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Animal house

Sheila Hayman visits the dogs, cats and cockatoos
at Tatjana Patitz's Malibu ranch house



Ironwood, picked up from local beaches and sawn to length, forms a sculptural balustrade around the double-height living room



Hearing that I was going to interview Tatjana Patitz, a friend threw me the latest issue of *Paris Match*, a bizarre and unmistakably French publication which I was last given as a bribe to do homework at the age of 15. On the cover, Catherine Deneuve stares wistfully past the camera to advertise an "intimate interview", done up to the nines and beyond in a plunging, velvet dress, diamonds, and at least an hour's worth of make-up. Roughly translated, the caption reads, "I worry that people will love me for my looks and not for myself." The implied inner conflict is made even more touching by the little sticker, marked "\$4.50", askew on her porcelain forehead.

Tatjana Patitz comes from a very different school of female beauty: hers is that International Casual look of ripped jeans, bare feet and a Porsche. At first she looks disappointingly human, loping to greet me surrounded by a bounding bundle of dogs. It's only as we sit and she talks that I notice, beyond the endless legs and the coat-hanger shoulders, that whichever way she turns the bones of her face are sculptural curves. This, I realise, is what makes a supermodel different.

An outfit like Deneuve's is Patitz's idea of hell. Asked which, of all the many looks a model has to assume, is her least favourite, she doesn't hesitate. "I hate it when I'm done up all vampy, with make-up and big hair and huge heels. Sometimes the skirt is so tight you can't even sit down. I like to be able to sit like this." She demonstrates, spreading legs that stretch from Malibu to Santa Monica. "I don't go to parties much where I have to dress up and, if I do, the minute I get home I throw off the heels and the dress and get comfortable."

Comfort is clearly a big priority in her life and this registers clearly in her home, where she has ripped out marble fireplaces and chilly tiles and restyled the house with local materials, plants and worn-in coverings.

"The thing that took longest was finding a

house. I looked for a year and a half all over Malibu, and it took that long to find somewhere that you could go like *this*" – the long legs crash like jackhammers on to the floor – "without thinking it was going to break apart; a lot of the houses here are so cheaply made and tacky. When we found this place – I loved the spaces, the high windows, the high ceilings – we just ripped everything out and started again."

The house sits in a lush tangle of trees and plants, halfway up a canyon opposite one of the finest surfing beaches in Malibu. With doors open wide and light streaming through the 20ft open windows in the living room, it melts into its surroundings like the haunt of some particularly artistic dryad.

Indeed, the bamboo lining the walls of the bathroom still bears its leaves, looking as though a good rainstorm would make it shoot out around the taps. The balustrade of the internal gallery is made of local ironwood, and sand and shells from the beach are set into the floors and counter tops. The cool dark floors are local hardwood – not rare hardwood, Patitz is quick to point out – and she had stone hauled from the canyon in rough lumps to make a new fireplace.

"I was everywhere: I helped fetch the stones and mix the cement with sand from the beach. In the end, the builders started asking whether I didn't have a job to go to." >

This page, people and animals share the comfort of old materials and furnishings: family photos crowd an Argentinian dresser; kitchen furniture is distressed and there are vases of wild sunflowers everywhere. Opposite, the inside/outside feel of the house of typified by this terrace among the trees, furnished with rugs hunted out on a working trip to Morocco



“I helped fetch the stones and mix the cement with sand from the beach. The builders started asking whether I didn’t have a job to go to”



When asked for her definition of home, Patitz responds, "Animals: dogs, cats, kittens, horses"





Opposite, Patitz favours hand-made objects and natural colours; her furnishings include Indian textiles, a Mexican screen and Spanish chairs. This page, the living room, cooled like the rest of the house by fans in the summer, in winter becomes an inviting place to relax around the fireplace of undressed local stone. Tatjana's visitors jam on the piano or bongos, or lounge beneath prints given to her by photographer friends

The natural materials and plain finishes continue in the kitchen, where the enamel has been ripped from all the appliances and the zinc underneath punched into stars like Mexican lanterns. The pebbly cement floors are carpeted with dogs escaping the summer heat. The house, in fact, seems to be designed as much for the comfort of animals as of people; when asked for her definition of home, Patitz responds, "Animals: dogs, cats, kittens, horses." There's also the white corella cockatoo, immortalised in carvings over the tall windows, flying across the room from one high arch to the next.

Her animals and her boyfriend, Gabriel Hill, also a model, are Patitz's preferred companions. When she does entertain, it's a barbecue for a few friends. There's not much time for socialising in any case, as she launches herself into a new career as a film actress, currently finalising a follow-up to her role in *Rising Sun* two years ago. Modelling helps with camera nerves, but acting is a very different game.

"When you're modelling, the still camera is a thing to which *you're* performing – you look at it, you're in control. The movie camera is more like something that's looking at you. With the still camera, you're aware of it

all the time – what it's seeing, how you're looking. With the movie camera, you have to try to forget that it's there completely."

All of this must be rather unnerving for somebody who's used to controlling every aspect of how she appears, but Tatjana's relationship with her looks is clearly much more thought-through than Deneuve's.

"As a model, you have to fulfil other people's fantasies, half the time without even realising it. You think people are being nice to you because of who you are and then you find out they have some other agenda. I would say 80 per cent of the men who go after models are sleazeballs. And 80 per cent of women think you're a threat before you do anything. I used to end up thinking, 'Why is that person being so mean?', and it's nothing to do with me at all. So all the time you're being used..." Her enjoyment of the company of animals is starting to make sense.

"I have a horse, he's a really beautiful horse, pure white, and he's been ridden to death by all these people who owned him, who all wanted to show him off. Now I have him here and I say to him, 'You can roll over and get all dirty; you can relax, nobody wants anything from you any more...'"

That is one lucky horse. ■



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