



WHEN IT'S TIME FOR SOME R&R, SONGWRITER DENISE RICH HAS A PERFECT ESCAPE

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As television talk-show host Larry King said on April 30, 2001, just before cutting to a commercial, “Our guest is Denise Rich. If we have to tell you who she is, you’ve got problems. We’ll be right back. Don’t go away.”

At the time, of course, virtually everyone in the Free World was intimately acquainted with Denise Rich, who turned up on *Larry King Live* that night, just as she had turned up on *20/20* three nights earlier for a heart-to-heart with Barbara Walters. She wasn’t there to discuss her booming career as a songwriter with three Grammy nominations to her credit or her impressive-by-any-standard philanthropic work but to answer a barrage of pesky questions about, among other related things, a letter she had written to her friend Bill Clinton, urging the then President to pardon her ex-husband, besieged billionaire Marc Rich, who, rather than face a series of criminal indictments, fled to Switzerland in 1983. Which Clinton did, amid a swirl of controversy, just days before he left the White House.

If all the ruckus surrounding her part in what pundits called Pardongate took a toll on Denise Rich that spring, consolation was near: Shortly before Memorial Day she moved into a grand Southampton estate that dates to the early part of the last century and carries the same name—though not the same spelling—as the first volume of Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past: Swan’s Way*.

“I’ve had a love affair with Southampton since the late 1970s,” says Rich, who in person has the wide-eyed enthusiasm of a delighted child. “It’s got the ocean, the beach, the fields . . . everything. It’s serene and exciting and so beautiful.” She bought *Swan’s Way* in 1999. “I had been looking and looking, and I finally found my dream house,” she adds, pointing out the merits of the idyllic retreat, which has a clear view of the Atlantic and five acres of land—nestled between a pair of ponds populated, not surprisingly, by swans—neatly shielded from public view by a wall of meticulously manicured privet.

Denise Rich stands beneath a pergola at her Southampton, New York, estate, whose decor was updated by Waldo Fernandez; the teak furniture is by Sutherland. Facing page: The façade of the 1916 house; architect Frank Greenwald added two wings to the structure. See Resources.





One of the first calls Rich made after buying the estate was to Waldo Fernandez, a Los Angeles-based designer she had heard about years back, when, sitting at the piano in Burt Bacharach's house in Bel Air, working on "Let Me Be the One" for Johnny Mathis, "Burt just stopped and looked at me and said, 'Denise, if you ever have a project, you should use Waldo Fernandez. He's amazing!' That stuck with me."

It takes a certain kind of confidence to ring up Fernandez, who tools around Los Angeles in an Aston Martin or a Porsche Turbo or a Mercedes G500, who lives most of the year behind electronic iron gates in Beverly Hills, and whose klieg-lit client roster ranges from Elizabeth Taylor, Merv Griffin, Sean Connery, and Warren Beatty to Peter Guber, Tobey Maguire, and Pete Sampras. (Oh, and at the moment, Fernandez is building a 32,000-square-foot house for Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith in Malibu, as well as working with Hollywood poster couple Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston on the renovation of their six-bedroom Beverly Hills house, which architect Wallace Neff completed for actor Fredric March in 1934.)

For Rich, however, approaching the high-flying California designer was easy. Shortly after Bacharach's pianoside suggestion, she and Fernandez began meeting socially—first in Los Angeles, then in East Hampton, where Fernandez spends summers in a four-acre Bali-inspired compound of his own.

Already on board for the project was East Hampton architect Frank Greenwald, an alumnus of New York architect Peter Marino's office.



The living room's Regency-style mahogany cocktail table and Jake sofa and club chairs, all by Waldo's Designs, mingle with high-voltage art; the painting is by Donald Baechler. Facing page: A French Directoire bench and *Trans/Res*, a 1999 painting by Graham Gillmore, in the entrance hall; the rug is by Mansour. See Resources.





Clockwise from top left: Fernandez designed the kitchen table and turned-wood chairs. *Ada*, a 1966 oil on canvas by Alex Katz, hangs in the den; the sofa is upholstered in a Henry Calvin linen. Sutherland teak chaises and armchairs poolside. The sunroom's Waldorf Billiard ceiling light is by Ann-Morris Antiques. Rich's bed and the chinoiserie chaise longue are by Waldo's Designs. See Resources.



"I wanted a beautiful, stately place—not a mansion exactly, but sort of like that," Rich explains. "I also wanted it to be a beach house, with a comfortable, homey feeling. Waldo's a genius because he knows what you want even before you can articulate it. He doesn't talk a lot, but he's observant and sensitive. He took everything I said, everything I felt, and worked with it."

"She was very open, very easy to work with," says Fernandez. "I did two presentations, and then we started."

One thing she did specify was a bit of color. "I tend to live with a lot of beige," says Rich, who, in addition to a ski lodge in Aspen, has a duplex penthouse on Fifth Avenue that features beige Venetian plaster walls and beige travertine floors. (Though the stop-your-heart views of Central Park, not to mention an eye-opening collection of paintings and sculpture by Picasso, Léger, Miró, Ernst, Calder, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Condo, Dine, Schnabel, Rosenquist, and, of course, Ilona Malka, Rich's artist-cum-fashion-designer daughter, add a certain polychromatic punch to the place.)

"The house is of historical importance," says Greenwald, who characterizes the original 1916 white stucco structure with the cedar-shingle roof as "part Cotswold, part Mediterranean. But Denise did *not* want to live in a 'grandma house.'"

To better suit Rich's program, Greenwald and Fernandez added a pair of two-story wings to the now-10,000-square-foot seven-bedroom main house—the master bedroom suite and a screening room on one side, a gym and a garage on the other. They also built a 3,500-square-foot five-bedroom guesthouse, a 60-foot pool, and an elaborate poolhouse complex, which includes cabanas, bathrooms and a kitchenette, and under a pergola, an alfresco dining area.

Also new are the cedar arbors and limestone terraces that extend from the house, helping make the transition from inside to outside more gradual. "I put a lot of effort into the landscaping," says Rich, who tapped Bridgehampton-based Charles Marder to take charge of redesigning the extensive grounds.

As for the collection of art in the house, Rich turned to her son-in-law Kenny Schachter, a well-known hipster-curator who recently opened ConTEMPorary, a Vito Acconci-designed gallery in the shadow of Richard Meier's twin apartment towers overlooking the Hudson River at the edge of Greenwich Village. "My idea was to add color, humor, and freshness—a sense of exuberance," says Schachter. "By adding new art, there is an infusion of contemporary thought, feeling, and emotion to contrast and co-exist with pieces from much earlier times." Among the works Schachter assembled for his mother-in-law's house are paintings by Christian Schumann, Ricci Albenda, Lisa Ruyter, Donald Baechler, Graham Gillmore, Lawrence Seward, Alex Katz, and Brendan Cass.

"Last summer we had a big event at the house," says Rich. "We had 500 people for dinner and a whole show by Liza Minnelli, who is a good friend." The point of the evening was to raise money—some \$600,000—for the G&P Foundation for Cancer Research, which Rich established with Philip Aouad, the husband of her daughter Gabrielle, who died of leukemia in 1996 at the age of 27. ("G&P" stands for Gabrielle and Philip.) Rich began organizing the foundation's biannual Angel Ball in 1998—raising \$2.5 million the first year and almost \$4 million in 2000.

"That evening was when I could really see what a great job Waldo did," says Rich. "I couldn't be more thrilled. The house is so refreshing to me because it has a vitality, a youthfulness. I really feel that Waldo captured my personality." ■

