



## Castle in the sky: Amanda Hearst visits San Simeon, where her great-grandfather lived--and lived it up.(Cover story)

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**Town&Country** IT'S THE MOST distinctive house in America. Certainly there are larger private residences (for instance, Biltmore, the 250-room Vanderbilt chateau in Asheville, North Carolina) and more formal, more predictable or more opulent ones (any number of Palm Beach piles or Newport "cottages" spring to mind). But there's not a mansion on either side of the Mississippi that can hold a candelabra to Hearst Castle, in San Simeon, California, for sheer exuberance and bravura spirit.

It was planned and built (but never finished) by publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst and architect Julia Morgan over twenty-eight years, from 1919 until 1947, when construction was halted because of his poor health (he died at the age of eighty-eight, in 1951) and financial constraints (WRH's huge spending habits taxed even his wallet). Today the Hearst family continues to own the bulk of the original surrounding cattle ranch, now encompassing some 84,000 acres, but no descendant has inhabited Hearst Castle (the property's official name) for decades. That's because in 1957 the historic landmark and the 150 acres upon which it sits were bequeathed by WRH's heirs to the California State Parks system. To mark nearly a half century of public ownership, Town & Country (among the Hearst Corporation's portfolio of newspapers and magazines since 1925) asked twenty-two-year-old Amanda Hearst, a lovely great-granddaughter of WRH's, to play a very sophisticated and stylish game of house with us.

And what a house it is. Casa Grande, with more than a hundred rooms and three outlying guesthouses, comprises a dazzling amalgamation of Mediterranean influences, mostly Spanish and Italian. Hearst was a voracious, lifelong collector of beautiful objects--whether ancient Greek vases, Renaissance tapestries, religious paintings or large-scale architectural elements (carved and coffered ceilings and fantastically sculptural mantelpieces from the great castles of Europe)--and it was Julia Morgan's task to bring some sort of order under one roof to this marvelous, motley assemblage.

For most architects this would have been impossible to carry off, but not for Morgan, one of the first women to graduate with a degree in civil engineering from the University of California at Berkeley and the very first female architect to come out of the famed Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Nothing seemed to daunt this petite, bespectacled, intensely private woman. Not the scale and duration of the project. Not the remote coastal location (equidistant from Los Angeles and San Francisco). Not the challenging building site (on a rocky, windswept hilltop up a five-mile-long twisting drive). And not even the formidable client himself, known to be a demanding--one might say tyrannical--boss. In fact, throughout the decades of construction, the architect and the publisher enjoyed a mostly harmonious and thoroughly fruitful creative collaboration. Theirs was a true meeting of minds.

I first "met" William Randolph Hearst's mind nearly twenty years ago. At the time, I was studying architecture and living for the summer in San Francisco, and I remember being

vaguely skeptical when friends suggested we drive down the Pacific Coast Highway to San Simeon, as the castle is often referred to. I didn't know much about the place or, for that matter, about the man known as "the Chief." I'd seen the 1941 movie *Citizen Kane* but was well aware that Orson Welles's dark portrait of a powerful publisher cloistered in a big, forbidding house was a fictionalized version of Hearst's controversial life. What little I'd read and heard made me expect some kitschy pastiche: the surreal twin-towered, faux-cathedral front of Casa Grande; the classical-colonnaded Neptune swimming pool, straight out of Gianni Versace's dreams; the just-folks ketchup and mustard bottles lining the thirty-four-foot-long dining tables in the flag-festooned refectory; the herd of zebras--some descended from Hearst's original menagerie--that still roam the pastures below the house. Hearst may have referred to the place as *La Cuesta Encantada* ("The Enchanted Hill"), but I was thinking more along the lines of Disney's *Enchanted Kingdom*--you know, *Cinderella's Castle-by-the-Sea*.

With its breathtaking views of the Pacific and the Santa Lucia Mountains, an enchanted hill it surely is. But so, too, is the edifice built atop it. Here was, I soon learned, no mere showman's crowd-pleasing spectacle, although as a newspaperman who popularized tabloid journalism and as a producer of innumerable Hollywood films, Hearst certainly knew how to dazzle a large audience when he wanted to. San Simeon was above all else a home--a home filled with the cherished treasures acquired by one man and built on land he loved more than any other on earth. The property, which at its peak covered 250,000 acres and extended along thirty-five miles of oceanfront, was originally bought by Hearst's father, George, and young Will camped on the hilltop, rode his horses and explored the singular California coastline every happy summer of his youth.

