

SANTA BARBARA

# LIFE & STYLE

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*LOVE  
IS IN  
THE  
AIR*

*ALL  
LACE  
LINGERIE*

*Romantic  
Getaways*



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welcome to the

# ABLITT HOUSE

Photographed by Carly Otness and Silas Fallstich  
Written by Silas Fallstich  
Styled by Paula Parisotto at Dettamoda  
Model Sany Fedorenko with Next Model Management  
Makeup by Carolina Miranda with Carlyle Salon & Style Bar  
Hair by Katrina Barraza with Carlyle Salon & Style Bar  
Manicure by Quang Pat with Aqua Skin & Nail Bar using LVX in Nu  
Location Ablitt House

*I'm standing on the cusp of an abyss. The threshold I'm passing is real yet the feeling and energy conveyed here has transported me elsewhere. I'm in a magical and majestic place where every corner, nook and cranny offers the hope of something fictional. I'm cozying up in the Ablitt House. A dainty little leap off of State Street, this residence is by far Santa Barbara's best kept secret. Negligently reserved for tourists, Segway tour-goers and architecture buffs. But that will be no more, this space, this majestic castle, this 20-square-foot tower, which must have been built with a SoCal Rapunzel in mind, will no longer stand vacant.*



Ulla Johnson Poncho, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
Spell Dress, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
Chie Mihara Heels, !Romp Los Olivos  
Earrings, Peregrine Galleries  
Necklace, Lily  
Floral Hairpiece, Matti & Me





You've walked within feet of this place and never realized it, I'm guilty. The facade goes unnoticed as if it sarcastically disappears into the sky. The gate keeper to this abyss, Neil Ablitt, meets me at the foot of his tower, glimmering gold key in hand. Rapunzel must have let her hair down. I arch my neck and strain upwards. As if stretched by Dr. Seuss himself the tower careens into the sky bending and unfolding before me. Whitewashed exterior walls, jagged edges and a massive yellow clay pot set into a corner. All cast against massive looming gray rain clouds, my stay is already questioning reality.

Neil is a warm and friendly home owner; just a few moments into meeting him his passion for his space is apparent—from his classic purple "Ablitt House" t-shirt to his almost rehearsed breadth of knowledge. He opens a beautiful arched wooden doorway lined with blue and white tiles and begins a retinue of stats. One hundred percent is built by local craftsmen. The home consists of 800,000 pounds of poured concrete (zero wood was used), four and quarter miles of rebar...his eyes are twinkling with joy but suddenly he stops. He offers me a courteous farewell and departs, the twinkle in his eyes is the last thing I see, as if he has a secret and it's up to me to figure it out.

Once inside color, texture and light wash over me. Vibrant oranges interact with subtle blues and greens. The floor tiles in the garage remind me of a film in which a man and woman are looking at a colorful avant-garde piece of art. The woman asks the man, "What do you see?" The man responds with "Headlights," she shrugs and says, "I see the female orgasm." The whitewashed walls and colorful array of tiles assert themselves to me, neither of the aforementioned come to mind, yet the semblance of an idea is beginning to formulate itself. Rightfully so the tile work has already received one national award for its design.

My self guided tour begins. The ground floor of the structure is the garage and laundry room, with enough space for a compact car and a compact load of laundry. My favorite part is the manual wooden garage door, which slides in and out of place by the power of my own arm, secured with a wrought iron latch. Mediterranean influences are already beginning to echo throughout the structure.





*Peter Cohen* Dress, Allora by Laura  
Earrings & Necklace, Peregrine Galleries  
*Isabella Fiore* Purse, Matti & Me





As I climb the marble steps inlaid with tile I become overwhelmed with feelings. Joy, excitement, curiosity, marvel, and sophistication all slide over me. The bedroom boasts the most custom queen sized bed in all of California. The bed took five months to build and was quite literally built into the space by contractor Dan Upton and his crew. While in the bedroom I know I'm downtown but the feeling isn't "downtown." I don't feel here or there, I imagine I'm floating on a vessel with no boundaries and no anchor. Neil and his wife lived on a sailboat for 14 years before moving into the Ablitt House; it's clear that architect Jeff Shelton made conscious personal choices towards every single detail. The bedroom is a subtle salute to a captain's quarters with expansive windows, built-in book shelves, a ceiling reminiscent of a rolling sea, and a tidy jar of orange ear plugs for the noisy nights in the downtown Santa Barbara sea.

Above the bedroom, the kitchen is full of natural light. Light that beams in from all sides and grand windows. There is so much light in the kitchen it seems as if the seams of the building are coming undone to let more light in. A sophisticated design, tone and character exudes itself in the kitchen. Ultra-modern appliances, delicately inlaid into the structure, transition to casual wine storage and blown glass light fixtures. My first deed is to

open the grand wooden windows. Before me lies an expansive view of the Santa Ynez Mountains. The sounds and smells of State Street are ushered up to me, I can almost smell the possibility of meals, hear shop owners calling me down and in the distance is a bellhop with a hand at the ready.

