

VANITY FAIR

HOLLYWOOD

Bohemian Cove

The hippest neighborhood in Malibu right now is ... a *trailer park*? Yes, say the likes of Minnie Driver, Pamela Anderson, and Matthew McConaughey. In Paradise Cove, whose pioneers included director Sam Peckinpah and *Los Angeles Times* publisher Otis Chandler, Vanessa Grigoriadis explores the surfboard-and-shirtless bohemian charms—not to mention those trailers, with their marble floors, Italian-granite countertops, and Sub-Zero appliances—which have sent the price of a tricked-out double-wide into the millions.

BY VANESSA GRIGORIADIS • PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM STREET-PORTER

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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION Paradise Cove—home of the nicest double-wides money can buy. Beach access on either side makes it a surfing paradise.

There's no one friendlier in a housing downturn than a small-town real-estate agent, and David Carter, a suntanned New Zealander with the *über*-Waspy look of most agents in

Malibu, can often be caught smiling from ear to ear. On a recent Saturday, he bounds past a series of real-estate offices and jumps into his golf cart, which is his preferred mode of transportation around the gated community in which he is selling homes. Or something resembling homes. “Paradise Cove is full of gorgeous, tricked-out residences with a lot of value,” he explains, revving up the cart and then staring off dreamily. “It’s hard not to fall in love with this place.”

FROM THE ARCHIVE

• Malibu’s beachside film colony (James M. Cain, August 1933)

• Malibu’s 1960s surfmania scene (Sheila Weller, August 2006)

Carter swings the golf cart up a sheer bluff toward a mesa overlooking a grand expanse of the Pacific Ocean, with the island of Catalina visible in the foggy distance and the tail end of Santa Monica shimmering in the foreground. It’s easy to see Barbra Streisand’s home on the next cliff, just a hundred or so yards away—well, actually, she has three homes, because she reportedly bought out her neighbors for about \$12 million 15 years ago. The situation is a little different on the particular mesa we’re traversing, though. Here, there are a lot of residences. Two hundred and sixty-five, to be exact. And all of them came down the highway on a truck.

That’s right, Paradise Cove is a trailer park, but you’re not going to find anyone outside his trailer here drinking a beer on a foldup chair. No one’s put a non-operable toilet in his front yard and filled it with flowers. There aren’t any 13-year-olds smoking at the dining-room table. You know the Jeff Foxworthy joke about the way that homes in trailer parks move but the cars in the front yard don’t? That doesn’t apply here. “Paradise Cove has become one of the grooviest places to live in Malibu,” says Julia Chaplin, the author of *Gypset Style*, a history of bohemia. “Malibu is a ritzy, expensive place, but screenwriters, surfers, and down-on-their-luck movie stars can still have a slice of it in Paradise Cove.” Singer-songwriter Pete Yorn even recorded a song about the park: “I drove out to the white-trash beach, on a brief vacation / I’d felt freer than I had in a long time.” After all, when downsizing is the cool thing to do, what shows your commitment to economizing and scaling back more than a trailer?

Now, your welcoming neighborhood real-estate agent would never be so indiscreet as to point out celebrities’ homes, but since I’d done a little research, I’m aware that Carter is zooming his golf cart past Minnie Driver’s green-trimmed trailer, flanked by manicured

white-rose bushes, and around a curve covered with scarlet bougainvillea to the one owned by Liberty Ross, a British model, and then to the one that belongs to Stephen Hillenburg, the creator of *SpongeBob SquarePants*. “Some people use these as weekend retreats and keep a big place in the city,” says Carter.

