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ROAMS IN STYLE
MICHAEL CHILDERS
HOSTS ONE NIGHT ONLY
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PLAYS WITH FIRE

MEN

OF THE
MOMENT

NATIONAL PHILANTHROPY DAY / PALM SPRINGS ROAD RACES / THE DESERT'S TOP LAWYERS



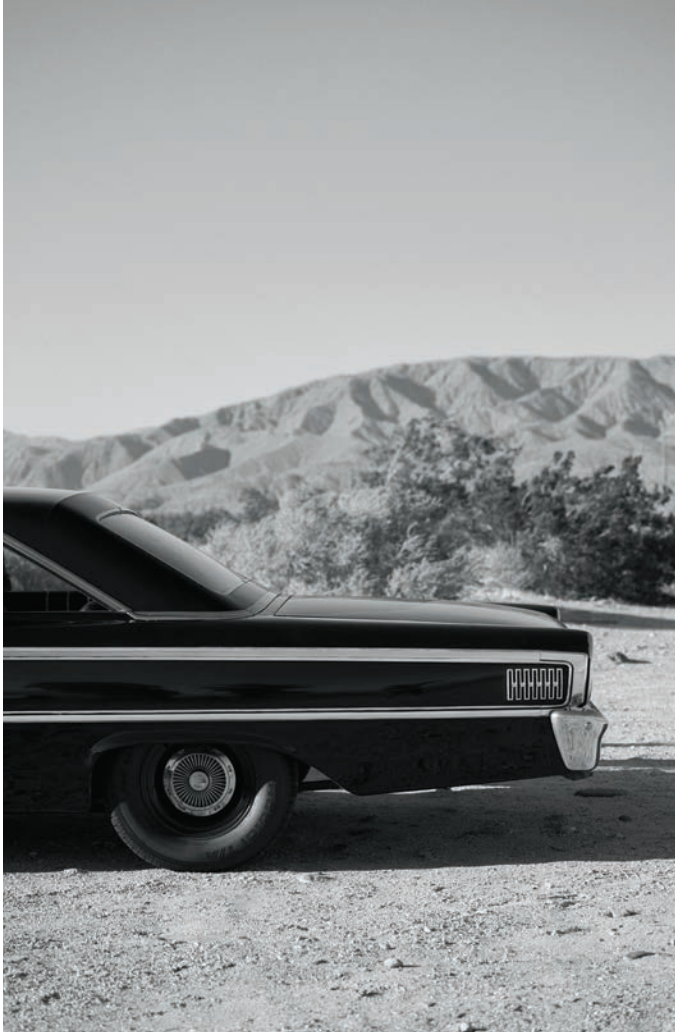
CRUISING PARADISE

He's worked with the biggest names in fashion and film and had his photo taken all over the world — but here in Palm Springs, *Rudy Verwey* just likes to blend in.

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A beacon of modernism and the era's penchant for simple living, Frey House II — built in 1964 — rises above the desert floor and rests amid the rocks of the San Jacinto foothills. From this built-in concrete bench on the front deck, architect Albert Frey observed the evolution of the Coachella Valley landscape over three decades. Here, Rudy Verwey contemplates life in a Stetson hat, Chin Mens pants, and his own Citizen jewelry (throughout). Opposite: Vintage H Bar C Ranchwear shirt and pants, Laredo boots, and Illesteva sunglasses in a '64 Ford Galaxie.

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IT'S TUESDAY afternoon at Hair of the Dog, a bar on South Palm Canyon Drive in Palm Springs. Rudy Verwey is on the patio sipping Heineken and telling stories about his life.

There's the time he was electrocuted in Gary Oldman's backyard. The time he filmed a sex scene with Patricia Arquette. The time Nicholas Cage tried to fight him because Cage was dating Arquette and pissed about said sex scene.

It's the kind of bluster you might expect from a 64-year-old barfly drinking his way through the quiet hour between lunch and dinner, and the regulars have heard it all before. "They say I'm full of shit, but it's all true," Verwey insists.

Verwey, who grew up in Holland, is working up to an explanation for how he wound up living in Palm Springs for the past decade. At 16, he left his family's farm to live in Paris. After a string of odd jobs — handyman, tattoo artist, record sleeve designer — his preternatural cheekbones caught the attention of fashion photographer Helmut Newton. Soon he was flying all over Europe for photo shoots.

Verwey was never one to plan out his career. He simply pursues interests, and when the pursuit leads to opportunity, he seizes it. To that end, he recorded an album in 1987 and toured all summer to support it. (Look up "Different Words" by Rudy" on YouTube — it's industrial pop built from synthesizers and drum machines.)

