



SUNNYLANDS
CENTER & GARDENS

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New Sunnylands exhibition explores the ‘maximalist approach’ of its famed interior designer, William Haines

RANCHO MIRAGE, Calif. -- The odd thing about Sunnylands, the renowned midcentury modern home of the late Ambassadors Walter and Leonore Annenberg, is that its interiors — its furnishings and décor — do not reflect midcentury modern design at all.

“In an era and a region heavily leaning into a minimalist, modernist interior design, the Annenbergs embraced a full-on maximalist approach,” said Sunnylands Director of Heritage Anne Rowe.

Decorator William Haines was the mastermind behind the refined elegance of Sunnylands’ opulent interiors. His designs are the focus of a new exhibition, *Variations to a Theme: William Haines at Sunnylands*, that goes on display when Sunnylands Center & Gardens opens for a new season on Wednesday, Sept. 13.

“Haines earns the title ‘design master’ because his work was unique and singular at a time in history when the midcentury aesthetic was everywhere and ‘modern’ was the style of the moment,” said design expert Patrick Dragonette. “Haines realized that without the past there can be no future. To honor the past in many of his designs and yet to make them something new and different was one of his great gifts.”

Haines’ style of décor, known as Hollywood Regency, reflected silver-screen glamour — through a vibrant mix of colors, textures, patterns, and finishes — with references to interior design of the 19th-century English Regency period.

Before he succeeded as an interior designer, Haines had been famous as a movie star in the 1920s and 1930s. His talent for infusing classic elements into a newer design aesthetic made him popular with his former movie-industry colleagues. His client list included the likes of Joan

Crawford, Carole Lombard, Jack and Ann Warner. “When you’re designing modern, use the past,” Haines once said.

For the Annenbergs, Haines furnished Sunnylands from top to bottom, designing and installing more than 450 pieces specifically made for the 25,000-square-foot home. The cabinets, tables, consoles, sofas, desks, chairs, and other decorative items compose the largest extant collection of William Haines, Inc. furniture and lighting in the world.

Over the course of three years, 1963-1966, Haines worked hand in hand with the Annenbergs, architect A. Quincy Jones, and the estate’s landscape designers to turn 200 acres of open desert into one of the most unique and important homes in the country.

“This exhibition breaks ground as the inaugural museum experience celebrating the influential design work of William Haines,” Rowe said.

Variations to a Theme: William Haines at Sunnylands will be on display throughout the 2023-2024 season.

Sunnylands Center & Gardens, at 37977 Bob Hope Drive in Rancho Mirage, will be open free of charge from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday, beginning Sept. 13. Tickets to tour the Annenberg estate are available at www.sunnylands.org/tours.

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(Editor’s note: Photographs with caption and photo credit information are available for download. Click here for [hi-res images](#). Click here for [low-res images](#).)

The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands

The Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands is a nonprofit operating entity that hosts high-level retreats on serious issues facing the nation and the world. Programs offered through Sunnylands Center & Gardens educate the public about the history of Sunnylands, its architecture, art collections, cultural significance, and sustainable practices.