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SPECIAL ISSUE

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ON PASSION, POLITICS
AND PLAYING NICE



Sandy gravel in the driveway and sea foam green shutters hint at the subdued, beachy mood of Carolyn Espley-Miller's oceanfront home.

Sublime

SANTA BARBARA

A stone's throw from the Pacific, Carolyn Espley-Miller has created an idyllic weekend retreat—full of sea foam hues and cozy chairs—for her family

BY DAWN MOORE PHOTOGRAPHED BY LISA ROMEREIN

Fortuny pillows and an old dhurrie rug set the tone. OPPOSITE Pillows made from vintage feed sacks nestle in a 19th century Gustavian bench.





Espley-Miller, left, transformed an 18th century French cornice into a mantel in the master bedroom and 19th century English corbels into the breakfast table, below. OPPOSITE "Is there anything more beautiful in nature than a shell?" she asks.

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all-out from men's mid-life crises tend to manifest in testosterone-laced acquisitions: a blazing red Ferrari, an inflated twentysomething blonde or—at the very least—a change in facial hair. So any wife would be grateful for this predictable passage to produce a Cape Cod-style beach cottage instead. "For years, Dennis' dream was to have a beach house, and I just wasn't convinced. Finally, when he turned 50, I said, 'Okay, okay I get it!'" says Carolyn Espley-Miller about the birthday epiphany of her husband (yes, *that* Dennis Miller).

A frontage road outside of Santa Barbara running parallel to rattling train tracks and a hissing freeway is not where one would generally expect to find lavish homes with eight-figure MLS listings. But then again, this is California, and just 200 yards from those train tracks, waves crash against a tiny strip of white sand drowning out any manmade racket. All along this stretch (which includes fellow beach worshipers Kevin Costner and Rob Lowe), neighboring cottages range from original 1,000-square-foot modest abodes to remodeled manses behind discreetly posh gates dripping with fuchsia bougainvillea and night-blooming jasmine.

Espley-Miller asked a realtor to start the beach house search in this reclusive zip code, and the reconnaissance trek brought tears to her eyes. "In a bad way!" she giggles. "With our budget," she wondered, "this is what we're going to get?!" Then, the couple's realtor showed something way out of the budget, and once Dennis and Carolyn saw the view, the deal was sealed. As the house (only seven minutes from their main residence, an 1895 shingled Georgian by Stanford White) wasn't officially on the market, the Millers had to wait for more than a year before they got the keys. "Quite often we would drive by and peer through the gates imagining what it would be like when it was finally ours!"

That sense of childlike enthusiasm twinkles throughout Espley-Miller's speech. The former model is a both a girl's girl and demurely dignified, which supplies the perfect "yin" to her husband's sardonically witty "yang." Occasionally though, she reveals a secret sass. "When I'm asked if our house is 'green,' I say, 'Absolutely! Sea foam green!'" And indeed, a muted hue of the ocean's tint presents itself on the exterior shutters, the patio's cushions and in every room. What's more environmentally harmonious than that?

The house had been the main residence of the former owners and was a darker English

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HAIR AND MAKEUP BY VICTORIA VACCARELLO WITH THE KEVIN CHARLES SALON





The southwest-facing octagonal study allows uninterrupted views. OPPOSITE "I've been doing collages since I was 20. It's family, friends, my little watercolors and happenings from the year," says Espley-Miller.



A tableau courtesy of travels to Paris, L.A.'s La Brea Avenue and Espley-Miller's beach. OPPOSITE The home's original washed linen window coverings get a boost from old wooden slat blinds found at a Paris flea market.



country version of its current Nantucket self. Espley-Miller white-washed everything, bleached the floors and mirrored the dining room wall—allowing the sun to set in virtual stereo. “Of course, we could actually walk out there to see it, but it’s cold!” she laughs, and as if on cue, winds start sweeping the (sea foam green) patio cushions into the actual sea foam, sending Espley-Miller outside to haul them in. The home’s surfaces are layered with texture; rough-hewn wood walls, a cathedral beamed ceiling and stone fireplace are juxtaposed against Fortuny pillows. “Those were actually my first inspiration for the house—very non-beachy, except that color! It’s the color of the ocean.”