Soon, we wave to a new resident, a big Hollywood director (who prefers to remain nameless), coming back from the beach with little kids and a bunch of pails in tow. Then we swing by Pamela Anderson’s place, near the communal laundry room. (She used to do her own washing in there, too.) Anderson moved to Paradise Cove in 2009, while she was renovating her nearby mansion, and she decided to stay because her two sons loved living here so much. She even started dating an electrician who lives in the park (reportedly, the same guy who dated Minnie Driver—trailer-trash alert!). Anderson has taken some flak for living here. “Pam Anderson doesn’t even have a credit card,” Courtney Love sneered recently. “And she lives in Paradise Cove, which is in Malibu—but it’s a trailer park in Malibu.”

Carter keeps going, whisking by a trailer with Craftsman-style touches and a mailbox shaped like a whale, and another with 12 surfboards lined up outside, before coming to a stop in front of a trailer covered in white clapboard. “This is a beautiful double-wide,” he booms, stepping gingerly out of the golf cart. Inside, the appliances are Sub-Zero and the countertops are Italian granite—and there’s a hot tub on the side patio. “And can you beat the price, at \$935,000?” he asks grandly.

Excuse me?

“Well, that’s hardly the most expensive residence we have here,” says Carter, flashing his thousand-watt grin. “We just sold one in April for \$2.5 million.”

For a trailer.

The 'Bu! Not even 60 years ago the phone book for this 21-mile stretch of oceanfront just north of Los Angeles was only 10 pages long. Now look at it: the main shopping area, currently undergoing a *nuevo rústico* renovation, may still be named “the Malibu Lumber Yard,” but it’s chockablock with John Varvatos, Ralph Lauren, Juicy Couture, Chrome Hearts, and a dozen crowded coffee shops, plus a new restaurant from Rande Gerber. Oracle’s Larry Ellison appears to have finally broken ground on his multi-million-dollar restaurant project on Carbon Beach. Even in the housing downturn, the prices of homes

here remain astronomical. The late computer-industry pioneer Max Palevsky's oceanfront villa went on the market for \$55 million, and a 1,500-square-foot house rented for \$40,000 a month to the Olsen twins a few years ago.

And is Malibu really so great? You know how in the Hamptons there aren't any ugly stores in town or fast-food franchises except for the one strip in Southampton that's still pretty close to the highway? Well, in Malibu they don't care about that. They throw their Jack in the Boxes all over the place.

But the natural surroundings, the canyons and the sea, are still heart-stopping, exquisite. The Chumash Indians crossed the Santa Monica Mountains into Malibu some 7,000 years ago, fishing the rivers in their canoes until Spanish settlers made camp on the shores of "Maliwu Creek" in 1776. One of these Spaniards claimed 13,000 acres of land that make up present-day Malibu, though the parcel ended up in the hands of Boston tycoon Frederick Hastings Rindge by the end of the 19th century. Rindge dreamed of turning Malibu into a glamorous California Côte d'Azur, but he died at 48, before his dreams could be realized. His widow, May Rindge, an Annie Oakley-style traditionalist, had different plans for the land: she erected high, wire fences, brought in armed patrols to ward off squatters, and shut out the public completely. For more than 20 years, Rindge fought efforts to create a public highway that would eventually connect Santa Barbara and San Diego. It was the longest land battle in California's history.

May Rindge finally lost her appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1925, and with it her determination to keep Malibu private. As builders began construction on the Pacific Coast Highway, she started selling off land in large parcels. Hollywood was immediately smitten, snapping up 10-year leases for \$1 per oceanfront square foot per month in one of the first residential parcels, the Malibu Movie Colony. Swedish silent-film star Anna Q. Nilsson was one of the first to build a cottage at the Colony, followed by Bing Crosby, Jack Warner, and Gloria Swanson. (Robert Redford bought Nilsson's original house for almost \$2 million in the 80s; later, Bob Newhart purchased it.) Life remained low-key within the weekend retreat for decades: tennis and badminton by day, cookouts on the beach at night. The pleasures of Malibu were a secret of the elite until 1959, when *Gidget*, the story of a girl surfer in Malibu, hit the theaters, followed by a stream of beach-party movies.

