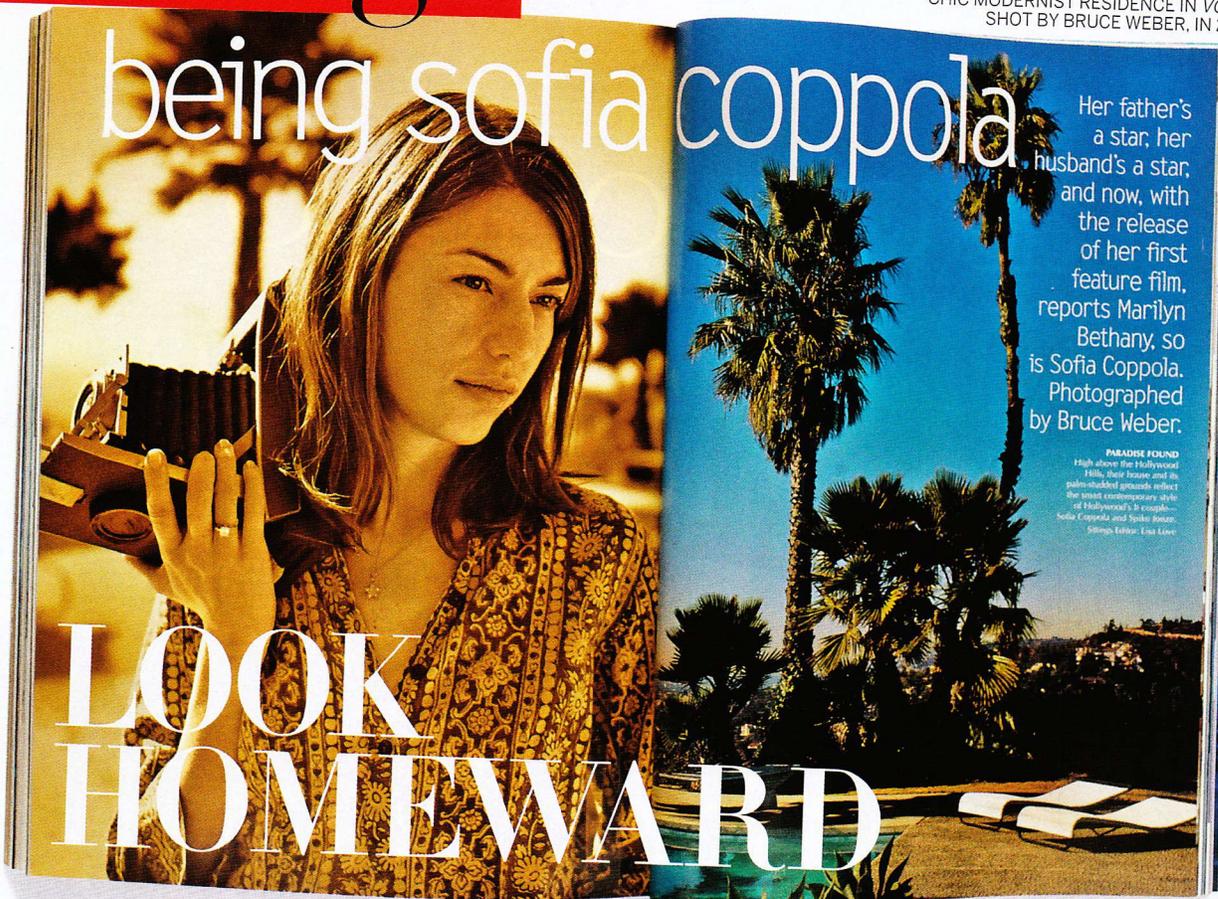


CALIFORNIA DREAMING
THE AUTHOR ENVISIONED HER IDEAL
ABODE AFTER SEEING SOFIA COPPOLA'S
CHIC MODERNIST RESIDENCE IN *VOGUE*.
SHOT BY BRUCE WEBER, IN 2000.



