



Historic Miracle Mile

DRIVING TOUR

Throughout the middle of the 20th century, Miracle Mile, Oracle Road, and Drachman Street were together known as Tucson's "Miracle Mile Strip."

This was the northern segment of Tucson's primary automotive corridor: the vehicular route into the city from the North, a crossroads for those traversing the nation on Routes 80 and 89, and an economic arterial that fostered development in several regionally popular architectural styles. For many, this defined their Tucson experience; for others, it shaped their first impression of the Old Pueblo. Swimming pools, flickering neon and lush grassy courtyards welcomed visitors to motels with names like La Siesta, El Rey, Frontier, and El Rancho. Restaurants served steak and music for under \$2.00.

Today, these iconic buildings and glowing signs have emerged from history to provide a persistent reminder of the continuing American fascination with the Automobile, and to enhance our society's understating of the mythic 20th century West.

Classic neon still signs evoke an era of fast cars and a slower pace of life. These wonderful examples of mid-20th century commercial art are an evocative night experience.





1
Wash Well No. 2

Sparkle Cleaners
2 W. Drachman St.
1955

Originally designed by Tucson architect Cecil H. Moore to house a dry cleaning business, this modern-style, red brick single-story, square building has remained relatively unaltered. Air vents for the dry-cleaning machinery are integrated into the south wall of the façade in a geometrical, decorative pattern. The original neon monument sign is extant.



2
Tucson Inn

143 W. Drachman St.
1952

Built between 1952-55, Tucson Inn originally consisted of two concentric U-shaped, two-story buildings. The outer ring has been demolished but the inner ring remains intact and fully functional. The large, one-story north-facing office building included the lobby and a restaurant and bar. The restaurant sign has been painted out and neon tubing removed. The massive entrance sign, a Tucson icon, is illuminated at night.

3
El Rancho Motor Hotel

Copper Cactus Inn
225 W. Drachman St.
1942

This hotel was built by Louise and Bess Barrasso. The 20th Century Revival style property consists of two buildings in an integrated row-on-row arrangement. The interior courtyard was originally a garden; now it is used primarily for parking. The original swimming pool has been maintained. The original monument neon sign of a cowboy and lasso has been replaced.

4
Frontier Motel

227 W. Drachman St.
1941

The Frontier was built in a 20th Century Revival style with a 1965 addition at the rear. Ornamentation includes exposed red brick, carved wooden columns, and red concrete floors. This property has remained intact and is a fine example of an early highway motor court. The original neon sign illuminates at night.

5
AAA Branch Office

Creative Awards
234 W. Drachman St.
1960

This single-story round building was constructed in 1960. The exterior surface is red brick and topped with a circular roof that overhangs the entire building. The roofline is a series of identical gables, the peaks of which radiate from the center creating a highly idiosyncratic modern form. Two gables of this "pleated" roofline extend over the entrance and at the rear of the building.

6
Executive Inn and Suites

333 W. Drachman St.
1962

Designed by Phoenix architect Barrie Greon, the luxury 150 room motel was constructed at a cost of \$2.5 million and opened February 14, 1961. The building has undergone substantial renovations and alterations, including faux dormers added to the parapet of the front façade. The original sign has been replaced but the base of the monument sign is original.

7
Tucson House

1501 N. Oracle Rd.
1963

The 17-story reinforced concrete and brick Tucson House was featured in "Time Magazine" and "TV Guide." Rep. Morris K. Udall was a resident for two years during the 1960s. In the mid 1970s, occupancy declined; the property was auctioned in October 1976 to HUD, which provided a grant to the City of Tucson to purchase it. By August 1986, \$4 million renovations were completed, creating 100 subsidized apartments. The building continues with this use today.



8
Gateway Saguardo

Public Art Project
Summer 2009

Dirk Arnold's design for this oversized neon sculpture draws from the visual lexicon of vintage neon signs the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Created in the form of a saguaro cactus, the 30 ft. monument is a fresh glowing icon of Tucson and Miracle Mile.

9
Tucson Hiway House Motor Hotel

Stadtler Hilton Hotel
College Place
1601 N. Oracle Rd.
1959

The 200 room two-story courtyard motel developed by New York City investors on a nine-acre site at a cost of \$2.5 million was leased and operated by the Del Webb chain. Amenities included a dining room, coffee shop, cocktail lounge, and a narrow gauge miniature railroad ride in the parking lot. It was the second hotel in Arizona to install direct dial telephone service. The 120,000+ sq. ft. building has undergone modifications and rehabilitation. It now functions as student residences with a café and cantina.

10
La Siesta Motel

1602 N. Oracle Rd.
1941

Operated by Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Mehl during the mid-twentieth century, this one-story L-shaped building was constructed in a revival style with exposed red brick and low-pitched, hipped Spanish tile roofing. Recent restoration of the property included work on exterior surfaces, the re-establishment of the central lawn and garden area, and renovation of the original swimming pool.

11
De Luxe Motel

Starline Motel
Quail Inn
1650 N. Oracle Rd.
1936

The De Luxe Motel was built in the Spanish Revival style by Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Dunlap and was part of the first national motor hotel association. After WWII, it was expanded and renamed the Starline Motel." The carports were converted to units, and the stylized Spanish Revival details masked behind a simplified flat façade. The neon "Vacancy" sign on a plinth of glass blocks in a classic Art Deco motif, is assumed to be original.