Today, as you encounter Casa Grande's countless juxtapositions--antique and newly made artifacts sitting side by side; rich textiles hung against rough-hewn concrete surfaces; a gilded Gothic chest here, an Art Deco clock there; those ketchup bottles resting on tables set for a king you can glean the contradictions that predominated throughout Hearst's life. As David Nasaw writes in the preface to *The Chief*, his excellent 2000 biography, WRH was "a huge man with a tiny voice; a shy man who was most comfortable in crowds; a war hawk in Cuba and Mexico but a pacifist in Europe ... a Californian who spent half his life in the East." And although he inherited a huge fortune from his father, Nasaw says that Hearst "considered himself a self-made man, because ... he invented himself: as art collector, builder, journalist, publisher and politician."

Then, as you make your way through the endless ornate rooms, you begin to understand that Hearst's restless need at San Simeon to build and refine, accrue and redo, mirrored his *modus operandi* in business dealings and his reckless drive to expand his publishing empire (which almost proved his undoing during the Great Depression).

Finally, there are the clues provided by the art: perhaps the myriad delicately rendered paintings of the Madonna and child reflect the enormous affection that Hearst, who wasn't particularly religious, felt for his mother, Phoebe Apperson Hearst. And in Casa Grande's entrance hall, notice how the late-19th-century marble statue of Pygmalion embracing Galatea somehow echoes Hearst's relationship with Marion Davies, the Ziegfeld Follies girl-turned-film actress who was his mistress for more than three decades and the putative chatelaine of Hearst Castle.

Of course, nowadays there is no chatelaine, but WRH's living descendants include Amanda Hearst, a part-time model and full-time college student majoring in art history. On the occasion of our photo shoot, Amanda, who grew up on the East Coast, was

returning to Hearst Castle after a six-year absence. And it was fascinating to observe her as she moved through the elaborate rooms and landscaped terraces wide-eyed and awestruck, she said, by her great-grandfather's "ability to build such a dream palace and fill it with so much wonderful art." In fact, Amanda, with her gentle disposition and unaffected ways, might have been mistaken for any of the countless tourists visiting the castle that day--until, that is, the hair and makeup and clothes were in place, the lights were turned on, and the camera was pointed in her direction.

That's when she magically assumed the role of lady of the house, so right and fully at ease in these rooms and somehow animated by memories of glamorous days gone by long before she was even born.

Then, all too soon, the day and our work were done, and she, like the rest of us, descended back to earth from that enchanted hill.

Hearst Castle is located midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles; from either city it's a four-hour drive or a one-hour flight (into San Luis Obispo, forty miles south of San Simeon). Until the Hearst Corporation builds a new beachside luxury hotel based on original designs by Julia Morgan (the proposal's still on the drawing board), local accommodations are spotty. We avoided the few nearby campgrounds and motels and stayed at the Best Western Cavalier Oceanfront Resort in San Simeon (request a room in the Terrace building; 800-826-8168; 805-927-4688; cavalierresort.com). For more deluxe digs, consider the Post Ranch Inn (800-527-2200; postranchinn.com) or Ventana Inn & Spa (800-628-6500; ventanainn.com). Both are in breathtaking Big Sur, about an hour's drive away.

More than 700,000 people travel to Hearst Castle annually, exploring the premises in several different guided tours (reservations are advised). For an extended visit, book a private four-hour group tour (\$750 for up to six people), led by guides who can focus on your area of greatest interest, whether it's the sculpture, the architecture or the wonderful decorative-arts collections. For general information, call 805-927-2020; for reservations, call 800-444-4445; hearstcastle.com.

For even greater access to the treasures of San Simeon, Friends of Hearst Castle, an eleven-year-old not-for-profit organization, sponsors special fundraising events--such as its Holiday Feast in the refectory and the Enchanted Evening dinner dance--that support the castle's education and conservation programs. 805-927-2138; friends ofhearstcastle.org.

Publishing titan William Randolph Hearst once owned more than thirty-five miles of Pacific coastline around San Simeon, California, where he built his famous complex of houses on a hill. One of his descendants, Amanda Hearst, takes in a portion of that view from an ornate balcony on the main house, known as Casa Grande.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Amanda makes a dramatic entrance in Casa Grande's west vestibule. The front door is a 16th-century wrought-iron convent grille from Spain. The Florentine marble arch is from the same period. Opposite: The design for the house's front was inspired by the church of Santa Maria la Mayor in Ronda, Spain.

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Amanda lights up one of the already sun-drenched Italian-style terraces surrounding

Hearst Castle. Opposite: William Randolph Hearst's private office, known as the Gothic Study, from which he ran his business empire when he was at San Simeon. The arches, executed by a painter on architect Julia Morgan's staff, were inspired by artwork in a 14th-century Sicilian palazzo. On the far wall hangs a portrait of the young WRH by his lifelong friend Orrin Peck.

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