

California is a world leader in the fields of design and architecture – quirky, eccentric and inspired by its natural surroundings. Just ask leading landscape architect and interior designer William Kopelk, a true California visionary, who has taken his ideas of art and the environment and melded them to shape and style California's signature landscape designs.

'Good design is an integration of the landscape and the indigenous materials that are here,' says Kopelk, who often uses native boulders and fire pits in his work. 'I try to incorporate the basic elements of nature – earth, fire and water – into my designs.'

Kopelk's 'art' has been featured across the globe – he's worked in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Tokyo and Kuwait but it's the vast desert,



head down the coast from Solano to San Diego. Along the way, stop to enjoy the ornate Victorian designs of San Francisco's Painted Ladies, and the quaint arts and crafts bungalows of Los Angeles, before you journey out across the desert to the waiting oasis of Palm Springs, where modern movements like the

EARTH, FIRE & WATER

Cutting-edge design and unique, modern architecture... the elements inspire California WORDS | GREG BENCHWICK

mountains, redwoods and diverse geography of California that really inspire him.

'I would say there's sort of a myth of California and the rugged west. It's the dramatic landscape, at least what we have here in Palm Springs, with the mountains and the desert,' says the California native, who runs the Palm Springs-based design firm InsideOutside. 'It's always been a Mecca for artists and creative types. It just inspires creativity, no matter if it's music, movies, art or architecture.'

California's penchant for unique design goes back several centuries to the original Spanish missionaries, who brought Spanish Colonial and adobe designs with them. To this day, you can marvel at the 21 remarkably well preserved missions left by those pioneering settlers as you

Spanish Colonial Revival and Mid-Century Modern first started to take root.

'A lot of celebrities came [to Palm Springs] and were influential in what they did... even in starting modern architecture,' says Kopelk, who served for many years as the President of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation. For example, Frank Sinatra's Palm Springs house was one of the first examples of Mid-Century Modern architecture in the country. Inspired by the expansive desert landscape, Mid-Century pioneers like E Stewart Williams, the man who designed Sinatra's desert retreat, used organic design elements, large windows and wide-open living spaces to bring the beauty of California's rolling hills and deserts through the window and into the living room. No wonder Kopelk chose to name his company



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: OLD MISSION TOWN; WILLIAM KOPELK; JOHN LAUTNER'S ELROD HOUSE; THE LATE FRANK SINATRA'S HOUSE AND POOL



"I THINK, IN THE FUTURE, PEOPLE ARE GOING TO EMBRACE NATURE AS MUCH AS THEY CAN, RATHER THAN ENFORCING THEIR IMPRINT UPON IT" WILLIAM KOPELK

InsideOutside. And while you can enjoy Palm Springs' signature architectural style any day of the year, it's best to come in February for Modernism Week.

A state as diverse as California is bound to have some unique designs. One of Kopelk's favourite California landmarks is the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, which is estimated to draw about nine million visitors from around the world each year.

'The Griffith Observatory [in Los Angeles] is

fascinating because of the outreach into the heavens,' says Kopelk. And for modern architecture, look no further than the Mid-Century designs of Palm Springs or LA's famed Getty Museum.

And the future of design? For Kopelk it's all about embracing nature and cohabitating with it. And what better example of this than the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco? 'The new building has a green roof that's a living, growing organism,'



says Kopelk. 'I think, in the future, people are going to embrace nature as much as they can, rather than enforcing their imprint upon it.' This very holistic and innovative approach to design, combining the old and the new, the natural and the cutting edge, is what sets California's unique architectural landscape apart. Nature doesn't necessarily have to end where the buildings begin.

For more information, go to visitcalifornia.co.uk