**12
Green Lantern
Café**

*Ye Olde Lantern
Tucson Elks Lodge #385*
1800 N. Oracle Rd.
1938

Originally constructed in 1938 as the Green Lantern Café, the building was remodeled and renamed by Dean and Millie Short in March 1959 to Ye Olde Lantern, with Eddie Dugan entertaining at the Piano Bar. In 2007, the building was purchased and remodeled by the Tucson Elks Lodge #385. "Bill," the bronze elk that resides atop the roof was cast in 1903. The restaurant sign was removed during remodeling, but its remains are on display on N. 10th Avenue just north of University Blvd.

**13
Highland Tower
Motel**

1919 N. Oracle Rd.
1941
This 24-unit Spanish Revival motel was constructed in an open U-shaped plan. The original neon sign (now lost) was conceived as a flag attached to the two-story office/owner's-residence at the east end of the south wing. The original swimming pool, ramada, and adjacent trees are original, although the lawn has been removed. There have been almost no alterations to the form and details of this building.



**14
Casa Linda Motel,
El Sahuaro Motel,
Silver Saddle
Motel, Paul's
Hideaway Lodge
and Las Flores
Motel**

200 Block of W. Flores
1947-1960

This cluster of five small motor courts has remained relatively unscathed by time and economic downturn. Although the neon signs no longer glimmer, the gardens are overgrown or removed, and the properties are rented as apartments, the overall form and character of these motor courts survive. The figurative Casa Linda Motel neon sign was partly painted out in 2007.

**15
Pago Pago
Restaurant and
Cocktail Lounge**

Starbuck Design
2201 N. Oracle Rd.
1945

Featured in the 1956 MGM movie "A Kiss Before Dying," the one-story, rectangular building featured a circular entrance porch designed to evoke a South Pacific *palapa*, heavily decorated with faux Polynesian deco murals. Large individual neon letters spelled out "Pago Pago" on both the east and north walls. The lounge featured a long, curving outdoor bar and irregularly arranged booths. In the late 20th century the building was heavily modified but the original palm trees survived.



**16
Oracle Motel**

Tiki Motel
2649 N. Oracle Rd.
1940

Constructed by Mr. and Mrs. Luther R. Campbell, the one-story flat-roofed, simplified Pueblo Deco complex featured exposed red brick buildings and attached carports with slightly lower roofs. The original landscaped court and classic Art Deco sign were lost by the late mid-20th century, when the property was renamed the Tiki Motel and a sign in the shape of a Polynesian war shield and mask, outlined with neon, was installed.



**17
Motel El Corral**

The Oasis at El Corral
2725 N. Oracle Rd.
1949

Originally the 32 unit Motel El Corral, this property now functions as senior apartments. The roofs are flat and low-pitched, with a slight overhang throughout. The original neon monument sign and pool have been removed and a wrought iron security fence now surrounds the property. The original trees and landscaping are present and thriving and the primary configuration of the motel is visible.

**20
Riviera
Motor Lodge**

515 W. Miracle Mile
1953

The office/owner's-residence at the front of the eastern building has unique floor-to-ceiling mullioned picture windows on the north and west sides angling outwards. Original-design brick details including the curved staircase are still present. The streamlined Moderne sign originally extended toward the roadway from a steel post which rose from a brick plinth in a small reflecting pool. The sign is now taller and projects away from the street. While the water feature under the sign is lost, the original palm trees and swimming pool are still present in the courtyard.

**21
Terrace Motel**

631 W. Miracle Mile
1949

Mr. and Mrs. William Goldfield built the Terrace Motel in 1949, with additions in 1952 and 1958. The boxy modernist motel is defined by a front office which features a large extension of the roof supported by a column of specially cast concrete blocks with faux Mayan pictograms. Incorporated into this sculptural element are the letters "W," "O," and "G" for William O. Goldfield. The concrete retaining walls, steps and vegetation and persists, including mature palm trees. The sign atop the office/lobby is original.

**18
Tucson Biltmore
Motor Hotel
(Demolished)**

2775 North Oracle Rd.
1948

The Tucson Biltmore Motor Hotel was designed by modernist Tucson architect Arthur T. Brown and built by Paul Robinson; the landscaping was designed by John Harlow. The entire project was constructed at a cost of \$500,000. The Biltmore featured a circular restaurant with picture windows above its office/lobby and a large neon sign of a abstracted cowboy.

**19
Sun Land Motel**

465 W. Miracle Mile
1949

This well-preserved 20th Century Revival single-story motel is still in operation. All of the buildings were constructed in a simplified Spanish Revival style. A small swimming pool is extant; the original landscaping which included a lawn across the front of the property and cactus garden is now paved parking area.





22
Wayward Winds Motel

707 W. Miracle Mile
1958

The façade of this low-slung brick motel is dominated by a deep porte-cochère and large monument sign supported by two steel posts. The neon details of the sign have been removed and covered. The central courtyard is planted with grass and adorned with palm trees and other original vegetation. The rectangular swimming pool with three adjacent shuffleboard courts delineate the out door space.



23
Ghost Ranch Lodge

801 W. Miracle Mile
1941

One of the most iconic tourist accommodations along Miracle Mile, the original eight buildings were designed by Tucson architect Josias Joesler in his signature Spanish Colonial Revival style. By 1955, the Lodge had expanded to a total of 25 buildings in different styles, reflecting various approaches to highway-oriented accommodation. The original buildings and cactus garden are being restored and converted into elderly housing.