Endless Summer

As the world turned its attention to Malibu, Paradise Cove became a popular location for sets—the album cover for the Beach Boys’ *Surfin’ Safari* record was shot here—but it wasn’t anywhere that someone would actually stay overnight. The Cove, originally called Ramirez Canyon Beach, was much rougher than Malibu Colony. It was developed in the 1940s after the Malibu Colony pier was damaged by winter storms. According to Marian Hall, author of *Malibu: California’s Most Famous Seaside Community*, the owner held a contest to rename the area, and the residents picked “Paradise Cove.” Fishermen brought their trailers to the area, which had a tackle shop, boat rentals, and a barge. The kelp beds just offshore were full of halibut, sea bass, and yellowtail, and divers easily pulled up lobster and abalone for Friday-night fish fries.

At first, the trailers were set down willy-nilly by the water, but in 1972 the owners of the Cove finally decided to grade the bluff. The clientele was macho in the early years. Director Sam Peckinpah and Otis Chandler, the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*, moved into the park, and *The Rockford Files* started shooting there, too, with James Garner’s trailer in one of the slots. “Sam Peckinpah loved the park,” says David Weddle, author of the Peckinpah biography *If They Move ... Kill ‘Em!* and a television writer who has lived in the Cove for more than 20 years. “He had burned through a lot of marriages, and given up on the idea of having a house and a family. Sometimes, he’d put multiple bullet holes through the back wall of his trailer—but when he got rowdy, he always sent flowers to the owner of the park as an apology.” Peckinpah lived in the Cove until his death, in 1984, when his ashes were scattered off the coast in front of the trailer park.

In the 1990s, some of the trailers at the Cove went for as little as \$25,000, while trailers with an ocean view sold for up to \$400,000. But in the housing boom of 2006, prices went up tenfold, much more than in the rest of Malibu, even though buying a trailer is a pretty sketchy real-estate deal. The owner of the park still controls the land, and you’re just buying the improvements—in other words, all you own is the trailer itself. But prices still rise with each resale: a 75-year-old woman who seldom changed out of her bathrobe sold her trailer for \$750,000 to the ex-wife of a former Eagles guitarist in 2003, but she never moved in—she decided she wanted to live on a boat. She sold it for \$975,000 to another flipper, who sold it to Mac Humphries, a retired Countrywide executive, and his wife, Jill, for \$1.2 million. The Humphrieses put another \$1 million into renovations.

After Dave Carter goes down to the beach to check out the surf—he used to make surfboards for a living before he switched to the more lucrative trade of selling trailers—I stop by the Humphrieses’ trailer, which has floors of Peruvian marble, bay windows facing the sea, and a lot of framed pictures, including one of Jill’s horse, George. “We’ve got the chassis underneath, but this is hardly a trailer anymore,” says Jill Humphries, drifting through the house with us and a friend from down the street. She stops at the master bedroom, with a four-poster bed, and taps the door with a nail. “These are 150-year-old Indian doors,” she says, touching a series of silver nubs affixed to the wood. “They were built this way so that elephants wouldn’t bang into them. The elephants know that they would get hurt if they went near them, and back off.”

“Actually,” jokes her friend, putting a hand on her hip, “those nubs turn into daggers, and then she puts her husband up there, because she likes that kind of stuff.”

“Now, that’s not right!” says Humphries, breaking out into giggles.

After leaving the Humphrieses’, I wander around the Cove, passing a silver Airstream with gingham window shades and a small, hand-lettered sign out front that reads, LAND YACHT. A gang of grommet (little kid) surfers shoots by, calling out insults to one another before a tall blond surfer in his 40s—an ex-Goldman Sachs financier turned hotelier (who asks to remain nameless, for privacy’s sake)—swings by with his neighbor Henry (who prefers to give only his first name), to watch the waves from a lookout point on the bluff. “The trailer park ruined my work ethic,” grumbles Henry, staring at the waves.

