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Sea life centre

Fabulous decor does its best to compete in a book where the ocean is the real star

BY GABY SOUTAR

YOU'D THINK, WHEN potential buyers arrived to look over the captivating houses featured in the coffee-table book *New Seaside Interiors*, that the estate agent's spiel would be rendered completely useless.

There would seem little point in mentioning the decor of any of these places, beautiful as they are, when the interior design is competing with the miles of azure ocean visible from the windows and terraces. Once a prospective buyer has seen the views, "I'll take it" would surely be the only thing they could possibly choke out.

Anyone can be seduced by a coastal view, as proved by the fact that this book is a long-anticipated follow-up to the highly popular *Seaside Interiors*, released by Taschen back in 2000.

"A house by the sea. It's a dream a great many people have," editor Angelika Taschen says. "Eight years ago, for the first time, I gave that dream visual form in a book, and since then people have often told me that simply looking at it was like a holiday by the seaside."

There's a big discrepancy between most people's idea of a trip to the coast (which might involve ice-cream, donkeys and a nearby caravan) and a life vacationing at one of the glamorous homes in this book, however. Parting with millions would be pretty much a given, should you wish to add any of these to your property portfolio.

Not that cash would be any object, as the proprietors featured here include wealthy fashion designers Pierre Cardin, Dolce & Gabbana, Fiona Swarovski and the late ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev.

Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana are lucky enough to have more than one spectacular coastal home; they have two Italian seaside retreats in which to live *la dolce vita* – one in Portofino, where they have a nearby boutique, and the other in Stromboli.

The first property, in the bay of Portofino (where Coleen McLoughlin and Wayne Rooney got married last month), consists of six hectares of land separated into a number of independent structures. To avoid squabbles, one supposes (as they're no longer romantically involved), each designer has his own villa and

guesthouse. So, if Domenico fancies having Kylie and Naomi Campbell over to Villa Bianca at the weekend, but Stefano is in the mood for rest and respite at his Villa Olivetta, they can each have their cake and eat it too.

Relaxation might be difficult, of course, given the assault on the senses afforded by the bright colours and patterns in both these properties. Unusually for these legendary designers, it's not all leopard-print upholstery and silk sheets – each room has been individually put together.

"It's a heady mix," says Taschen. "There are walls covered in an over-

"People long for the simple life"



Clockwise from main: Vietri tiled detailing at the Positano home of architects Claudio Lazzarini and Carl Pickering; Fiona Swarovski's terrace in Capri; Rudolf Nureyev's deck on St Barths in the Caribbean; Alan Wanzenberg's property on Fire Island, New York

sized peony print, a kitchen clad in a mosaic of vibrant Sicilian pottery and mirrors, and a sofa upholstered in some 70 ocelot skins."

If you haven't been turned off by the thought of lounging on wildcat hides, the golden bedroom might push your taste boundaries to the limit.

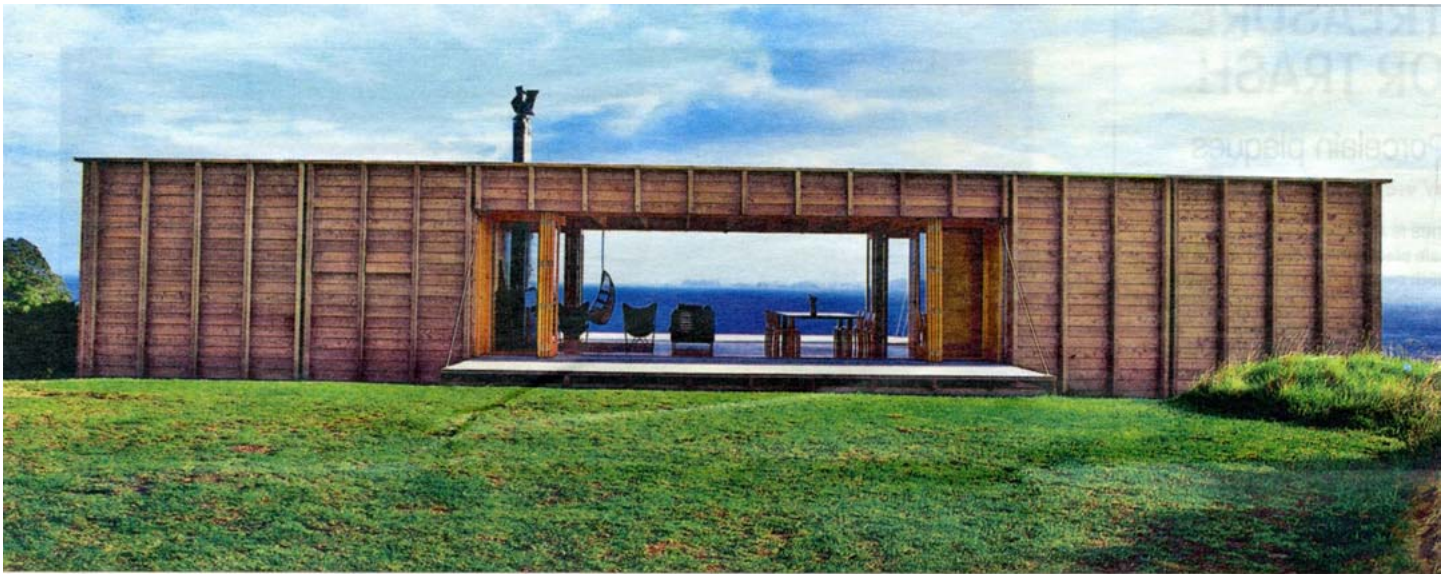
This metallic hub resembles the inside of a disco glitter ball. As well as the tiny gold mosaic tiles that cover the walls and ceiling, there are chainmail curtains and a double bed that looks rather as if it's been carefully wrapped in Bacofoil.

