul Revere Williams in Nevada

This exhibition features the photography of Janna Ireland, who explores the important contributions of architect Paul R. Williams (1894-1980) in Nevada. Williams was the first licensed African American architect to work in the western region of the United States, designing buildings from the 1920s to the 1970s. Williams worked in Nevada from 1934 through 1964, a time when African Americans faced racial discrimination throughout the United States and segregated residential communities were commonplace. Despite this racism, he went on to design over 3,000 architecturally significant structures during his lifetime. Williams first built a name for himself as an architect in southern California. Some of those clients later commissioned him to design their residences in northern and central Nevada. After World War II, Williams expanded his practice into southern Nevada.

In 2021, Janna Ireland was awarded a Peter E. Pool Research Fellowship from the Nevada Museum of Art, and an invitation to survey and photograph all of Williams' buildings in the state of Nevada. She approached his structures with the unique perspective of a contemporary photographer, making images that highlight the intimate interior and exterior details of his buildings. Her poetic response to his work invites reflection and thoughtful contemplation, while encouraging further inquiry and future discoveries.

This exhibition is organized by the Nevada Museum of Art and curated by Associate Curator Carmen Beals. We thank spokesperson Claytee White, scholarly contributors Alicia Barber and Brooke Hodge, and community partners: Our Story, Inc., KME Architects, LGA Architects, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Las Vegas.

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About Janna Ireland

Artist and educator Janna Ireland (born 1985) often uses herself and her loved ones in personal and editorial work that explores family life. In recent years, Ireland's practice expanded to include architectural photography. In 2016, she was invited by architect Barbara Bestor, Executive Director of the Julius Shulman Institute in Los Angeles, to photograph structures in southern California designed by the African American architect Paul R. Williams. Unlike conventional architectural photographs that were intended to document every detail, Ireland's shadowy photographs conjure a moody richness, inviting viewers to focus on unique architectural elements and how they may have been experienced.

In 2020, Ireland's photographs were reproduced in a monograph titled, *Regarding Paul R. Williams: A Photographer's View*, published by Angel City Press. The book was shortlisted for the 2020 Paris Photo–Aperture Foundation First PhotoBook award. In 2021, Ireland was awarded a Peter E. Pool Research Fellowship by the Nevada Museum of Art to document Williams' work in Nevada.

Ireland was born in Philadelphia and currently resides in Los Angeles. She received an M.F.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles and a B.F.A. from New York University. Her work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions across the United States and internationally, and her work is in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the California African American Museum, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Her photographs have been published in *Aperture*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *the Los Angeles Times*, *Architectural Digest*, *the Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times Magazine*.

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About Paul R. Williams

Paul R. Williams was born in 1894 in Los Angeles to parents who migrated there from Tennessee in search of a better climate. He was orphaned in 1898, his parents having died of tuberculosis, and he was raised by foster parents. While not much is known about his upbringing, it's evident that his family recognized the importance of a good education and instilled strong community values in him. Nevertheless, when he expressed his early interest in architecture while in high school, his counselor dissuaded him, asking, "Who ever heard of a Negro being an architect?"

Upon graduation, Williams worked multiple jobs, which exposed him to municipal, civic, and commercial design and taught him the importance of community. Williams opened his own architectural firm in 1922 after passing the American Institute of Architects (AIA) exam and obtaining his professional license. He became the first African American member of AIA in 1923. By the late 1920s, Williams had established himself as a standout architect for upper-middle class residential homes. This was perfect timing for southern California, as the landscape was undergoing rapid development and wealthy clients wanted new homes in Beverly Hills, Hancock Park, Pacific Palisades, and Pasadena. By the 1940s, Williams had earned the nickname "architect to the stars." Among the strategies he adopted for working with White clients was his ability to draw upside-down. This unusual skill enabled him to sketch ideas out for his clients who, because of the norms of the day, dictated that they not sit side-by-side, but rather across from a Black man at a table.

In 2017, the AIA posthumously awarded Williams the AIA Gold Medal, their highest honor recognizing individuals who have made lasting impacts in the field of architecture.

