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## Joyce Maynard's Compound Life

*The author creates a home with color, art, and many satellite buildings for her family*



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Roughly 20 years ago, author Joyce Maynard drove over the Golden Gate Bridge, followed Mount Tamalpais to Mill Valley, and made it her home. Until then, she had spent a lifetime in New Hampshire but, almost on impulse, she moved West after holding a giant yard sale to divest herself of possessions. "I had sold a book to the

movies [*To Die For*, which later starred Nicole Kidman], and it made me think I could do big things," she said.

Maynard made Mill Valley her home for years, until an online dating service uprooted her again. She met her now-husband, Jim Barringer, on Match.com, and they decided to combine households — a task that's easier said than done. "I had a wonderful, quirky house in Marin. Jim had an equally wonderful house in the Oakland Hills. We tried living in each. But ultimately, we felt both houses had a history, and we wanted to start a new history together," she says.

While they were testing the waters in the Oakland, Maynard started writing in a small, vacant cottage in Lafayette offered up by a reader and fan she met at one of her readings (Maynard's life appears to be filled with an extraordinary amount of serendipity). "While working there, I started wondering if Jim and I could find a place like that in Lafayette," she says.

They discovered a property as idiosyncratic as the couple themselves. Maynard and Barringer may be in harmony as a couple, but their divergent styles had the potential for discord. "Jim is a modernist and a minimalist. His favorite color is probably black or gray," she says. "I am a person who loves collecting, shopping at yard sales, and color — lots of color."





Maynard says the house was built with many repurposed materials. The large window in the living room was salvaged from an old schoolhouse. Patricia Chang

It all came together on a nine-acre property in a part Lafayette that's so remote, Maynard says many locals don't know of its existence. It had been built by a couple who had lived there 40 years. The home's style defies category, which made it perfect for a couple whose style and past is equally as hard to label. "We came to the house with two households, two sets of complicated histories, and six children between us — although they are grown and don't live with us, they visit."

"The owners before us had purchased the property when it had a 1940s era cinderblock house on it, and they built this as their dream house," Maynard says. "In many ways, it's an odd house — it only has one bedroom, for example. But it has huge rooms, high ceilings, and a great kitchen. Spaces are important to me, and I loved these spaces."

As importantly, the house has the almost magical quality of being able to embrace a myriad of styles and colors. A necessity for a family where one member (Maynard) adores Mexican pottery and bright colors and another (Barringer) prefers Le Corbusier's L3 chairs and no color at all.



Luckily the couple does have one thing in common. "Neither one of us is a rule follower, and we don't like things that are perfect," Maynard says. "The house was able to absorb

all kinds of pieces — from Italian chairs to antiques. It's a slightly funky house for two exceedingly funky people."



One of the reasons Maynard felt this house was right for her family is that it had a perfect spot for displaying her mask collection. Patricia Chang

But just one house was not enough for a writer who leads occasional workshops and an attorney who loves music and likes to jam with his friends.

Barringer took over an old barn for his law office and music activities. Maynard, who requires a specific conditions for writing, set up shop in a large room above the garage. Here, she finished her new novel, *Under the Influence*. "In this space, I have what I need to write: a big desk, a comfortable chair, a window, and a whiteboard," she says. "I also hold workshops in this space. No two chairs in this room match, and the only rule is that everyone must feel comfortable."





The space above the garage is Maynard's writing studio. It has all she needs for creative inspiration: a whiteboard, windows, and a big desk to spread out. She also leads workshops in the room. Patricia Chang

Two other buildings on the property could both be classified as tiny houses, but they are complete opposites. One is modeled after a traditional nomadic wagon, the other is a modern building whose mantra is simplicity.

Maynard first spotted colorful wheeled homes in Europe while on book tour, and was smitten. Back in the United States, she found a man who had built a replica of the traditional rolling units and purchased it for her New Hampshire property. When she and Barringer bought the Lafayette home, she hired two long-distance truckers to haul it 3,000 miles to a new East Bay resting place. "We put a porch on it, and it's one of my favorite places to sit," says Maynard. "Inside, it's all color and cushions — it's like a casbah. It would be the perfect place to hide out and smoke a hookah, if I smoked hookahs."



Maynard had this wagon hauled from New Hampshire to California. She added a porch to the tiny house, and it's a favorite spot for relaxing. Patricia Chang

Another building is called the Tiny House. Maynard describes herself as being "obsessed" with the Tiny House Movement, and built this one on her property as sort of an ode to some of her most productive writing sessions spent at retreats such as Yaddo. She rents the space out to writers at any level, and provides mentoring services as requested. "When my kids were small, I would sometimes check myself into a hotel to write," she says. "This is a space where writers can have that same experience, a place where they can find the quiet and space to be wildly, creatively productive."









"I love the word compound. I like the idea of going from building to building for different activities, the students do in college," she said. "For me, one life has never felt like enough, there's so many things I want to do. Instead of exploding all over the place, having different buildings for different purposes keeps my creative energies directed."

































