

JOHN PATTON

A WHIMSICAL MOOD
ENLIVENS A CONVERTED
BARN IN SANTA BARBARA

I've done houses for myself with very tasteful interiors, everything very correct and upscale," says John Patton. "I got tired of it. I wanted something with charm, something fun and without any particular value so I wouldn't have to worry about it being too precious."

Patton and his business partner, Leo Duval, found the simplicity they were seeking in a converted barn overlooking the Pacific in Santa Barbara. They saw the 1915 handcrafted structure as the very embodiment of their affection for Americana and a fitting showcase for their collections of vintage toys, signs and cars.

They kept the barn's rustic red exterior to emphasize its vernacular appearance. "The house is pretty much the way we found it," says Duval. Indeed, they made so few changes, the interior was completed six weeks after the day they assumed possession of the property.

Patton and Duval have always maintained weekend retreats. "They were alike in that they were second homes, furnished with leftovers," says Patton. But this was different. "Even though this is a



"We wanted an old-fashioned space with contemporary spirit," says John Patton of the Santa Barbara, California, residence he shares with his partner, Leo Duval. TOP: Patton, left, and Duval with their collection of classic cars. ABOVE: Tom Palmore's 1985 *Owl and Drapery Panel* hangs in the main room.

weekend place, it's my main home and has everything I own in it." They still spend three to four days a week at their office and apartment in Los Angeles.

"I didn't want anything that felt dressy, stiff or fancy," Patton explains. This approach is evident in the quintet of worn kiddie cars arrayed on the front patio. Inside, the house is exuberant and whimsical. Retaining the outline of the original barn, with its twenty-two-foot ceilings and sturdy crossbeams, the main room is an undivided space where furniture defines the living and dining areas. The designers painted the walls a sunny yellow, the trim bright white, and added draperies of bold red-and-cream-striped denim.

Patton, who has designed for both society clients (see *Architectural Digest*, September 1993) and celebrities such as Andy Williams (see *Architectural Digest*, September 1978), does not consider his choices appropriate for everyone. "I put more of a mixture of things together in this house than I could ever do with a client. This is my own personality. When I work for a client, I don't impose my personality on them. I try

"I had my elegant period," Patton says. "Now I'd rather buy an old sign than a serious painting." OPPOSITE: The converted barn's 22-foot ceilings, along with items such as a Mobil Pegasus, a Texaco star and a wheel of fortune from a carnival, contribute to the "circus-like" character of the main room.

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to make people comfortable."

A successful designer for more than thirty years, Patton has nurtured parallel interests in outsider art, automobiles and amateur crafts. During the 1980s Patton and Duval's gallery in Los Angeles sold Americana as well as Patton's own furniture designs and paintings.

The cavernous space of

the barn nicely frames their collection of vintage metal signs. A giant yellow scallop advertising Shell and a crimson Pegasus representing Mobil are hung high on the walls alongside a sign with flashing lightbulbs announcing "Spanish Food." Framed 1930s posters for car races in Monaco line the stairwell.

"It's like a circus," Patton

observes of the colorful main room. "It has a lot of spirit." A large tole model of a fishing boat and a wood paddle wheeler from the 1930s appear to sail around the perimeter of the room, watched over by a tin lighthouse. A painting of a red barn by Patton's father and a watercolor done by Patton while studying at New York's Par-

sons School of Design lean casually against stacks of art books on the Art Déco mahogany tables. A wood fish covered with scales made of misprinted Coca-Cola bottle caps, considered outsider art, hangs from a crossbeam.

A comfortable leather sofa and a pair of dark oak Stickley Morris chairs with cush-

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ABOVE: In Patton's bedroom, a clock from a Bulgarian automobile dashboard sits on a chest of drawers decorated with bottle caps and license plates made by Jon Bok. Patton designed the barrel chair, which recalls "a 1930s western chair I saw in New Mexico."

OPPOSITE: "We use the enclosed patio for dining and entertaining and as an exterior area for our two dogs," Patton says. Kiddie cars spanning 50 years are grouped around the front entrance near a giant ear of corn. "I was told it came from the set of *Honey, I Shrank the Kids*."

JOHN PATTON

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ions covered in white French terry cloth are placed around a cast-iron stove and a burlwood low table designed by Patton. The dining area is defined by a circular table and caned Windsor chairs.