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Luella Garvey Residence, 1934

589-599 California Ave, Reno

Williams first came to northern Nevada in 1934 when Luella Rhodes Garvey invited him to design a home for her on California Avenue in Reno. A recent transplant from Pasadena who had moved to Nevada to take advantage of the state's lenient divorce laws, Garvey was familiar with Williams' work from her time in southern California. The luxurious home Williams designed for her combined elements of the Colonial Revival style with Georgian and French Regency influences and boasted a New Orleans-style second-floor balcony with foliated wrought iron detailing. Williams favored the eclectic style, reminiscent of the architecture of America's Deep South because it connected him to the Black heritage of that region. The sixteen-room Garvey residence was L-shaped with an interior courtyard and patio and an elaborate stairwell at the foyer entrance. It was constructed for \$40,000, with an additional \$10,000 landscaping budget. The home was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

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Herman Residence | Rancho San Rafael, 1936

1595 N Sierra St, Reno

In 1935, Dr. Raphael Herman purchased 375 acres just northwest of the University of Nevada campus, right outside Reno's city limits. Upon taking ownership, Herman gave it the romantic name of Rancho San Rafael. A California transplant from Beverly Hills, Herman had retained a Nevada residence for several years before hiring Williams to design a custom home in the Classical Revival Style on the Rancho San Rafael property in 1936. The spacious residence Williams designed (that Herman would share with his brother Norman and sister-in-law Mariana) had eighteen-rooms and amenities including an outdoor patio and courtyard and a built-in, brick cooking area.

In 1964, Mariana Herman offered to sell the expanded 540-acre ranch to the University of Nevada, but the administration was not interested. Instead, the property was purchased in 1979 by the State of Nevada's Public Employees Retirement System and sold to Washoe County, which now operates it as San Rafael Regional Park and rents out the main house for special events and gatherings.

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El Reno Apartments, 1937

711 Mt. Rose Street, Reno

Although Williams designed grand homes for wealthy clients in Nevada and California, he maintained a lifelong interest in small houses, and had been entering small house design competitions since 1923. In the mid-1930s, the opportunity arose for Williams to promote well-designed smaller houses that were made even more affordable using innovative and efficient construction techniques. Soon thereafter he became a consulting architect for LEA Steel Homes, which developed a method to prefabricate modular housing components from galvanized steel. Reno resident Roland Giroux decided the steel homes would make great rental properties and arranged for fifteen homes to be erected on eight lots on South Virginia Road between Pueblo and Arroyo Streets. (Today home to a business called Statewide Lighting.) These homes were priced at \$2,500 apiece, which included the foundation, complete steel framing, steel windows, bronze screens, steel door frames, plastering, plumbing, electric wiring and fixtures, flooring, and painting. Williams designed the homes to resemble traditional construction with the exterior metal siding imprinted with faux wood grain and his trademark ornamental ironwork around the entryway. In the 1950s, after the city's rent control boards refused to let Giroux raise his rents, he sold off the homes individually and they were moved to locations throughout Reno. Twelve of the fifteen homes have been identified, and one is listed on the City of Reno historic register.

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The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1939

528 W. First Street, Reno

Williams returned to Reno again in 1938 for a project connected to his former client Luella Garvey. That year he designed what many consider his crowning achievement in the region: the First Church of Christ, Scientist (popularly referred to as the Lear Theater). Garvey had become interested in the congregation's plans to construct a new building and contributed funds to acquire property on Riverside Drive along the Truckee River. The congregation held an architectural competition and Williams was unanimously selected in 1938.

Neoclassical Revival in style, the building's twin curved balustrades lead up to a monumental entry portico that is supported by four slender columns. Designed to accommodate 600 congregants, the nave is bathed in natural light from large windows on the east and west sides, with a staircase leading from the entry hall to the balcony.

Upon her death in 1942, Garvey created a trust to support the building's maintenance. The congregation moved to a new facility in 1998 and there were discussions about converting the church into a theater. Local businesswoman and philanthropist Moya Lear lent significant financial support and the building became known as the Lear Theater. Although the building is listed on the city and state historic registers as well as the National Register of Historic Places, today it sits empty. It was acquired by the City of Reno in 2021 and its future remains unknown.

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E. L. Cord Residence | Circle L Ranch, 1941

Dyer

In 1931, Williams designed a legendary 62-room home for automobile magnate E.L. Cord on a 10-acre estate in Beverly Hills. Their paths would soon cross again in Nevada. In 1936, Cord began purchasing mining properties in Nevada's rural Esmeralda County, about seventy miles west of Tonopah. Eventually he acquired a 2,200-acre working ranch in the Fish Lake Valley near Silver Peak and named it the Circle L Ranch. This enabled Cord to establish his official state residency in Nevada, with all the tax advantages that conferred. Williams designed a modern residence for Cord on the Circle L Ranch. The rustic, yet refined ranch house is a low-slung, single story, white brick home with knotty pine and brick interior. Cord shared it with his second wife, Virginia and their three daughters, Sally, Nancy, and Susan. They continued to vacation at the ranch for decades, until selling it in the 1970s.

