

Michael Kors Takes Us Inside His Relaxed-Chic Beach House

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by JONATHAN VAN METER | *photographed by* MARIO TESTINO

You wouldn't necessarily think that the architect who is most famous for designing Studio 54 in the late seventies would be the go-to guy for the ideal twenty-first-century beach house on Long Island, but then again, you're not Michael Kors. It's the start of the Fourth of July weekend, and he and his husband, Lance Le Pere, are standing on a long, narrow pier that runs away from their house, through the dunes, all the way to the ocean. "If you want a beach-bum life," says Kors, "you have to find beach bums. And the architect, Scott Bromley—his idea of getting dressed up is if his shorts are clean." It's a blustery, overcast day, and Kors himself is wearing khaki shorts with a navy-blue Penn State sweatshirt and Birkenstocks. When I first arrived in a blazer, Kors gently mocked me. "I think that's the first blazer I've ever seen in this house," he said, laughing. "You can't have a jacket out here. It kills the Big Sur-barefoot vibe."

As we move inside—*phew, it's hot*, I say, and quickly slip out of my jacket—the first thing I notice is Joni Mitchell's ethereal soprano wafting out of the sound system. It reminds me that when I first met Kors and Le Pere, a few weeks earlier, Le Pere asked if I was wearing patchouli, and when I said yes, Kors's response was "Oh, we *loooooove* patchouli!" speaking with a level of enthusiasm one usually reserves for Britney's halftime show at the Super Bowl. "No one believes me," he said then, "but I am such a hippie at heart. My joke about it is that we are such a contradiction: We love caviar with potato chips while listening to Joni Mitchell in Capri in flip-flops, wearing ten-ply cashmere. Everything we love is laid-back but indulgent."

Hippie was not the first word that sprang to mind when I thought of the designer, especially knowing that when Michael Kors Holdings went public in 2011, it was one of the most successful initial public offerings in fashion history, making him "big-time rich," as his friend Blaine Trump puts it. The Long Island boy who landed on the World's Billionaires list in *Forbes* magazine last year has finally become a character from one of his Mario Testino ad campaigns: the well-traveled rich guy, with tall, blond spouse trailing, disembarking from a private jet while discussing Ischia vs. Capri.

Or has he? A friend of mine used to live next door to Kors at this very same beach in the late nineties—back when he was merely a successful (and not yet *Project Runway*-famous) designer—and Kors once told him his clothes were “too neat” and suggested that he start sleeping in them. Perhaps the 56-year-old designer hasn’t changed? Testino doesn’t think so: “I haven’t seen anything change in him since he’s made hundreds of millions. And that is why he says he’s a hippie. Because what he treasures isn’t the limousine; it’s intimacy, it’s the home.” Or, as his friend [Blake Lively](#) puts it, “When you have a conversation with him, it’s not about helicopters and yachts. He talks about real-world things like not wanting to go on vacation because he doesn’t want to leave his cats, Bunny and Viola.”

As we make our way through the house, which is a triumph in streamlined beach modern—Nakashima furniture, ropy Scandinavian chairs, with an enormous paper lantern trembling above it all—Kors suddenly looks out through one of the many vast sheets of glass that frame the ocean and says, “Oh, my. There’s a naked person walking on the beach.” Pause. Is he himself a nudist? “Oh, please. I *shower* in a caftan.”

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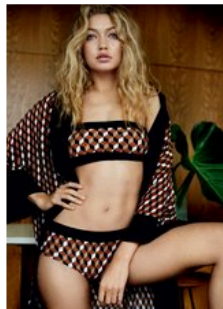
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Eventually we find ourselves in the master-bedroom suite—an entire floor, really—where at last I spy a few tchotchkes: a small cluster of framed photographs on a shelf next to the bed. One is of Kors with long curly hair, and his two best friends, Tim and Lauren, from his brief tenure at the Fashion Institute of

Technology. It was taken in Montauk, Long Island, in 1981—the year Kors started his company. “Still my two best friends,” he says. “We think this picture looks like an album cover and I look like Peter Frampton.” There’s also a photograph, from the early sixties, of Kors, a towheaded toddler, with his mother and grandmother, taken at the Lawrence Beach Club, not far from here. A lot has been written over the years about the influence these two women have had on him, particularly his mother, Joan, who lives in Los Angeles, and is, according to Kors’s friend Bette Midler, “over-the-top, a true character. She loves clothes and she loves being beautiful—you know, the *bella figura*, that Italian thing of showing your best face to the world.”

Kors picks up the frame. “OK, this is full *Flamingo Kid*. I was an only child, so I was always the only kid at the cabana, surrounded by women. I think all they did, basically, was eat cantaloupe and play cards. Lunch was really just the discussion of where you were going to have dinner.” Clearly he’s been training to be a beach bum his whole life. (He’s preparing to be one for the rest of his life, too, having almost finished building a house on the Gulf Coast near Tampa. “Commutable barefoot luxury—that’s my idea of perfect,” he says, sounding like he’s describing his latest resort collection.)

We make our way over to the guesthouse. The bedrooms on the second floor here are subtly themed; one has a safari motif, with photographs the couple took in Africa. Another has pictures taken in the seventies at Studio 54, bought at the Steve Rubell estate sale several years ago: There's a shot of Bianca Jagger and Halston, on the night when she infamously rode through the disco on a white horse. As luck would have it, Kors, eighteen at the time, was there, so thrilled by his luck that he stayed until 7:00 a.m. The next day, he walked into class an hour late. "I have big Porsche sunglasses on, and the teacher says, 'Well, thank you so much for joining us.' Of course, the arrogance of eighteen, I said, 'I'm sorry, but I was out at Bianca's birthday party.' And all the kids in the class looked at me and were like, Ugh, you're *gross*." Perhaps it was at this moment that Kors, who is unpretentious to a fault, learned the valuable lesson that being a name drop-y douche bag gets you exactly nowhere in life.



Fashion Editor: Tonne Goodman

Photographed by Mario Testino, *Vogue*, October 2015

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