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RIDING HIGH

A ranch in the Santa Monica Mountains serves as the ideal retreat, where Portia de Rossi can indulge her passion for horses and Ellen DeGeneres can escape everything—except her obsessive love of design

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FACING PAGE: Portia de Rossi and Ellen DeGeneres at their ranch in Hidden Valley, California, which DeGeneres designed with Jay Holman and Cliff Fong. **THIS PAGE:** In the living room of the property's main cabin, Number 8, a 1962 Fabricius & Kastholm chair faces a sofa covered in Belgian linen and a granite-top cocktail table, both from Brenda Antin; the fireplace is faced with antique Belgian brick, the wall sculpture is by Catherine Willis, the painting on the shelf at left is by Martin Mull, and the one on the right is a flea-market find. See Resources.



It didn't take Portia de Rossi long to discover Ellen DeGeneres's passion for decorating. "I got a very thorough education in mid-20th-century French furniture within the first weeks of our dating," she says with a grin. Indeed, there's nothing the television star and comedian loves more than designing a house. "Ellen has moved more times than any person I know," says Los Angeles designer Cliff Fong, her decorating accomplice. The goal, however, is not to flip her homes. "I can only change the furniture so much and I get bored," DeGeneres says. "Then I need a new structure to work on."

In 2009, the couple bought a property that De Rossi believed would keep DeGeneres occupied for some time: a ranch north of Los Angeles with multiple structures, including eight cabins. "I thought it might take Ellen five years to finish the project," De Rossi says, "and she did it in one. It was shocking!" Situated in tony Hidden Valley, the 26-acre property was the estate of actor William Powell in the 1920s. Later it became a monastery, then a rehab center. DeGeneres thinks part of the film *Seabiscuit* was shot there. "When we bought the place, it was a professional horse facility," she recalls. "But it was





In the Art Barn, the Danish leather armchairs, bluestone cocktail table, and 18th-century Spanish wood ring are all from Lucca Antiques, and a pair of antique armchairs are covered in Belgian linen. **BELOW:** In the Romantic Barn, an American workbench holds a Poul Henningsen lamp and a Belgian bust; the stools are French, the portrait is 19th century, the antique rug is Persian, and the redwood walls are original. **FACING PAGE:** Under an oak tree in a pasture, a pergola shades a French military daybed and a wicker sofa. See Resources.



really not taken care of.” Nonetheless, both women were immediately seduced by the landscape. The property abuts the Santa Monica Mountains and features giant boulders and oak groves. There are roaming deer, coyotes, mountain lions, and a number of feral cats that the two more or less adopted.

De Rossi, who was born in Australia and moved to the U.S. in the 1990s to pursue acting, has her own on-site passion: riding horses. She has two horses here, a Hanoverian called Maeby—named for the daughter of her character on *Arrested Development*—and a Dutch Warmblood called Mcy (pronounced Macy). “But she looks like a cow,” De Rossi says, “so we call her Moo.”

Don’t think she has the stables to herself, however. “There are times I’ll come to the barn and see a beautiful piece of early American furniture where my horses get groomed,” De Rossi says. “I have to explain to Ellen that I need to fit a horse in there.” DeGeneres did manage to sequester one stall and turn it into an elegant sitting room. It was there that De Rossi wrote part of her 2010 memoir, *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain*.

They made numerous alterations to the property, the most significant of which was tearing down the main house. “The footings were crumbling,” De Rossi explains. “It wasn’t worth salvaging.” They



also removed plastic corral fencing and a host of signage. “It said, ‘No Parking Here!’ ‘Don’t Even Think of Parking There!’” DeGeneres says with a laugh. They did, however, retain a public restroom, and gave its interior a coat of chalkboard paint. “I leave chalk in there so everyone can draw,” she adds.

When it came to the overall look of the place, DeGeneres says she wanted “a feeling of country and yet a relaxed sophistication.” She favors sculptural pieces and simple forms, mixing 20th-century designs by Jean Prouvé and Arne Jacobsen with industrial furnishings, and she collects old portraits and fencing masks. “Ellen likes things to be a little more natural and rustic,” De Rossi explains. DeGeneres initially worked on the ranch with Los Angeles decorator Jay Holman, with whom she has completed several other projects. But as soon as they were finished, she became antsy and called in Fong to help her tweak the spaces, and it remains an ongoing process. One of her primary goals was for each cabin to have a different mood. For DeGeneres,