A half-dozen surfers bob around in the sea. “A lot of the guys down there are 60 to 90 years old, and they don’t care about you catching their waves—they just want to have fun,” says Henry. “That’s very different than surfing in the rest of Malibu, which can be competitive and vicious.” In fact, in Paradise Cove, the surfers are so collegial that, when the paparazzi tried to shoot pictures of Matthew McConaughey (“Matt lived in the trailer park for a year, and I never saw him with his shirt on once,” says a park resident), the kids from the Cove gave the paps a beatdown. “That’s a rare real trailer-park moment for you,” says the ex-Goldman Sachs guy.

Mostly, though, the park is an almost absurdly friendly place, a clubby beach community with most of the trailers *parked*, I guess you would say, on a diagonal, so everyone has a view of the street from their front windows. Neighbors dart in and out of one another’s trailers, scrambling after kids on skateboards, and at least a dozen people invite me in for

coffee, to see their pictures of the Fourth of July party at the Cove or Minnie Driver's Christmas breakfast, which she hosts on the bluff every year, when she makes doughnuts from scratch for everyone. "Look, if you need privacy, this is not the place for you," says Kathy Manoukian, a transplant from Arizona. "If you need space, this is not the place for you." She hoots a little. "And if you don't like gossip, this is not the place for you."

Moblesse Oblige

After leaving Manoukian's trailer, I head over to see Roko Belic, a filmmaker who has just finished *Happy*, a documentary exploring what makes people that way. His trailer looks like a hilltop monastery, decorated with African and Buddhist carvings, photographs of monkeys, and a series of heavy red velvet drapes that obscure the afternoon sun. Belic has only shorts on: "I apologize that I didn't put a shirt on when you walked up," he says, "but I usually hang around here in my boxers because the park is so relaxed. Sometimes, I put some shorts on to go down to the beach."

Belic came to Paradise Cove two and a half years ago, after his friend Tom Shadyac, Jim Carrey's longtime director and producer, had an epiphany and moved there. Shadyac was worth tens of millions of dollars, but he felt lost in life. "Before I moved to Paradise Cove, I was living in a 17,000-square-foot, three-home complex, and the key word was 'complex,'" he says. "One house was a guesthouse, one house was a work house. I had six or seven acres, and for the people I knew in L.A., that was pretty standard. But I had been in L.A. for 20 years and I still didn't know one of my neighbors. Here I live in 1,000 square feet, and it takes me 20 minutes to take out my trash, because I'm always chatting with them." Shadyac, who has just finished a documentary about the communitarian spirit entitled *I Am*, gave away or sold most of his belongings and funneled the money into various causes when he moved into the park. He now refuses to accept more than the Directors Guild minimum for directing fees, presumably a vast discount from his earnings on movies like *Ace Ventura* and *Liar Liar*. "I don't want to participate in a system where we all argue for as much as we can get and take as much as we can," he says, then laughs a little. "I'm not trying to bring down capitalism or anything, but it's just not right for me."

Anyway, back at his trailer, Belic has some philosophical words as well. "I know a guy in the Cove who can afford five of these trailers, but he likes that the trailer he has is so small that his kids have to stay in the same room when they come here," says Belic. "They sleep in bunk beds, and they understand that the point of life is not to have as much luxury and exclusivity

as you can afford—unlike what everyone in L.A. thinks—but actually to spend time together, to have experiences together.”

Belic takes a sip from a glass of water. “The other day, I saw a house rolling down my street, and I was like, ‘My God, we really do live in a trailer park,’” he says. “It was so bizarre. The truckdrivers were asking everyone to move their cars out of the road. It’s such a cool thing, a meditation on impermanence, or whatever you want to call it.” He smiles. “You know, someone said to me the other day, ‘There’s only one way to leave Paradise Cove, and it’s feetfirst.’ I agree. I’m not planning on leaving anytime soon.”

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