This mixing of high with low pervades Miller’s style. Feet propped up on the coffee table, she muses about her childhood design talents sprouting in a cardboard refrigerator delivery box. Dragging it outside—sans refrigerator—the 8-year-old cut out windows, used Saran Wrap for glass, and plastered together bits of leftover wallpaper and carpet scraps to create her first private luxury fort. Not yet recognizing her natural bent for design, she nursed a dream to travel and write quirky little guides that she’d also illustrate. And travel she did—as a model for more than 10 years in Tokyo, Toronto and London, where the exposure to Portobello Road’s antique markets sparked her latent passion for provenance. “I was always buying vintage textiles; I just made them into

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Antique Swedish sconces, an Italian chandelier and the sunset are reflected in the dining room’s mirrored wall. LEFT Edwardian-era seahorses shimmy on their mounts.

NOUVEAU RICCI

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book that is going to teach me something,” she adds. As for the stacks of scripts Ricci regularly considers, she’s developed a canny sixth sense for sorting the promising from the problematic. “You can pretty much tell right off the bat,” she says. “If I read something and feel that the intention behind it comes from some sort of misanthropy, then I don’t want to be involved. But if it shows or describes something troubling to make a larger point, that’s something else, and you can usually tell in the writing,” she adds.

The actress keeps a healthy distance from the machinery of Tinseltown—Beverly Hills agents’ offices, West Hollywood shopping streets clogged with paparazzi—by residing in the low-key eastside Los Angeles neighborhood of Los Feliz. But despite her arthouse credentials, she is decidedly not the kind of actress who grudgingly lives in California while pining after a home in New York. She was born in Santa Monica but spent much of her childhood in the New York suburbs of New Jersey and Long Island. Early in her career, after a few years living in Los Angeles, she moved back to New York. “I quickly realized that L.A. had completely spoiled me,” she says. “I

really hated living in New York—I don’t even like being there for too long. It’s just such a hard place to live.”

The deciding factor for the actress boiled down to personal space. “You can be friendly here and talk to people if you want to. But if you don’t feel like it, you have the option of retreating to your private space,” she says. “But in New York, you have no protection. People are going to talk to you and do whatever they want and that’s it—you have to deal with people. So many times it would be raining and I’d be in tears trying to find a taxi.” For Ricci, it’s all about having the right vehicle. “I like having what is basically a portable home,” she says. “I like my car.” ●

SUBLIME SANTA BARBARA

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skirts then rather than pillows.” Now—design talents fully realized—the interior styling firm she founded four years ago, Ceylon, is working on private residences in Vancouver, Los Angeles and Sun Valley. (So much for cardboard forts.)

Her latest inspiration came during a family trip to Africa. “I was into my whole *Out of Africa* Anglo-Colonial romantic thing,” Espley-Miller’s con-

nection to Africa was instant. She felt as if she had lived there in a previous life. However, while she was experiencing déjà vu, the rest of the family was holed up in tents watching vintage *Tarzan* movies enhanced by live roars and squeals from Cheeta’s relatives outside. Dennis brought *Tarzan* and their boys (sons Holden and Marlon-Oliver) brought “Lost.”

Being tent-bound in the African veldt seems normal for the intensely private Espley-Miller, who revels in the company of her family. Days are

spent walking along the shore with their scruffy cock-a-poo Homer (whose passion for patrolling the sands earned him the weekend alias “Beach Justice, Undercover Dog Detective”) and dinners are usually take-out affairs from Lucky’s or Smokin’ Jack’s Kansas City BBQ. Entertaining is rare, but reading in front of one of their six fireplaces is common. “I’m all about getting cozy, squishing in and nesting.” And let’s face it, squishing into a down-filled sofa is much easier than an Italian sports car, mid-life crisis or not. ●

FRENCH LAUNDRY

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crowd around the menu briefly, say a few words to Bililies, before dispersing to resume their duties. Lee studies it with a hand on his hip, looking for spelling mistakes and repetitions. Today’s menu contains the word “poached” twice, for example, and one of them has to go. Now that we finally have a

chance to speak, Lee warms a little.

“If you say ‘submerged in fat,’ it sounds terrible, but if you say ‘confit,’ you’re suddenly in France,” he says with a faint smile. The menu is then sent back for one final revision.

Around mid-afternoon, Lee begins to cook for the first time that day. “Every chef longs to be on the line,” he says, “but there’s more to being a chef than cooking.” Tonight, he’s attempting a new dish—foie gras mousse in duck

confit gelée. He brings out sinful amounts of duck liver on cutting boards and begins grinding them through a tamis, a drum-like mesh sieve. The tamis is a “tool of refinement” extolled in *The French Laundry* cookbook for its ability to create “perfect texture...the texture of luxury.” Once Lee separates the foie gras into fine filaments, he places it into two large mixing bowls and adds whipped heavy cream. He cranks the mixture

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