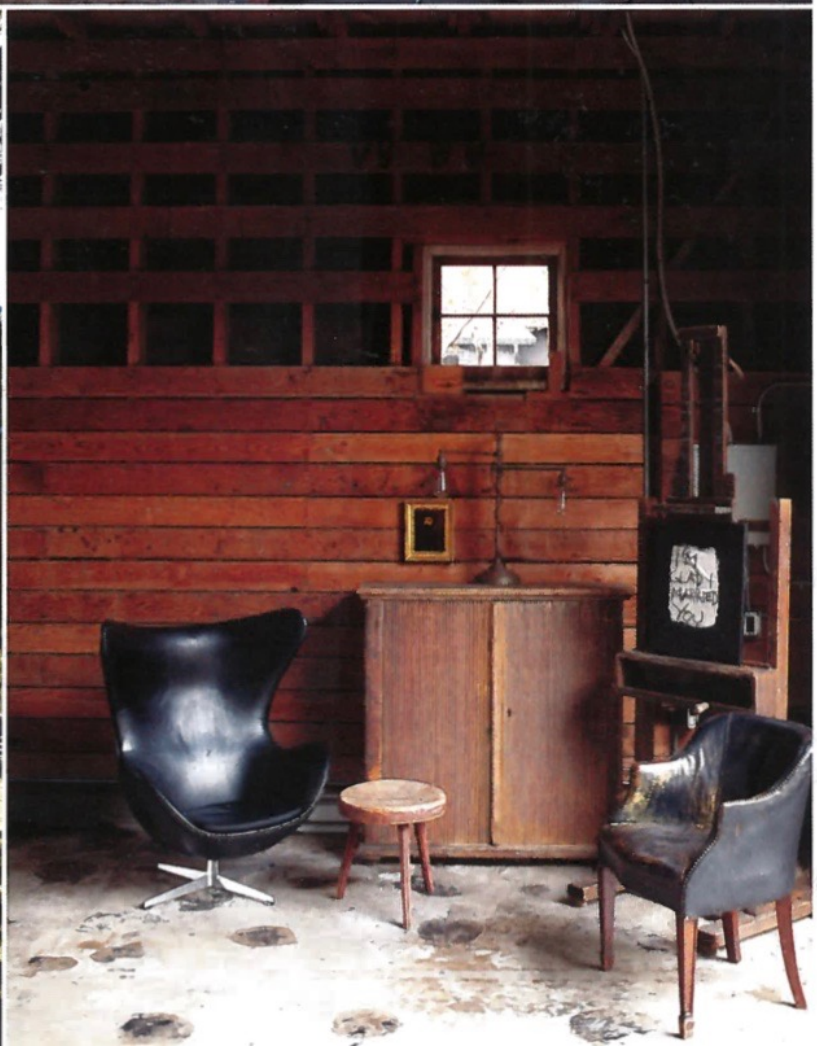
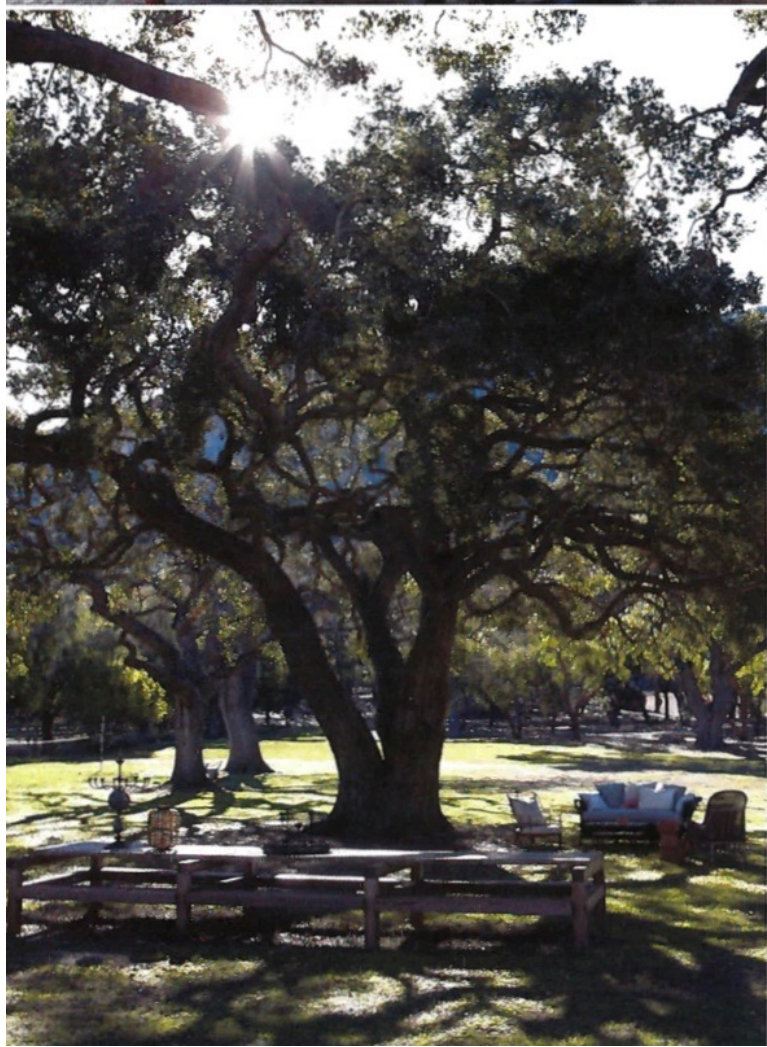
In the Art Barn, a 17th-century Swedish farm table is surrounded by circa-1930 Swedish armchairs; the Spanish desk is late 18th century, the cabinet is 19th century, the speed bag is antique, and the photograph is by an unknown artist. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** In the kitchen area of Cabin 6, an Italian industrial light fixture hangs above an antique bluestone table and 19th-century American Windsor chairs; an Ib Kofod-Larsen armchair and a midcentury Danish lounge chair in its original leather are placed near the fireplace. California oak trees outside Cabin 5. See Resources.







