

CELEBRITY HOMES

Ryan Murphy's Brilliant Beach House

Acclaimed television impresario Ryan Murphy conjures a showstopping compound in Laguna Beach

PHOTOGRAPHY BY [DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN](#) · Posted January 4, 2017 · [Magazine](#)

When I was pitching the very first season of *American Horror Story*, in 2011, my main selling point was this simple conceit: Let's change how we make it. Let's do something radically new with the characters and the sets. Let's completely reimagine it every single year. To some people, this idea might seem risky. But for me, it was a very natural rhythm I felt I had some experience with: I had been doing this sort of annual reimagining at my Laguna Beach home since I bought the place in 2003.

The modern residence, designed by legendary local architect Mark Singer on two acres of land with panoramic views of the Pacific, had served as a kind of design laboratory for me. Every 12 months or so, I would try a different version of my California dream.

The house has been a cream-and-black-leather tribute to *Scarface*, then a cozy beach shack inspired by *Mildred Pierce*, then, after a trip to Asia, a textural Balinese home, then a blue-and-white homage to Bel Air. Moving trucks would show up, old furniture and art would be carted off to storage or sold, and a new vision would be carefully placed, scrutinized, and curated with feverish enthusiasm. Then I would start thinking about doing it again. Design has always been a passion of mine, a place to pour anxiety and joy in equal measure. I'm a bit of an addictive



personality, to the point where, when my business manager complained of my Laguna hobby, I replied, “I figure it’s either furniture or cocaine.”

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The pool terrace at Ryan Murphy's California compound, designed by architect Mark Singer, features chairs and planters by Willy Guhl.

I have been radically transforming rooms since I was nine years old and my parents let me experiment with my Indiana tract-house bedroom. In 1977 it was inspired by Studio 54; the next year it was a tribute to Hitchcock. And so on. The experience was great preparation for becoming a showrunner and a director with the privilege of creating imaginary worlds.

Set on a stunning plot of land, the Laguna home was always a dream, purchased with my first real money (from the pilot of *Nip/Tuck*). My oldest friend, Bart Brown, also a real-estate junkie, visited the property with me on a sunny January afternoon, and I bought it on the spot. The project started off with one house, which Bart would lovingly tend to while I was off in Los Angeles working. Then the house next door came up for sale, and I bought it, reuniting the original parcel. Bart moved in there,

and I lived in the main house. Surrounding both was a tiered nightmare of a garden with ground as hard as lava rock and sad, wilted root-bound roses.

In 2009, after writing the *Glee* pilot, I called up Mark Singer and asked him to figure out a way to tie the houses together. What about a pool pavilion? he asked. Sold! A citrus allée? Sold again. How about a saltwater soaking tub? Sounds great! Plans were drafted up and sat for two years. Then I got married to David Miller and had my first child, Logan. (Ford would soon follow.) I wanted to nest, to create a weekend getaway for my growing family. And so we started construction, supervised by Bart and David. The idea was to make both houses steel and glass, and the gardens modernist but bold and odd (like much of my work, I have been told). With garden designer Bridget Hedison, we moved forward. Six months tops, we thought. God laughed.

Five years later, after stops and starts, it was finished: concrete and glass and minimalist, with olive trees galore. My good friend and interior designer Cliff Fong, who had helped me revamp my Beverly Hills home (previously owned by Diane Keaton), was called in to finesse the final details.

For months, Cliff and I slowly but surely curated a home and gardens inspired by local artists we loved. The California dream house now became a literal tribute to the photographers, furniture designers, potters, and decorators who have, over the last 100 years, made the Golden State their home as well.

An entire wall was dedicated to the photography of Herb Ritts, whom I had the pleasure and privilege of knowing slightly before he died, in 2002, and whose work my husband has long admired.

William Haines, movie star turned decorator to the stars in Hollywood's golden era, was always a favorite, and so Cliff found several big Haines-designed pieces—most

notably a comfy sofa we clad in a mouse-gray velvet—and brought them in. Next to my bed are two huge chinoiserie lamps covered in white porcelain flowers that Haines designed for the bedroom of Joan Crawford (I'm doing a show called *Feud*, out in March on FX, about the battle between Crawford and Bette Davis).

Other California pieces abound, but three are worth singling out: Doug Aitken's text sculpture *NOW*, anchoring the living room; David Cressey's earthy pottery, which I have come to adore and hoard; and *Portal Arch*, a huge piece of found Big Sur redwood hacked by chain saw into a monumental totem by J. B. Blunk. The latter weighs more than 1,000 pounds and stands proudly outside the kitchen window, framing an ocean view.

Peaceful, clean-lined, modern, and oddly quirky, my finally finished family home embodies my fantasy of California—glamorous but effortless, a place to dream and retreat—and how I pictured myself living here when I was kid.

Recently, David, Bart, and I were walking the grounds, taking it all in, and the conversation shifted to my yearly habit of redoing and reimagining the house. “I think I'm finally done,” I said.