In an altarlike arrangement against the stairs, on a table draped with a red-and-white quilt, a faded wheel of fortune from a carnival joins a compote piled with steel boccie balls. Hundreds of tin windup toys are crowded onto shelves along an adjacent wall. Space boys pilot tin airships, captains drive motorboats, and animals of every species perform antics, including Donald Duck, who rides a bicycle. "That's probably the number-one toy. I found it at a dime store in Laguna Beach," recalls Patton. "There are reproductions of it today, but if it says 'West Germany' on the bottom, you're lucky. And it does."

For Patton and Duval, the whole point is a return to innocence. "When I started collecting toys, it was strictly out of my own heart," explains Patton. "I wasn't trying to keep up with toy collectors. This was my idea of fun."

The downstairs bedroom, used by Duval, opens onto an enclosed deck with a spa, next to which a statue of the RCA dog listens and a pair of life preservers hang on the fence. The upstairs bedroom and sitting room—what Patton calls his "teenage hideaway"—are dedicated to his car collection. Shelves hold dozens of model cars and twenty years of bound volumes of *Automobile Quarterly*. He commissioned the "John Patton Classic Motorcars" scale-model showroom, complete with electric lights and Plexiglas turntables on which the cars rotate. Patton's paintings of cars are displayed throughout the house. And it doesn't stop there. Patton and Duval's favorite amenity is the three-car garage for the cherry-red 1961 Thunderbird Sport Roadster, with a swingaway steering wheel and tuck-and-roll upholstery in black and white; the white 1955 Mercury Montclair Sun Valley with a Plexiglas roof; and the powder-blue 1950 Lincoln Cosmopolitan Capri.

"The best compliment I've had on the house," Patton says, "came from a client's nine-year-old son, who said, 'Mommy, this place is so cool, it's just like Pee-Wee's Playhouse.'" He laughs. "It can't get better than that." □

THOMAS FLEMING

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over the room—"the strongest shade of it I've ever used," he declares. "I was in a quandary: Do I add a cornice and break the walls and ceiling, or do I just paint and let everything flow into everything else?" Off the kitchen is a screen porch, favored as the summer living room for its view of the granite-clad swimming pool and the pond beyond.

The designer credits the inspiration for the master bedroom upstairs to a 1940s movie, *Home in Indiana*. "It had a bedroom so big there was a Christmas tree in it, and ever since, I've wanted a bedroom with that same spacious feeling," he says. "Now that I have one, it's like opening up a present every day." The room's colors are muffled: Coral, yellow and teal freely associate in the antique Feraghan rug, and the love seat is bashfully covered in beige.

Also upstairs are a dressing room, double bath and two studies. Fleming's, with its low-pitched ceiling and dormer windows, has the feeling of garret or *garçonnière*. A high table serves as his desk; its twin, across the room, functions as a bar. The furnishings tend to be either nineteenth-century English or twentieth-century rattan or wicker. "Wicker is my passion," Fleming confesses. "I can hardly pass a piece without buying it." The floor was stenciled in two tones of brown in a diamond pattern by a local artist, Ken Scanlon, who specializes in "fantasy finishes."

The second study was planned for Fleming's friend Hagstrom, a bibliophile by avocation. "I did it, but he personalized it," the designer allows, adding, "Jack is very good at personalizing." Hagstrom's one wish was that his study hark back to the book-lined living room of their previous house, so Fleming gladly recycled a green wool rug and built bookcases all around the new room. Except for the two places where French doors had been projected to open out to a porch. It's a happy fact that from almost every room in the house you can walk outside—if not onto a porch, then onto a terrace or even into an arbor.

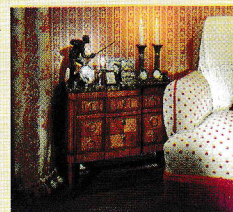
But no nook, however embowered, is private enough. "Most people would think of a house like this as an escape," says Thomas Fleming. "But I'm my own worst enemy—out here I work. After all, the clients are here, too." □

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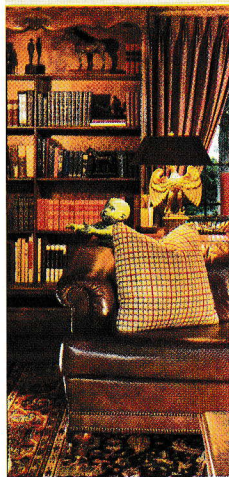
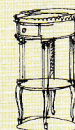
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