By his late 20s, Verwey had made some money, spent it all, and moved to New York. He was designing silk scarves for Bergdorf Goodman, and that yielded an offer to fly to Los Angeles to sketch jewelry for the Eddie Murphy film *Coming to America*.

Verwey liked L.A., so he stayed. He opened a motorcycle shop and found work in commercials and music videos. In 1989 alone, he had roles in Madonna's "Like a Prayer" and Liza Minnelli's cover of "Losing My Mind."

He discovered Palm Springs when his Hollywood friends started inviting him out for parties. He marveled at how the valley drew his eye up and out toward the horizon. Hawks and turkey vultures floated on the

updrafts, and behind them were mountains in every direction.

One day, while visiting friends and family back in Paris, he met the owner of a music-equipment rental company. The two got to talking about how much they loved Palm Springs, and the guy mentioned he'd like to open an office there. Would Rudy like to be a part of it?

Verwey moved immediately. He lived in hotels for the first few months and then relocated to a tiny cottage in Cathedral City, which he helped turn into an art show for Modernism Week.

"Rudy's house was like a walk-through art experience," says Craig Krull, Verwey's long-time friend and the art curator who organized the exhibit, which they called *Small House*. "He had it lit perfectly, with all his paraphernalia and urban cowboy pirate shit everywhere."

At the show, Verwey put about a dozen sculptures on display. They were made from rock, twine, rusted metal, and other desert scraps. Every piece sold; and when the property also sold, Verwey began looking for his next home.

Ultimately, he found a place as storied as his own life was shaping up to be. In the 1920s, an unknown architect named R. Lee Miller grafted four rock houses onto the hillside at the outer edge of Araby Cove in Palm Springs. They were small and austere, like natural geological formations. They were also abandoned, and years of neglect had pushed them into disrepair.

Verwey didn't mind. He saw beauty where others couldn't, and the rock houses' owner was happy to have someone care for the property and keep people from breaking in to get high. He let Verwey crash rent free for four years. "You couldn't really tell what era you were in," Verwey says of living in the rock house. "I had no TV and no need. I always had something to do."

Life without the usual comforts will wear most people down, but Verwey isn't most people. Modeling work continues to come in hot, sending him around the world; even at

retirement age, he seizes every opportunity. He recently did a shoot with Ralph Lauren, starred in a video campaign for Jacques Marie Mage, and shared a runway with Jeff Goldblum for Prada during Milan Fashion Week. If you caught the Super Bowl, you may have also seen him in a commercial promoting U2's residency in Las Vegas.

Today, Verwey owns a home in Desert Hot Springs. But he lives in a mobile home off Highway 111 with a friend who watches his animals while he's away. Verwey owns four dogs, two cats, and 30 parakeets. He's settled down, but not really. After all these years, the mountains still catch his eye. "I have two nice kites," he says. "When it's windy, I'm not sad. I can fly a kite. It's beautiful."

Why did Verwey choose Palm Springs as the place to fly his kites? Maybe because the city took him as he was. "I've been to places where I was kind of weird or strange," he says. "I don't have that here. Here, I'm not even eccentric."