Compared to this, "Naomi's room" (named after their "passionate" supermodel pal) at D&G's other home in Stromboli is positively demure. Camp-

bell's private room features scarlet walls with a matching bed, set off by a 17th-century Sicilian chair re-upholstered in a velvet tiger print.

The rest of the Stromboli house could be described as a tribute to Dolce & Gabbana's love of kitsch. There are even a couple of tongue-in-cheek "icons" featuring "Santo Stefano" and "Santo Domenico" which hang beside a leopard-print bed.

It's all very avant-garde – perhaps not what most of us imagine when we picture our ideal coastal property. Unsurprisingly, the book as a whole demonstrates that the majority of people fantasise about a far cleaner, simpler and more authentic look, influenced by a life on the ocean waves.



"In recent years, dozens of interiors styles have appeared and, just as quickly, disappeared. Nonetheless, the interiors of houses beside the sea are less affected by fashions than one might expect in the age of globalisation," says Taschen.

"In my view, this is because people long for the simple life. In the morning you catch the fish – or buy it in the port – that you intend to eat for lunch. You pass your time simply contemplating the sea. Many of these house-owners refuse to have an internet connection or even a television in their seaside homes. It's a way of ensuring that they really get a break from the everyday world."

Certainly Rudolph Nureyev wanted to escape the outside world when he visited his St Barths retreat, perched on the rocks on the east coast of this Caribbean island. Today, it's owned by Frenchwoman Jeanne Audy-Rowland, who, as a tribute, maintains it almost as he left it.

"It's his house, not mine," she says. Nureyev led a solitary existence and the interior is decorated in a very ascetic style. Outside, a deck, which Nureyev had built to dance on, overlooks the waves and is furnished with teak loungers. Everywhere, natural stripped wood predominates, looking as if it's been bleached by the sun and salty surf – and in the living room a hammock is strung from wall to wall. Although it's a simple look, it perfectly



Clockwise from top: indoor-outdoor living and a bath with a view on New Zealand's Coromandel Peninsula; fashion designer Lisa Perry's home in the Hamptons, New York

encapsulates the romance of living by the ocean.

This popular style is repeated time and again throughout the book. Take architect Alan Wanzenberg's family home at Fire Island, New York, with its pale wood beams, shell ornaments and essential surfboard propped casually against a bedroom wall. Or Dutchman Daan Neleman's primitive, castaway-style home in Manzanillo, Costa Rica. This hut-like property is designed around an impressive circular staircase and is cluttered with driftwood and other treasures the sea has cast ashore.

Although this house, like many others in *New Seaside Interiors*, has been built with a focus on 180-degree sea views, it can't match the 360-degree vistas boasted by the retreat of 86-year-

old fashion designer Pierre Cardin. He owns a floating, fibreglass structure in St Tropez that is shaped like a pod and features a transparent glass bottom, so that guests can look down on the fish darting below.

"The design was inspired by the final scene of *The Spy Who Loved Me*, in which James Bond escapes with his lover in a sea capsule," says Taschen.

Cardin, one of the foremost designers of the 1960s and 1970s and famous for his sharp monochrome minidresses, has chosen his interior decor to reflect this. The circular sitting-room has a black and white patterned sofa, perched on an Austin Powers-style, white shagpile rug. Although it looks retro, the technical specifications of this house-boat are very contemporary – it features a number of gadgets including a curved-screen Bang & Olufsen TV, and the whole thing is built to withstand a cyclone.

Whether your beachcomber cocktail would remain unspilled in particularly inclement weather is another question. Still, a little orange stain on the upholstery isn't going to mar those blue views. After all, the decor is just a bit player. As Taschen says: "The one thing all the houses have in common is that the sea plays the lead part." SM

■ *New Seaside Interiors*, edited by Angelika Taschen, is out now, priced £24.99.