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The Tharpe Residence, 1946

Lovelock Inn, 1949

55 Cornell Ave, Lovelock

E.L Cord arranged for Williams to design two properties in Lovelock, Nevada, but not for Cord himself. Rather, the Lovelock Inn and neighboring residence were for Cord's brother-in-law, William A. Tharpe and his family. Originally from Shreveport, Louisiana, Tharpe and his wife both worked many years in state government before they eventually left public service to run a motor lodge in Louisiana. They then moved to Lovelock, Nevada, in 1946 to be closer to Tharpe's sister, Virginia, the second wife of E.L. Cord. Through Cord, Williams was commissioned to design their home and a motor lodge, known as the Lovelock Inn. The comfortable and spacious home featured luxurious but rustic touches with knotty pine walls, vaulted wood ceilings, and stone fireplaces.

The Lovelock Inn, located directly adjacent to the residence, opened in 1949 with thirty-three units. The ranch styled motor lodge's amenities included a six-foot wrap around porch, and a lobby boasting a central fireplace to offer its guests comfort during the winter months. The parcel was selected due to its easy access to U.S. Route 40, but after the completion of Interstate 80, the facility took a decline. The Tharpes returned to Shreveport, Louisiana in 1974, and the residence was sold. The motel was sold separately and is still in operation today.

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Berkley Square, 1954

Highlands Square, 1956

Historic West Side, Las Vegas

Berkley Square was the first Black housing development in Las Vegas. It was financed in part by Thomas L. Berkley, a prominent African American attorney, media owner, developer and civil rights advocate from Oakland, California. Williams designed Berkley Square in 1949. He deployed his concept of the small house movement to construct 148 homes, which opened for occupancy in 1954 with the original name of Westside Park. The ranch homes had low pitched, gabled, or hipped roofs with wide eaves. Customers could choose from two models, Model A or Model B, which were distinguished by the design of the façade. The development of William's second residential neighborhood project, Highland Square, comprised of 125 homes, began construction in 1956, and offered the same two model homes.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque 775.546.1464 y presione 1979#

La Concha Motel, 1961

770 Las Vegas Blvd, Las Vegas

In 1961, Williams designed the La Concha Motel, a 100-room, non-gaming motel, for M.K. Doumani who had purchased land adjacent to the Riviera Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas in 1959. Doumani's son, Edward, a 1960 graduate of the University of Southern California, was acquainted with Williams' work and invited him to design the building. The graceful curvilinear forms of the structure echo the details—such as arched entries, staircases, and ceilings—of the residences Williams designed in southern California. Often described as an example of Googie-style architecture, inspired by the sleek futurism of the Space Age and Atomic Age, the La Concha Motel became a favorite destination of the rich and famous, including Elizabeth Taylor, Ronald Reagan, Wayne Newton, Elvis, Ann-Margret, Flip Wilson, and the Carpenters.

The La Concha Motel operated as a motel from 1961 to 2004 and was razed in 2005 to make way for new development. The lobby of the La Concha was salvaged in 2005 by Nevada preservationists and was moved in 2006 to serve as the visitor center for the Neon Museum. In 2015, the La Concha Motel lobby was listed on the Nevada State Register of Historic Places.

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St. Viator's Guardian Angel Shrine, 1964

(Guardian Angel Cathedral)

302 Cathedral Way, Las Vegas

After designing buildings on the Las Vegas Strip for nearly a decade, Williams was asked by Moe Dalitz of United Resort Hotels, to design a new Catholic Church, which was originally known as St. Viator's Angel Shrine. There had long been a community desire to construct a church near the Strip to serve the needs of hospitality workers. A Jewish businessman known for his association with organized crime syndicates, Dalitz donated the land and underwrote the construction of the church in a move that was seen by many as an attempt to clean up his image.