As I climb to the living room my fascination grows with every detail. Each tile and peek-a-boo window carries within itself the potential to incite feelings of magic and wonder. What's most captivating about this place is how effortless these feelings are. It's as intrinsic as the framework of the structure. The living room boasts two symmetrical key hole windows, magnetic colors and more apparent geometric tile work, harkening the design elements towards a Moroccan feeling. The space is enhanced by a minimalist approach with a love seat, living room chair and hideaway flat screen.

There are not one but two stairways leading to the rooftop patio. Just before the entrance to the rooftop I come to the end of the 108-foot-long black walnut handrail, a serpents head. The magnificent handrail winds its way nearly 50 vertical feet up through the entire structure. It is unlike anything I've ever seen, curving and undulating, a piece of art in its own right.







The patio has one of the most uninhibited views of Santa Barbara I have ever laid eyes on. It boasts a 360 degree view of downtown, TV hill, the Santa Ynez mountains, city college, the Pacific, and the Channel Islands. On this evening as the light starts to fade from the sky, clouds crest the mountain range. The quickly fading daylight and clouds race over the city as if instructed by an orchestrator to usher in night.

After sunset my appetite and partner arrive at once. We welcome the proximity to State Street and take an early evening jaunt to Joe's for a cocktail. Patrons are radiating energy and robustly consuming their drinks; we settle in to the revelry and up-beat feelings all around us. Before long we are eager for dinner, and the Ablitt House kitchen is all but calling us home. I hope Rapunzel isn't offended by a female dinner guest.

Our return is instantly dominated by a spicy aroma of chorizo. Chef Courtney Ladin from Nuance Restaurant is waiting in the kitchen. She's preparing a private dinner for the two of us. Crispy loup de mer, with purple sweet potato puree, sautéed swiss chard with chorizo, and gorgonzola gnocchi. Paired with a seasonal order of Fizz Sparkling Shiraz from Municipal Winemakers. Chef Courtney infects the space with potent aromas, charm and dishes that please the eye before they even meet the plate.

The fish is cooked to a perfect golden brown. The first bite ushers in an immediate expression of gratefulness. In the last year I've had chefs from all over town reference the ultimate ingredient in their food: love. This ingredient is subtly referenced but always apparent in Chef Courtney's food. Whether she's preparing breakfast at home, brunch at Nuance or a private dinner at the Ablitt House her fare is always infused with love. The sweet potatoes may be the best I have ever had. Pureed to a cream like smoothness and as vibrant as the colored tiles around me they are almost sweet enough to be labeled dessert. The natural flavors of the fish and spiciness of the chorizo salad have my tastebuds feeling like a jackhammer of flavor is in my mouth. My girlfriend's shared enthusiasm for the space and food confirms my infinite fondness of this experience. We are dizzy over the flavors and the Fizz vino is making it all that much better.

Our dinner and chef retreat into the night and we retire to the patio. With no inhibitions we infuse the night with a second bottle of vino and a sophisticated backgammon board. Our night is spent wading in and out of sobriety, the ongoing flow of games contorted by debates and instruction over backgammon, gammon and exacto. I'm slowly learning the dialect of the backgammon board. The games are countless in number but charged with a grand lethargy towards victory. When the bubbling red wine catches up to us we are halfway down the 61 stairs and headed to bed.









*Joie* Blouse, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
*Flynn Skye* Pants, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
*Henry Beguelin* Loafers, Allora by Laura  
 Earrings, Necklace & Bracelet, Lily





*Joie* Blouse, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
*Love Sam* Skirt, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
*Calleen Cordero* Boots, !Romp Los Olivos  
 Necklace, Lily





Joie Blouse, Wendy Foster Los Olivos  
Floral Headpiece, Stylist's Own  
Necklace & Ring, Lily

In the morning we wake early and walk to French Press for a sunrise coffee. The warm embrace of caffeine infects us with energy for the day before us. Our brief walk to and from the coffee shop ushers in the closing of my shared time at the Ablitt House. My girlfriend departs and I have this space once again to myself.

I jump up each step to the top. Unfinished glasses of wine and backgammon are on display. Just as I find a rooftop seat, light starts to dance and play along the mountains. In the sky to the north an enormous rainbow arches over the city. It stretches from the Mesa to the Mission. Perfectly visible from my vantage point. It radiates throughout the rest of the morning. Hours after I've checked out it remains in the sky, the longest standing single rainbow I've ever seen.

You can't be sad when you leave the Ablitt House, if you never have the opportunity to stay here that would be sad. If you never see this space, whether from a distance or from within, that's sad. In staying here I not only discover the space but discover Neil's secret. This space will captivate you, it will leave you wanting more, but more important than anything else this tower will make you feel grateful. Grateful to have experienced it, grateful to have lounged in a fictional world of wonder and merriment if only for a day and a night. ✨

## ABLITT HOUSE

13 West Haley Street, Santa Barbara, CA  
ablitthouse.com