

# A Peaceful Domain

## *Evoking a Romantic Barn in the Malibu Colony*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RUSSELL MACMASTERS

THE MALIBU COLONY is a densely populated place, with a plethora of architectural styles. The houses cluster closely along the beach on narrow lots, almost every property abuts, and only the high fences and locked gates provide any semblance of privacy. The flavor is international: California beach, Cape Cod shingle, Bauhaus modern, Normandy farmhouse, classical Spanish, Mediterranean villa, even a castle out of Camelot sits high atop a nearby hill.

It is sunbaked, pleasant and expensive, but always crowded. In the midst of this, Oscar-winning British film producer Barry Spikings and his wife, Dot, have created a world of privacy and a sense of spaciousness, in a house that is a barn, with high beams, white wood, and sunlight pouring through uncurtained windows.

Barry Spikings is from Boston. Not the Yankee city, but the English Boston, in Lincolnshire, the seaport from which some of the Puritans departed on their roundabout, westward voyage to America and the New World. "I feel like a latter-day Pilgrim," says Barry Spikings. "We just landed on a different coast."

Southern California has always attracted the artists and intellectuals of Europe. Igor Stravinsky, Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, Christopher Isherwood and their friends leavened the loaf as Europe ignited in World War II. A horde of foreign rock stars, film actors and moviemakers have gravitated to Malibu in recent years. The Spikingses are no exception. Their quest for the sun led them first to the Caribbean, and ultimately prompted them to emigrate to the colony.

"Where I grew up, the wind blew from the Russian steppes, across the

North Sea, and in through our front door," Barry Spikings remembers. "I yearned to live in a place where the sun shines all the time, where I could walk the beach and be warm."

While the memory of cold winters prompted their move, the softness of the English summer was the inspiration for the interiors of their house. "Barry is a farmer's boy," says Dot Spikings. "His family had acres and acres of daffodils as far as the eye could see. They farmed the bulbs; they had farm animals, haylofts and barns. The dream of living in a barnlike house is a remembrance of his childhood." Their search for a house centered on finding one that could be renovated to spacious proportions, with interior walls and ceilings removed to the bare periphery, uncluttered to a point of purity.

"I was so lucky to find the perfect shell for us," Dot Spikings recalls, "a beach cottage that, when gutted, proved to have rafters, height, all we needed. At once becoming the brave and instant practitioner of architecture and design, I found my courage ebbing daily with the tide. I finally became terrified that the one remaining wall might collapse, and even more terrified that it would all be a mistake when we finished.

"A dress, when a mistake is made, can be hidden in the back of the closet. But a building mistake that involves a double-height steel and glass sunburst window is hard to ignore."

In her mind's eye, however, the vision of the renovation, blessedly complete, with white, clean-lined space, prevailed. "I kept seeing Barry and me having a celebratory glass of champagne, with baskets of flowers everywhere. That picture got me

through endless nights of doubts."

The cohesion in the house is accomplished through the use of white—on the wood-lined walls, in pickled pine floors, for the hand-carved swans. Punctuated by the use of natural tones for baskets, lamps and the dozens of wooden candlesticks, the look speaks of refreshing comfort and light. Country origins are recalled in a series of charming animal paintings and the arrangements of fruits, vegetables and flowers on every tabletop.

"I wanted our barn as open to nature as possible," says Dot Spikings, "so we could wake up with sun and air." Of towerlike proportions, the loft for sleeping or dreaming maximizes the possibilities for bringing the ocean to the eyes and ears.

The effect of the loft—and the enormous two-story window—was unexpected. "Suddenly the house became witty. It took on a humorous, happy look," says Barry Spikings.

For Malibu beach strollers, it is a witty house. They see the tower, the farm animals on the walls through the glass panes, the scarecrow protecting the seaside garden of basil, nasturtiums, peppers, tomatoes, greens, dill, parsley and lettuce. And sometimes, in the early evening, they can spot the Spikingses themselves out picking their supper salad.

"We purposely put a huge skylight in our bedroom—we still keep farmer's hours here," says Barry Spikings. "We want to wake up with the early morning light, the trees, the sky. You must be able to see the sunrise." □

—Nancy Guild

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