

# Aptos: Where The Living Is Luxuriously Laid Back

Aptos

**T**raditionally, July and August are always foggy at The Beach, which in this case is Aptos.

The fog is one reason many people prefer summer homes at Lake Tahoe or in the Napa Valley, and that's just fine with the Aptos regulars. In their opinion, the fewer the merrier.

The beautiful Santa Cruz area has taken a beating in the last few years — both from winter storms and the press: murder capital of the world, the controversy over the academic rigor (or lack of it) at UC-Santa Cruz, the late-blooming flower children, the surfers, the street people, the dope, etc.

But none of that bothers the longtime residents striving to improve Santa Cruz or the newcomers, who would rather live here than anywhere else. Most of all, it doesn't bother the people at The Beach: for them Santa Cruz is a Highway 1 turnoff they don't take.

Primarily there are just two enclaves — together fewer than 50 homes — on The Beach that attract the people who could choose summer homes almost anywhere. Located adjacent to the state beach parks at New Brighton and Seacliff, they are separated by a strip of beach 200 yards long.

Brighton people refer to their beach as Pot Belly — not because of the shape of the residents, but because the original shacks were heated by pot-belly stoves. About 20 years ago the land was sold, the owners formed the Pot Belly Beach Club and now there are 16 very comfortable, very Architectural Digest beach homes. (One, ravaged by fire, is on the market for \$500,000.)

The Pot Belly people look down their beach toward Seacliff and feel they have the better half of paradise, whereas the Seacliff residents think that their strip of sand and their less formal homes are by far superior. And both feel their ocean frontage is far superior to

A Pot Belly male emerged from his house in his native attire (Bermuda shorts, plaid sports shirt, Panama hat), assumed the official stance (tummy forward, hands on hips) and looked down at his gardener. He issued some instructions, then went off to putter elsewhere.

His wife was stretched out on the cushioned ledge of the deck, reading a novel. A dog romped on the beach around the tangled webs of driftwood (another reminder of the harsh winter), and 50 yards away a mother and two children were wading. A perfect day.

South of Pot Belly, the residents of Seacliff were doing the same thing, or having the same things done for them — new roofs, new paint, new plants, new decks.

But just north of both, a different scene was taking place at the state beach. A couple of hippies had set up a camp around a hollowed-out log, where they could smoke pot without losing too much of it to the strong breezes. A young couple on the beach were dressed in the Santa Cruz habit: walking shorts, T-shirts (his read "People Before Profit"), sandals and backpacks.

**D**espite the obvious differences, the inhabitants have a similar attitude: laid back. One side is Bain du Soleil and Scotch; the other, Coppertone and pot. But they both want to do things their way: the easy, relaxed way.

The most independent Aptos

residents have left the beach for the hills. Though they started as summer beach residents, Jim and Betty Griffith now live full time in their handsome, formal home about five miles from the beach. "The beach is fine if you don't mind having thousands of people walking by your house all weekend," Jim Griffith said.

When asked if he goes into Santa Cruz, Griffith arched an eyebrow and said, "Not if I can help it." Then he added, "Why would I want to leave here?"

"Here" consists of a single-story home with a view overlooking Aptos, the ocean and the Monterey Peninsula; a swimming pool; a painting studio; fruit trees; vegetable garden (he even grows his own capers); and an aviary. The Griffiths recently acquired two doves, which Betty Griffith named Mr. and Mrs. Ferragamo because "I could have gotten two new pairs of shoes for what they cost."

When asked if he and his wife go out much, he said, "The other night we went to the grand opening of the new Nob Hill grocery store, and we had a great time."

His sister, Louisa Snyder, who moved to a mountain near the Griffiths a few years ago, said, "If anyone ever told me a few years ago I'd go to a grocery store opening and have a good time, I'd have said they were crazy."

Entertaining in Aptos is not like it is in the Napa Valley or Lake Tahoe. Snyder said, "One night a week I come over and drink Jim and Betty's liquor, and another night they come over and drink mine, and then maybe the three of us go to someone else's house one night and drink theirs."

Anita Bohling, who owns one of the most beautiful homes at Seacliff, used to do little dinner parties because she is one of the few residents who had someone to come in and serve. Now "the help" doesn't like to go out at night, so Anita



Jim Griffith opted for a mountain retreat

That Other Beach (Stinson).

On a recent sunny and clear July day, there were only a few Pot Bellies in evidence at Brighton, and they were cleaning up, painting and replanting (the Beach People are big on plants, and several residents routinely stop at the Half Moon Bay Nursery on their way down Highway 1).



**Linda Smothers won't leave**

sometimes does lunches — even though “who wants to get booted, saddled and dressed up during the day when you'd rather be on the beach reading a book?”

Jeanne Redlick and her husband, Christopher, who have been at Pot Belly for “has it been 14 or 16 years?,” like to entertain informally. Barbecues are popular, as are small dinners.

The Beach People usually shop at the Safeway at Rancho del Mar. The Thrifty Drug store in Aptos is also popular; it's there that Anita Bohling bought some Italian white patio chairs for \$17 each. They also go into Capitola, which is becoming Carmel-ized with boutiques, to a bakery called Gayle's. The gourmet center of the region appears to be Soquel, where three popular restaurants are located: the Courtyard, the Greenhouse at the Farm and the Salmon Poacher.

Most Beach People admit they'd just as soon stay home as eat out. However, if they do go out, they favor the Courtyard, Panda (a Chinese restaurant) in Aptos or Rancho Grande, at the Freedom Road freeway turnoff. “It looks like a truck stop, but never mind, they serve the best Mexican food around,” said one woman.



**Anita Bohling and her Maltese, Czarina, in front of her Seacliff home**

*Photos by Jerry Telfer*

The fanciest dinner place for entertaining is another old favorite, Shadowbrook, where dinner for two with wine will run about \$40. An open-face shrimp sandwich with melted cheese (an area favorite) and a green salad at an old Aptos favorite, the Deer Park Tavern, is \$5.95, tuna-melt prices for San Francisco.

Linda Smothers, who grew up in Salinas, moved to the Santa Cruz area when she was married to Dick Smothers of the Smothers Brothers comedy team; together they operated a winery.

Now they are divorced and the vineyards and property are on the market (Smothers is moving his wine operation to Sonoma), but both have chosen to stay in the area. He just bought a home in Santa Cruz proper; she is about to open a shoe store, called the Enlightened Sole, in Aptos.

Over lunch at the Greenhouse, Linda Smothers said, “Living here is nice. In some ways, Santa Cruz is the ultimate organic area. Bean sprouts and alfalfa are on everything, but that's good, too, since these people look around for the freshest ingredients to use in cooking and baking.”

**D**uring the past few years, Santa Cruz has undergone a renovation. There are sidewalk cafes, new restaurants and an attractive mall in the downtown area. A longtime summer Aptos resident said, “I can't help but sometimes get a little angry at the past city councils of Santa Cruz. They didn't realize what they had, and they just let it go to pieces. But in a way I'm glad because it also prevented Santa Cruz from turning into a Monterey.”

The people who have weekend and summer homes in Aptos are very self-satisfied. There is, however, one problem: swimming in the ocean. Longtime Pot Belly resident Tanner Wilson said, “As one gets along in years, I find they're making the water colder each year.”