When the church opened in 1963, Williams' A-frame structure was celebrated as a modern masterpiece that could seat over 1,000 congregants. The mosaic work and stained glass designed by Edith Piczek and Isabel Piczek was installed in the twelve triangular recesses bisecting the A frame. Each window illustrates a Station of the Cross with gambling themes illustrating the story. The structure underwent a \$1.5 million renovation in 1995, and today the church is known as the Guardian Angel Cathedral.

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UNREALIZED AND NO LONGER EXTANT PROJECTS BY WILLIAMS

The Skylift Magi-Cab (unrealized)

Williams' final proposal for Las Vegas never materialized, except for on paper. The Skylift Magi-Cab was intended as a 15-station monorail system to transport tourists from downtown Las Vegas to McCarran Airport (now known as Harry Reid International Airport). Williams proposed a futuristic monorail that has been described as having a "post-Sputnik-Moderne style." Williams' design was popular, but the Skylift was never constructed. While Williams' design proposal captivated leaders and planners at City Hall, and could have been constructed without public funds, the popularity of the automobile appears to have won out over this sleek, space-age mode of transportation of the future.

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Las Vegas Horserace Track, 1953 (no longer extant)

3000 Paradise Road, Las Vegas

One of Williams' first design projects in south Las Vegas was a major thoroughbred horse racing facility he designed for New York promoter and entrepreneur Joseph Smoot. In 1947, Smoot hitched a ride with Hank Greenspun (the eventual founding publisher of the *Las Vegas Sun*) on a cross country road trip, where he hatched a plan for a major horse racing complex called Las Vegas Park. In 1950, Smoot hired the established architects Arthur Froehlich and Paul R. Williams to bring credibility to the project. After enduring many construction delays, the track opened in 1953, three years later than its original scheduled date, and soon after, Smoot was indicted on charges of felony embezzlement. The track enjoyed an opening-day crowd of over 8,000 people, but The Jockey Club was not sustainable, and the property was eventually sold. Over the years, the property evolved into a country club and golf course.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque 775.546.1464 y presione 1983#

Carver Park, 1943 (no longer extant)

631 E Lake Mead Pkwy, Henderson

At the beginning of World War II, Williams temporarily closed his architectural office to engage in what could be described as “war work.” The housing he designed southeast of downtown Las Vegas offered a refuge for Black workers who had moved to Las Vegas to work at Basic Magnesium Incorporated (BMI), a company involved in the war effort. Their community was known as “Basic Townsite,” and it eventually became known as Henderson, Nevada—the second largest city in Nevada today.

Workers at BMI were both Black and White, and given that southern Nevada was segregated at the time, this reality demanded two separate housing areas: Carver Park for Blacks and Victory Village for Whites. Williams designed the Carver Park complex, which opened in 1943. The facility contained 64 units for single male workers, 104 one-bedroom units, 104 two-bedroom units, and 52 three-bedroom apartments, a school and recreation hall. The housing facilities were razed in the 1980s through the 1990s.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque **775.546.1464** y presione **1984#**

El Morocco Motel, 1964 (no longer extant)

2975 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Las Vegas

The El Morocco Motel, which opened to the public in 1964, has recently been attributed to Williams. The El Morocco was owned by the Duomani family, who also owned the adjacent La Concha Motel. The design for the El Morocco was as graceful as the La Concha. It featured a cylindrical design with sculpted concrete columns. Originally a 139-room motel, its main building housed a lobby along with the branch of the Bank of Las Vegas and many restaurants, and was later repurposed into a souvenir shop. Demolition of the facility began in 2006 and the remaining portion was razed in 2008.

Español: Para escuchar el texto en español, por favor marque **775.546.1464** y presione **1985#**

Rehabilitation Center, Steamboat Springs (unbuilt)

16010 S Virginia St, Reno

In 1942, Williams partnered with a frequent collaborator, fellow Los Angeles-based architect Adrian Wilson, on a series of drawings for a proposed rehabilitation center at the Steamboat Hot Springs, south of Reno. The geothermal springs had been the site of various sanitariums, hospitals, and accommodations since 1861, with its highly mineralized waters and mud lauded for myriad health benefits. In 1941, the Reno Chamber of Commerce proposed developing and expanding the hot springs into a major health spa and resort.

The Williams and Wilson site plan depicts a sprawling campus including a fully equipped, modern, multi-story rehabilitation center, groups of cottages, a bath house, educational and recreational buildings, an outpatient clinic, and a guest inn and restaurant. Steamboat Springs is still in operation, but the financing for the resort designed by Williams and Wilson never transpired and was therefore never built.

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