Her father's a star, her husband's a star, and now, with the release of her first feature film, reports Marilyn Bethany, so is Sofia Coppola. Photographed by Bruce Weber.

PARADISE FOUND
High above the Hollywood Hills, Sofia Coppola and her palm-shaded paradise reflect the most contemporary style of Hollywood's 1950s. Sofia Coppola and Spike Jonze. Styling: Lisa Love

LOOK HOMEWARD

Twenty-six and heartbroken, **Janelle Brown** sought salvation in buying her first home. Then she fell in love and broke up again—this time with her house.

I bought my first home in the early days of the real estate boom in San Francisco, in March 2000. It was a one-bedroom Craftsman flat, optimistically measured at 1,086 square feet, and judging by the number of times it had changed hands—every 3.25 years on average, according to city records—had been habitually occupied by women like me: single, young, starting out in life. The apartment was a first stop along the road of home ownership but, I hoped, not the final destination: That, I assumed (and perhaps they did too), would be a house that had enough room for a husband and a child or two and a good-size dog, ideally with a garden and without an insomniac upstairs neighbor who vacuumed at five in the morning.

At the time that I bought my apartment, though, this idealized future was further away than ever. I had just broken up—for the third and final time—with my boyfriend of five years, the man I had at one point imagined staying with forever. I'd always assumed that we'd look for a place together. Instead, I found myself leaping headfirst into property ownership alone, with my eyes winched shut. Buying the apartment was the rashest decision I'd ever made, but I figured, even if I couldn't control my love life, the one

thing I could control was where I lived. This home would be my surrogate boyfriend.

After all, my previous living situation had been as untenable as my relationship. For years, I'd been stoically suffering in a bargain-basement shared apartment that I'd rented with a friend post-college. Cockroaches hosted a 24-7 rave in the grease-encrusted stove. Bloody juice dripped down through the pantry ceiling thanks to our alcoholic upstairs neighbor, who refused to replace her broken meat locker. Her ex-con boyfriend occasionally knocked on our door at two in the morning, trying to sell us stolen jewelry.

The only reason I remained in this hovel for five years was because of my boyfriend, a product designer with impeccable taste and a case of chronic dissatisfaction. I could afford to rent someplace nicer—upon graduating from college, I'd landed in the middle of the dot-com boom and watched my initial poverty-level salary quickly quadruple—but I was holding out for cohabitation. I saved my paychecks in anticipation of moving in with my boyfriend, mentally furnishing our imaginary residence with Arne Jacobsen Ant chairs and a Mies van der Rohe leather daybed, an Artichoke lamp hanging elegantly over the glass-topped *nostalgia* >168

coffee table. I dutifully studied the house spreads in *Vogue*, imagining a world where—like Sofia Coppola, living in her chic modernist abode with her husband, Spike Jonze—my boyfriend and I would hold court, in fashionable love.

I guess I was an optimist; any of our friends could have warned me that our volatile relationship wasn't going to last (nor did Jonze and Coppola's marriage survive, despite the fantasy home). My boyfriend and I were addicted to each other, couldn't stay away from each other even when we did break up; and yet the things each of us really longed for in our relationship (me: stability and peace; him: passion and expressiveness), the other person was incapable of providing. Instead of moving in together, after years of infidelity and explosive fighting, we finally called it quits on the last day of the millennium.

Suddenly I couldn't live one minute more with the cockroaches. In a spur-of-the-moment decision, I decided to apply all that cash I'd hoarded to a down payment: I would buy my own place, a radical shift that would launch a new, post-breakup me. I began apartment-hunting within the month and almost immediately came across a promising listing: "Spacious Arts and Crafts 1 BR with modern designer touches, near trendy shops. Softwood floors, wood-burning fireplace, large foyer, and lots of storage. Have a latte! Enjoy!"

