

The Bach's Beach Vision of Jazz Heaven

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If you want company, build a beach house and they will come.
—Pete Douglas

Heaven for some is a baseball diamond in an Iowa cornfield. For Pete Douglas, it was a house on a beach with a jazz club in his living room, a would-be heaven also for anyone who dropped in. Douglas passed on, in 2014 at age 85, sitting at his desk overlooking the Pacific Ocean. But his vision lingers at the Bach Dancing & Dynamite Society, aka the [Douglas Beach House](#), at Miramar Beach on Half Moon Bay in Northern California about 25 miles south of [San Francisco](#).

The facility closed for about a year after Douglas' death, amid questions as to whether a venue so closely identified with its founder (it had been, after all, *his actual house!*) would continue. It had been his labor of love. Middle daughter Barbara Douglas Riching, who had developed a career in corporate finance, methodical and kind of an opposite to her father's beachside bohemianism, stepped up to buy the house, with payments financed into the future to her two sisters, and to lead the nonprofit organization that is the operating business structure.

"The sisters all recognized a value in his legacy," Riching recalls, "and it kind of fell to me to keep it going. When I see the joy in people's eyes, it affirms that there's something really special here for others." So jazz on select Sunday afternoons, four seasons of more than a half dozen concerts each throughout the year, continues, as it has since 1964.

What Pete Douglas created continues in a wood-paneled listening room, with space for 200 guests on the main floor and a balcony loft above. Right across the street is the ocean, you can step directly onto the beach; immediately to the northwest and visible on a clear day or through the coastal fog can be the mega-waves of the surfing site known as Maverick's.

Natural light pours in through large windows facing the water. Food and beverages are available buffet style; people also picnic on-site or nearby. Several levels of wood decks wrap the building M.C. Escher-like, up a wooden staircases from a streetside patio. What started as a run-down beer joint with family sleeping space in the back is now a million-dollar-plus coastal property based on location alone, jazz added.

Dolphins and migrating whales pass by seasonally. Musicians too, hundreds of them over the years. Visualize: Duke Ellington, Teddy Wilson, Count Basie, Dizzy Gillespie; Dexter Gordon, Max Roach, McCoy Tyner, Sonny Stitt, Carmen McRae. More recently: Nicholas Payton, Miguel Zenon, The Bad Plus, Joey DeFrancesco, Jane Monheit, Larry Coryell, Hiromi. All up close and personal. Bill Evans recorded a live album *Half Moon Bay* there in 1973; other sessions yielded *Blue Mitchell Live*, Art Pepper *Renascence* and *Live in the USA*, and Richie Cole *Live*. This summer brings saxophonists Chico Freeman and Grace Kelly, bandleader Pete Escovedo, pianist Larry Vuckovich, vocalist Kendra Shank, the Django Festival All-Stars, and a tribute to Mel Martin.