An Oldenburg gelding in the horse barn, which is paved with rubber tiles; another stall contains a 1900s French armchair, a 19th-century table, and bird prints. The workbench in the entrance is 19th-century French. See Resources.



A 19th-century Swedish chalkboard hangs above a 1900 French bluestone-top table in the Art Barn; the antique baker's rack is from Brenda Antin, and the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's All White. **FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** The living room of Cabin 6 features a 1960 Illum Wikkelso sofa and a 1965 Ib Kofod-Carsen armchair; the 18th-century postal desk is Swedish, and the floor lamp is by Alison Berger. An Arne Jacobsen Egg chair, a Frits Henningsen armchair, and an 18th-century Gustavian cabinet in the Romantic Barn; DeGeneres made the artwork on the easel as a first-anniversary "paper" gift for De Rossi. A custom-made table inspired by Donald Judd and wicker furniture in a pasture. See Resources.





“I CAN ONLY CHANGE THE FURNITURE SO MUCH AND I GET BORED,” ELLEN DEGENERES SAYS. “THEN I NEED A NEW STRUCTURE TO WORK ON”



Number 6 is “very much like Belgium” and Number 8 “more contemporary.” She and De Rossi have lived in most of them and recently moved back into Number 5, which has a screened porch and a prime view of the largest rock on the property—“the size of a small apartment,” DeGeneres marvels.

The heart of the ranch, however, is a pair of large barns. The all-white Art Barn serves as a living and dining area. The darker, more brooding Romantic Barn is called that because the couple celebrated their first wedding anniversary there with a candlelit dinner. DeGeneres’s gift was to install three early-20th-century factory lamps that De Rossi had spotted at a nearby gallery. The space also serves as a games room, where they play Ping-Pong and poker. For bigger parties—which have drawn friends including Diane Keaton, Jamie Foxx, and Jennifer Aniston—they set up outdoor seating areas and put down vintage textiles as picnic blankets.

How long the couple will stay in Hidden Valley is anybody’s guess, given DeGeneres’s penchant for picking up and decorating anew, but there’s a good chance that this place may be for keeps. De Rossi seems particularly attached to it (both her mother and her brother’s family live nearby). “If I find something else and can see having a new project, I’m open to that,” DeGeneres says. “But I’d have to fight Portia, because this is her dream property. This we may just hold on to.” ■



A painting by Corey Daniels hangs in a bedroom of Cabin 8; the chaise is 19th century, the 1940 lamp is by Jacques Adnet, the chairs are by Jean Prouvé, and the table is by Axel Vervoordt. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP:** A custom-made bed by Jay Holman is dressed in Matteo linens and a vintage linen matelassé coverlet, and the antique Serapi rug and Tibetan hemp carpet are both from J. Iloulian Rugs. A limestone tub and countertop in the cabin's bathroom; the lamp is from Obsolete, and the rug is 1940s Moroccan. See Resources.