Which is how I found myself in possession of the keys to my first home. It had been love at first sight, an obsession so complete that I almost forgot that I was newly single. Instead of his-'n'-hers Mies chairs, I would have my own dishwasher

As much as I adored my softwood floors and those built-in bookcases, they were incapable of snuggling

and a clinker brick fireplace and parquet linoleum in the eat-in kitchen. (And: lattes!) Besides, a home would never break up with me as long as I kept paying the mortgage.

I was only 26 years old, which—in slackerish San Francisco—was shockingly young to be a property owner. Barely five years out of college, I now owed the bank a sum that made my knees tremble. As I painted the walls cerulean and dug up the garden with a pickax, I was inordinately proud of my new autonomy; in the career success that had allowed me this financial independence, in being a single woman who didn't need a man to have a home. My flat was a manifestation of me, of *only* me, in all my self-sufficiency. I had become the woman I'd read about in college women's-studies texts, someone powerful and resilient, and with impeccable design sense, to boot.

Eventually, though, the giddy distraction of eBay furniture shopping wore off, and disillusionment crept in. As much as I adored my softwood floors and those built-in bookcases, they were incapable of snuggling and useless when I was feeling lonely, which was often. I missed my ex-boyfriend more frequently than I liked to admit. Still in my 20s, I nonetheless began to harbor a niggling fear that I would never find love again. Instead, I would turn into my upstairs neighbor, a single woman in her 50s who wore UFO T-shirts and cleaned in the

middle of the night. It was possible for a woman to be perfectly happy alone forever, of course; but I wasn't convinced I could be. Had my home somehow jinxed me into permanent spinsterhood? What if I *wanted* to break up with it?

And yet, when I did finally meet someone new—Greg, a sweetly charming and enviably creative filmmaker who didn't own a twig of furniture but who finally gave me that sense of peace I longed for—and found myself moving to Los Angeles to be with him, the hardest thing for me to leave behind was not my job or my friends or even my family. It was my house.

That's how you know I love you," I told him. Love was sacrificing the ability to do it all my way in order to let someone else (at least occasionally) have his. It was needing someone so much that I didn't care that I was moving into his leased hovel—forgoing my dishwasher and tastefully framed photographs for fluorescent lighting overhead and his wall-size Jack Kerouac poster. It was renting out my San Francisco apartment while we "made sure this was going to work" and then—when it grew clear that it was going to work—placing it on the market.

Greg and I put a bid in on a home in Los Angeles the day before we drove up to San Francisco with a U-Haul to empty my flat of its contents. Thanks to the real estate boom, after four years of ownership I'd managed to sell my condo (to yet another young, single woman) for a profit that was going to allow us to buy a place in L.A.

After sweeping and dusting, after repairing the holes in the walls where my art once hung and mopping the scratched-up spot on the wood floors where the couch sat, I stood in the empty living room and cried. This breakup wasn't as heart-wrenching as the one that had driven me to buy the flat in the first place, but it was agonizing just the same. I was saying goodbye not just to a home I'd loved but also to a person I'd been. I suddenly missed the autonomy; missed not having to answer to anyone but myself; missed even the melancholy of Saturday nights alone by the fire.

As I looked out the bay window for the last time, I heard Greg come to stand behind me. "I know this is the end of something," he said. "But it's also the beginning—"

"It's OK, I've said my goodbyes, I'm moving on," I said, cutting him off. "I don't need to linger."

"No, *really*," he continued patiently. "It's the beginning of something." The tone in his voice made me turn around. When I did, he was holding out a velvet box with a diamond ring.

On Monday, when we returned to Los Angeles, newly engaged, we discovered that we were now the owners of a "charming 3 bedroom, 1½ bath traditional with a sweet back yard + beautiful home office." This one didn't boast a clinker brick fireplace or a large foyer, but it did have a garden, and room for a daughter and a Lab-mix puppy. We painted the living room yellow, bought a bed from IKEA, and received the espresso machine as a wedding present. We would have lattes there, too.

I would love that house for the next seven years, and our subsequent house, where we moved after I got pregnant a second time, too, but never with the same intensity as my first home. There are other things, now, to love more. □