

Pacific Coast Hideaway

FOR THE BELL FAMILY,
WEEKENDS IN MALIBU
ARE ALL ABOUT TIMELESS
PLEASURES—FROM
LOUNGING UNDER A
PALM FROND TO SPLASH-
ING IN THE OCEAN

BY COLLEEN BELL
PHOTOGRAPHED BY LISA ROMEREIN



A custom two-sided sofa and a bamboo cocktail table from Chapman Radcliff fill the Bells' Malibu living room. Opposite Colleen Bell, in a Chloé dress and Mish New York necklace, relaxes on a Laneventure bamboo recliner from Victory Furniture.





A Thomas Pheasant constellation mirror hangs above the fireplace, flanked by a pair of red lacquer pavilion chairs from Brenda Antin.



I was lounging by the pool last summer at a hotel in the South of France when I noticed something extraordinary. My fellow sunbathers, a pan-European set of skinny, bronze-skinned, platinum-haired jet setters, were engrossed in glossy magazines whose covers featured an endless coterie of even skinnier, even blonder beauties in big sunglasses. These nubile cover girls were participating in a variety of oceanfront activities: a particularly reedy young lady out for a jog; one walking her Chihuahua; yet another playing in the surf with her be-mohawked child. In that moment, it was obvious the global spotlight was not only shining on these beautiful people, but also their playground of choice: Malibu.

This glossy world splashed on the covers of celebrity magazines certainly looked glamorous, and my fellow sunbathers must have thought it was quite the happening spot. They probably wouldn't have believed that most tourists who try to visit Malibu drive right through it. Some will even stop at the newsstand in the center of town and quizzically ask, "Excuse me, but where is Malibu?" only to look surprised when they are told they have already arrived. So, while intrigue and glamour may reign upon this little "city" by the sea, for me it is a decidedly sleepier paradise.

Cruising down Pacific Coast Highway, past the Getty Villa on my



right and Surfrider Beach on my left, what awaits is a quintessential 1930s beach house. The home has been in my husband's family since the Bells moved here from Chicago more than two decades ago. Lore has it that the house was built for a young actress whose contract stipulated a rather unusual request. Filming in Los Angeles would take the actress away from her native England, so she asked that a country cottage be built for her enjoyment. A set decorator quickly went to work designing a seaside pied-à-terre for the beautiful ingénue. The film's construction crew didn't have much time, however, so the residence was built in a flurry of hammer-to-nail. (This might explain the occasional quiver when tall, crashing waves lap at the house.)

These time-tested tremors only sweeten the beach cottage's authentic, endearing charm. The bedroom chandelier sways to the half-moon high tides in the evening; the Santa Ana winds howl through the bottle-thin window panes. In this long row of snugly placed houses, many of which were recently constructed, this weathered anomaly has stood its ground. Two years ago, despite these rustic charms, it had become difficult to turn a blind eye to the house's yellowing paint and thinning, sea-sprayed fabrics. There was a nagging truth the Bell family could no longer deny: The house needed a face-lift.

And that's when Windsor Smith twirled into our lives.

Smith was the admired interior designer whom I called upon to come and assess the situation. Due to the house's age and years of exposure to the elements, I feared she might recommend razing and rebuilding. But as Smith whipped through the living room, her blue eyes dashing from ceiling



OPEN SEASON

LARGE PICTURE WINDOWS FRAMING
A TRIO OF LONGBOARDS ACT AS
A REMINDER OF WHAT LIES AHEAD



Pillows from The Fainting
Couch decorate a built-in ban-
quette covered in Kravet fab-
ric. The Bell family, from left:
Charlotte, Bradley, Chasen,
Caroline, Oliver and Colleen
(in a Tony Burgh tunic)





to floor, window to door, it was obvious this would not be the house's fate. On the contrary, this faded gem was going to sparkle again. It was going to be Windsor-ized.

"The house has the most amazing bones," says Smith. "I was excited when I saw it for the first time because so many of these great beach cottages have been torn down. Here, I was standing inside a piece of history. I knew I needed to make this house beautiful so that no one would ever tear it down."

Strangled by years of creeping by unruly vines, major pruning was necessary to let the California sunlight come streaming in. Today, light bounces off the white walls and reflects off strategically placed mirrors. Looking out from the center of the living room, the newly pruned view reveals both the blue Pacific Ocean to the west and the ruddy greens of the Santa Monica Mountains to the east.

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A Structure Design wooden bench in the entry is covered in Kathryn Ireland linen. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A bamboo bed from Windsor Smith is inlaid with nautical maps. Mustard, aqua and chocolate brown runners rest on the original oak floors.