

# form

# meets

# gumption

At the Malibu home of Chuck and Katie Arnoldi, the cactus garden and rear terrace—outfitted with Summit teak furniture—offer glorious views out over Dume Beach. Inset: The artist at work on a recent painting in his Venice studio.



A fixture of the Southern California scene for decades, artist Chuck Arnoldi continues to invent new riffs on abstract painting while also taking on design projects—not least the ever-evolving Malibu home he built with his author wife, Katie

by Michael Slenske  
photography by name lastname  
styled by Anita Savsidi





**Clockwise from left:** Arnoldi designed much of the home's furniture; a painting from his "Potatoes" series is displayed atop the fireplace opposite a large work by his daughter, Natalie Arnoldi, while a Frank Gehry fish lamp stands along the rear wall. An Andy Warhol skull is grouped with works by Arnoldi, Ken Price, John McCracken, and Natalie Arnoldi in a bookcase. Sculptures and furniture by Arnoldi are arrayed around the pool and putting green.



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#### S A KID GROWING UP IN DAYTON, OHIO,

Charles Arnoldi was a hard-partying, street-brawling, drag-racing "hood," he says. "I had a slicked-back haircut, pegged pants, and pointed-toe boots for fighting. In Dayton, they just pushed you through high school, and my buddies and I didn't care. All we wanted was to get through

school to go work at a factory, because if you did the graveyard shift you got paid double time."

But a fateful trip to visit his father in Thousand Oaks, California, as a teenager made a big impression, and after graduation in the mid-'60s, he and some pals pooled their money and stole enough parts for his 1955 Chevy to get themselves out west. Though he had no intention of becoming an artist initially, Arnoldi adopted a hippie lifestyle, finding work painting houses and digging trenches, and eventually starting a Lucite frame company with artist Laddie John Dill. Arnoldi also

took classes at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, though he dropped out after winning the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Young Talent Award in 1969 for his labor-intensive abstract paintings—a language he has continued to explore over the ensuing half a century, becoming a stalwart of the L.A. art scene.

These days, Arnoldi, now sporting a few more lines on his tanned visage and a shock of white hair, still exudes an intrepid, industrious spirit. He cuts an athletic figure in his studio uniform of a white T-shirt, jeans, and black sneakers as he stands outside the Malibu home he shares with his wife, author and former bodybuilder Katie, on a cliffside plot with scenic views overlooking Little Dume (a beloved surf

break where Kelly Slater and Laird Hamilton are regulars) and out to Catalina Island. Walking through his cactus garden, host to a prized saguaro he grew from a seedling, Arnoldi discusses the life he and Katie have created here—and perpetually reinvented—over the past three decades.

"Katie's father was a surfer, and he bought that little beach house in 1950," Arnoldi says, pointing to a shingle-roof bungalow on the bluff below. Though he and his wife would have gladly lived in that surf shack, it became a weekend retreat for family and friends, so the couple decided in 1986 to build a home on land next to the Mediterranean-style manse owned by Katie's brother. "I was used to living in lofts and storefronts," says Arnoldi. "When I told my buddy Frank Gehry I was going to build a house, he said, 'Just build a box.'"

With some help from contractors, that's essentially what the Arnoldis did, creating a 4,000-square-foot, three-bedroom residence composed of voluminous interconnecting cubes with walls of troweled concrete and floor-to-ceiling glass doors that run half the length of the structure. Inside, the walls are accented by steel-channel baseboards, while the millwork is hewn from marine-grade plywood—the same material Arnoldi used as the base for the celebrated series of "Chainsaw" paintings he produced in the '70s and '80s.

Arnoldi has installed numerous idiosyncratic touches throughout, including sculptural glass doors in the guest bedrooms and, on the front of the home, a cast-bronze balcony whose pattern conjures (and predates) Ai Weiwei's Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing. In the master bedroom, the artist devised a wall-size picture window that revolves on ball bearings and overlooks the double-height living-dining area, which is filled with furniture of his own design. Suspended above the long mahogany dining table is a chandelier made from bound branches that echoes the forms of the early





Chuck and Katie Arnoldi are joined by their bulldogs, Peaches and TKTKTKT, next to the pool.

“Stick” paintings that won him international recognition in the 1972 “Documenta” exhibition in Kassel, Germany.

Scattered throughout the house are not only Arnoldi’s own artworks, including a few choice “Chainsaw” paintings, but also pieces by old friends such as Gehry, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Ken Price, and Billy Al Bengston, as well as indigenous art and artifacts collected around the world by Katie. “Just stuff,” Arnoldi calls their collection, though he estimates he made 25,000 steps shuttling the art down to safety inside the beach house during the Woolsey Fire, which broke out in November 2018. (While a number of nearby residences burned in the blaze, the Arnoldis’ homes remained unscathed.) Countless memories permeate these spaces, and seated at the dining room table, Arnoldi recounts a few—like the time he drove the VW Beetle on which fellow artist Chris Burden had had himself crucified for a legendary 1974 performance at a Venice garage.

Outside, at the front of the property, Arnoldi has created a tropical folly dotted with his bronze sculptures and aluminum

paintings. There’s also a 75-foot-long swimming pool surrounded by concrete seating and a putting green with artificial turf.

A longtime golfer, Arnoldi also has a putting green next to his 15,000-square-foot Venice studio, a space carved out of a former potato chip factory that rivals any blue-chip gallery in L.A. Inside, the aesthetic shares similarities with the Malibu house, including the same distinctive plywood cabinetry. “I just can’t escape myself,” Arnoldi says of the overlap between his art and his design pursuits. The studio’s main gallery, where he makes and exhibits new paintings, is topped by a skylight that stretches some 60 feet. “I was gonna make it longer, but the building department wouldn’t let me,” he says.

Far from slowing down, Arnoldi still spends six days a week in the studio. His most recent paintings and sculptures, the subject of multiple museum and gallery shows, include geometric abstractions based on the interlocking stones of Machu Picchu—inspired by the couple’s 35th anniversary trip hiking the Inca Trail—and a new suite of “Chainsaw” paintings made last summer during a trip the two took to Canada’s Yukon Territory. “My wife really wants to travel more, but I have a hard time because I like to be here,” he says. “My mind is just working all the time.”

Still, it seems like the artist derives just as much pleasure building an *ipe*-wood tub room for Katie (with views of the Pacific) off the master bath or converting the childhood bedroom of his daughter, Natalie—an artist and marine biologist—into a home studio. For years, he’s been working on plans to level and rebuild the studio, plus he’s consulting on four or five architectural projects for friends and designing a new home-studio complex atop a hill on the Ventura County line.

“I brought Frank [Gehry] up to the lot, and he said, ‘Let’s collaborate.’ I said, ‘No,’” recalls Arnoldi with a laugh. “I might let him design the little poolhouse. Maybe. But I’m not sure yet.” □



**Clockwise from top:** A 60-foot skylight illuminates a selection of Arnoldi’s paintings in the main gallery of his Venice studio. Two of the artist’s large paintings from the 1990s hang in the corner of a studio gallery space [please confirm—no fact sheet]. Arnoldi designed all of the plywood cabinetry and tables throughout the studio, where he still goes to work six days a week.