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In a Malibu State of Mind

Producer David Geffen's Oceanfront Beach House

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NOTHING ABOUT the unadorned wall along Pacific Coast Highway hints at what lies behind. Beyond the entrance gate, a garden, with its meticulously tended ferns and impatiens, offers no clue. Even the house's white clapboard—a strain of California crossed with Cape Cod—is discreetly unprepossessing.

When you step through the door, however, the magic strikes. Light seems to melt the walls; there is nothing but a sweep of sand, sunlit ocean, the crash of surf, a faint sea smell.

That is the intention. Pale wood floors, a vast expanse of glass, inviting club chairs and sofa wrapped in yards of textured ivory wool—nothing distracts from the ocean or the owner's collection of paintings. Everything is simple and clean.

For producer and record-company owner David Geffen, the house is an island of serenity far from the jingle-jangle of the music and film worlds. He spends weekends there in winter, but when summer comes he commutes daily from the beach to his Sunset Boulevard offices.

"I come out on Friday night," says Geffen, still boyish at forty-five. "I have Mozart playing on the sound

"Most houses are done before you move in. But I knew where I wanted to sit and what I wanted to look at," says producer David Geffen of his Malibu beach house. RIGHT AND COVER: The projection room features *Blue Balls* by Sam Francis and *Portrait of an Artist* (Pool with Two Figures) by David Hockney.







system and a fire in the fireplace. There's no way you can tempt me back to the city."

When friends call asking him to lunch back in town, he invites them over instead. Weekends mean guests for lunch, dinner, screenings, neighbors in bathing suits, children and sand. That's why the floor is bare. "I want friends to feel they can walk in with wet feet," Geffen says. "A six-

year-old once spilled hot fudge on the sofa—the parents were freaking out, but I was calm. 'Don't even think about it,' I said. When we ordered the fabric we ordered twice as much as we needed." That way, when disaster strikes, Geffen calls his upholsterer and in a day or so the chair is re-covered. "If you're going to worry about white furniture, you shouldn't have it."

Geffen's retreat began as a small,

innocuous cottage thirteen years ago. By the time he hired designer Michael Taylor to expand his beachside vision, "I'd lived here long enough to know exactly what I wanted, which was a great advantage. Working with Michael was like shorthand. He understood exactly what I like."

Together they planned the dark sapphire pool, a stone conversation pit surrounded by glass to shelter



"He was a wonderful, talented man with a great sense of humor. And he loved this house." Where would Geffen turn? One day while visiting friends he found himself admiring their house; he hired their designer, John Cottrell.

"Each of them had a different vision," Geffen recalls. "But then I had my own."

For Cottrell there was no problem taking over midway. "I have a strong feeling about Michael's sense of scale, his simplicity, his big furniture." He

agreed that nothing should distract from the sea and the art. Everything became ivory, parchment, eggshell against rattan and bamboo.

"David is very particular, with simple, simple taste," says Cottrell. "He knows what he wants and he wants everything refined down to a pinpoint. All frivolities are eliminated. I felt the rooms were cold and wanted rugs, but he was adamant. Finally I persuaded him to let me put two in his bedroom.

"There was nothing there but the

LEFT: In the simply furnished living room are, from left, *Black Tree*, 1945, by Milton Avery and *For Bernard Jacobson*, 1979, by Howard Hodgkin—part of Geffen's extensive collection of modern and contemporary paintings. René Magritte's *Le Domaine d'Arnheim*, 1949, hangs in the stairwell at right. Ribbed upholstery fabric from Donghia. BELOW: Working with the late Michael Taylor, Geffen had the dining room enlarged and transformed into an informal study.

guests from wind-whipped sand, the guest room with an attached sauna. ("It's nice to look at the ocean while you get your little *svitz*," Geffen says.) Because formality seems foreign in this house, the dining room was extended a few feet and transformed into a study.

Geffen acquired the lot next door, and plans had been drawn up to add a projection room, when Taylor died.



bed and two bamboo chairs," the designer continues. "I told him it would be wonderful to lie down on a chaise in front of the fire. Lamps, rugs, plants, that's really all I did."

The house is simple but not monastic. There is a yellow Porsche in the garage, and a buoy out in the surf is where Geffen anchors his boat. There is a Jacuzzi on the hip of the pool and another pool in David Hockney's *Portrait of an Artist*, which hangs in the projection room. There Geffen can close the draperies, dim the lights and raise a giant screen from a concealed control panel without stirring from the deep sofa.

Against sand-pale travertine there are flashes of color—the iridescent

blue of the Howard Hodgkin painting over the sofa, the Milton Avery above the fireplace, a multicolored abstract by Jasper Johns over the bed.

Only a Dole pineapple box holding wood betrays the serenity. "Growing up in Brooklyn, my mother had to work," Geffen recalls, "and there was never time to keep the house well. Perhaps my home reflects that."

Often he wakes at six or six-thirty, stretching out on the bedroom chaise to read scripts with the Edward Hopper painting *Hodgkins House* over-

head. His house, like Hopper's, "has a kind of Eastern air." And even though Geffen is producing a Broadway show, he doesn't go to New York as often as he used to; he says he's less interested in the nightlife and tumult. His time by the beach is precious and healing. "It's so beautiful here. This is the one place I know I would never sell."

He strolls to the edge of the deck where a recent storm has lowered the beach several feet. "It will come back," he says. "It always does." □

BELOW: A dining area off the living room affords sweeping views. "The ocean is like a mantra," Geffen says. Donghia fabric. OPPOSITE: Edward Hopper's *Hodgkins House*, 1928, hangs in a sitting area where the producer often reads scripts. "Keeping your surroundings simple frees your mind to rest and create," says interior designer John Cottrell, who took over the project.







Geffen, who has also collected Tiffany and Gallé lamps, has been acquiring art since the early 1970s. ABOVE: A 1976 lithograph by Jasper Johns hangs in the bedroom. BELOW: Guests often gather for meals in the outdoor dining area. Umbrella by Santa Barbara Designs. Brown Jordan chairs.

