



# Open-Minded

A SIMPLIFIED PLAN CREATES VOLUME AND LIGHT IN A SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BEACH HOUSE

Architecture by Appleton & Associates/Interior Design by Chris Barrett  
Text by Peter Haldeman/Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

Florida and Chicago have their gold coasts, as do Australia, Hong Kong and any number of other littoral parts of the world that glitter with riches, natural and otherwise. In terms of sheer glitz, though, probably none of these communities outshines the gold coast of Santa Monica, California. That's because this sliver of beach wedged between a canyon and a pier once served as the official playground of old Hollywood. Samuel Goldwyn, Marion Davies, Harold Lloyd and Mae West were a few of the industry notables who built beach houses here in the 1920s and '30s. If *beach house* is the term. Marion Davies, for instance, presided over a 118-room Georgian mansion that her beau, William Randolph Hearst,

OPPOSITE ABOVE: Architect Marc Appleton and associate Paul Williger reimagined a Spanish-style Santa Monica, California, house for Michael and Danielle Braverman. Chaise longue, JANUS et Cie. ABOVE: They raised the living room ceiling more than three feet. Interior designer Chris Barrett used a neutral palette throughout. The mixed-media work is by Rufino Tamayo. Ottoman leather, Edelman.



ABOVE: The kitchen and dining area had been separate rooms. "It didn't make sense," says Williger. They took out the walls and "brought in all that light" from the ocean side. A painting by Michael Braverman's father hangs near the stairs. Sub-Zero refrigerator, at Abt.com. CaesarStone countertops. Stove, VikingRange.com.

hired San Simeon architect Julia Morgan to design. (The Santa Monica gold coast was also once known as Rolls-Royce Row.)

"Charlie Chaplin played Ping-Pong here!" exclaims Michael Braverman, brandishing several old black-and-white photographs of the compound Fairbanks once owned, a portion of which is now Braverman's property. The neighborhood was unfamiliar to the Chicago-born entrepreneur when, in 2000, he came west in search of a vacation home. "The original idea was to go to Malibu, because I thought that's what you do when you come out to California. I got in a cab to meet a broker in Malibu—and two hours later I was still in traffic on Sunset Boulevard. I called the broker, and she said, 'Let me show you some homes in Santa Monica, then.' The last place she showed me was this house. I thought, Now, this makes sense."

What clicked for him was the property's unique blend of convenience and get-away-from-it-all romance, rather than anything about the 4,641-square-foot house itself. Built in the 1940s after the Fairbanks residence was destroyed in a fire, the house was a relatively modest Spanish-style structure that failed to

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live up to its location. "The ceilings were low, and it was very cramped," recalls Braverman. "My desire was to make it more feasible for the environment." To that end he got in touch with Marc Appleton of Santa Monica-based Appleton & Associates. "The old house was a series of small, chopped-up spaces," says Appleton, "and for a beach house it had a rather weak relation to the beach. Our principal gesture was to open it up to that view."

Appleton, working with project architect Paul Williger, took out the walls separating the kitchen and the dining and living rooms and raised the ceiling three and a half feet to create "one big great room with arched openings looking out to the pool and the beach," he notes. Upstairs, the architects opened up the master bedroom by putting in a pitched ceiling lined with reclaimed barn beams, installing three sets of tall French doors connecting to a balcony as wide as the house, and converting a guest room into a spalike bath with a gull's-eye view of the ocean. "We gave the master a more commanding panorama of the beach," says Appleton.

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"A main concern," says Appleton, "was to bring back a richness of craftsmanship and materials and a certain amount of charm along with it." ABOVE: The pool courtyard, complete with a futon and a freestanding fireplace, "extends the whole living space," notes Williger. Grated openings connect it to the beach. Sunbrella drapery fabric.



ABOVE: An antique wedding trunk is at the foot of the bed in a guest room. RIGHT: The architects incorporated another bedroom to enlarge the master suite, which spans the width of the residence. A pitched ceiling, with recycled barn beams, increases the volume, while 10-foot-tall French doors accentuate the ocean view. Barrett designed the bed. Rogers & Goffigon drapery and chair slipcover linen.



dark-stained oak plank floors and simple fireplaces retain the traditional Spanish flavor of the house. The charming, Alhambra-like courtyard has a new pool surrounded by antique terra-cotta pavers, a custom-glazed-tile fountain and spa, and a low wall with wrought iron-trimmed openings that allow glimpses of the beach or can be closed off for privacy. "We were trying to be a little more literal and true to the style on the outside," explains Williger, "and then on the inside being a little more relaxed and loose."

With that in mind, the architects introduced Braverman and his then-girlfriend, Danielle Meers, to interior designer Chris Barrett. "We wanted a very fresh, open, beach-chic feeling," says Barrett, "so we went with slipcovers and abaca rugs." Deep sofas and chairs covered in white denim or white linen set off a spare but far-ranging (18th-century Italian to mid-century modern American) selection of one-of-a-kind pieces. Braverman family keepsakes—antique books, paintings, collections of vintage boxes and wooden heads—help to "balance the new with the old."

Which seems only appropriate in a neighborhood steeped in celluloid history. On a December afternoon warm enough for a lazy stroll along the beach, Braverman, who has since married Meers and moved full-time to California, declares, "I love it here this time of year. Every Labor Day, it's like a switch. A bus comes into the parking lot down the street and a bunch of tourists get off and take a picture of the sand, then get back on—and summer's over." He indicates an old tile-roofed complex. "That's the Irving Thalberg house. And that over there used to be the Sorrento hamburger stand." □