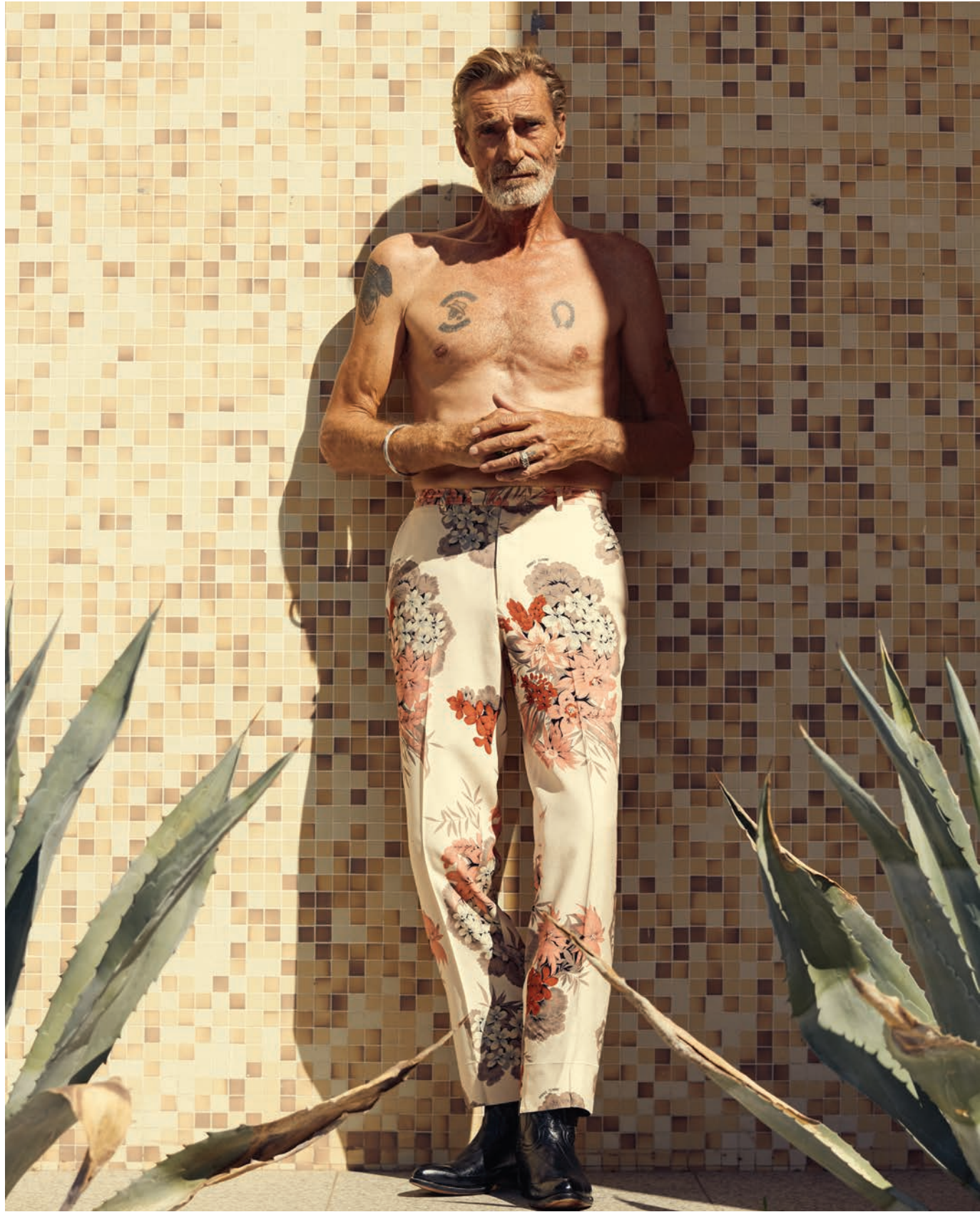
The stories are still spilling out when his ride arrives to pick him up from the bar. There's the time he worked as a doorman at a brothel. The scenes he shot with David Lynch. The testicle he lost in a motorcycle accident. ("I actually swim a tiny bit faster now," he says. "There's less drag.")

But those stories will have to wait. If you want to hear them, you'll just have to get Verwey talking when you catch him at the bar.





The seasonal yellow of brittlebush blooms warms the curtains at Frey House II, while corrugated aluminum sheathing and roof panels pick up on the aqua ripples of the pool. Verwey takes a dip in a pair of Akila sunglasses. Opposite: Vintage Ferranti shirt, Chin Mens pants, Laredo boots, and Jacques Marie Mage sunglasses.



Down the hill from Frey's abode, a Tiki bar has occupied the corner of North Palm Canyon Drive and West Vía Lola since the early 1950s. Back then, it was known as Don the Beachcomber, and characters like Frank Sinatra and Kirk Douglas often slipped in for a drink. Today, it's Bootlegger Tiki, and you might catch Verwey there, with or without the Versace suit, Montague Rentals vintage shirt, and Señor Cielos boots.





In 1967, Frey added a 300-square-foot guest room to his home. The bilevel space, with built-in seating and a vanity, was recently refreshed ahead of Modernism Week tours. A plein air painting by Frey's father now decorates one wall. Learn more about the architect in *Albert Frey: Inventive Modernist*, a retrospective that will be on view January through June at the Palm Springs Art Museum's Architecture and Design Center. Verwey basks in the stillness in a vintage Kai Hawaiian shirt, Levi's jeans, and vintage boots. Opposite: 1950s Arrow cabana set and Akila sunglasses.





Where life leads, Verwey goes. On the road in Desert Hot Springs, he wears a vintage Camel jersey and Akila sunglasses. Opposite: Blue Marble jacket, Rick Owens tank top, Levi's jeans, and Jacques Marie Mage sunglasses.