

# A Penthouse Fit For a King

By **NANCY KEATES**

*San Francisco*

When **Tom Perkins** was starting his career as a machinist at Hewlett-Packard, he was invited by his girlfriend to her parents' luxurious penthouse, with a "staggering" 360-degree view of San Francisco. After an uncomfortable dinner, the mother informed Mr. Perkins that he wasn't good enough for her daughter and that they could no longer date.

Photos



*Drew Kelly for The Wall Street Journal*

Minotaur statue in Tom Perkins' penthouse in San Francisco.

"The grande dame threw me out," said Mr. Perkins. The well-known venture capitalist recalled the incident while sitting on a leather sofa in his staggering penthouse: a newly completed two-bedroom, three-bath 5,500-square-foot apartment on the 60th floor of the Millennium Tower with views from the Golden Gate Bridge to the Bay Bridge and beyond.

"I'm called the king of Silicon Valley," said Mr. Perkins, 80. "Why can't I have a penthouse?"

Although Mr. Perkins's eponymous firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers has backed some of Silicon Valley's best-known technology giants, from Genentech to Amazon to Google, he doesn't live in the southern peninsula. For decades, his primary home was farther north in the affluent suburb of Belvedere, where he still has a 10,000-square-foot French manor house. He recently sold a 16th-century English manor that once belonged to Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page; but perhaps his most famous property was the 289-foot long Maltese Falcon, one of the biggest sailing yachts in the world. He sold the yacht in 2009. (Mr. Perkins resigned from the News Corp. board in 2011.).

The same year he sold the yacht, Mr. Perkins bought his first home in San Francisco for \$9.4 million. He liked the feeling of the Maltese Falcon design so much he rehired its designer Ken Freivokh to lead the penthouse's 2½-year, \$9 million construction. The result is sleek, modern, masculine and minimalist, with large sculptures and lots of

glass, wood and leather. It looks like something out of a James Bond movie; its panorama makes it feel like residents are in an airplane.

As he has often demonstrated in business, Mr. Perkins was unafraid to take some risks in the design of his new penthouse. Mr. Freivokh said the entire project, from the art to the materials, was intended to be unconventional. "Everything is meant to stimulate the senses and to provoke a reaction. It is all meant to be big and bold and drastic and adventurous."

After a steep elevator ascent, visitors enter an imposing wood door and are immediately confronted by a 7½-foot-tall stainless-steel sculpture of a Minotaur. Bent over at the waist, its hand on its hips, the creature has its face thrust forward menacingly.

Behind the statue and through the floor-to-ceiling glass windows on a large terrace is an enormous Deborah Butterfield bronze horse that looks like it's made from driftwood. A telescope aimed at the Bay Bridge allows Mr. Perkins to track progress of its construction.

Inside, the large open, loft-like space is broken up into separate areas delineated by changes in the floor materials, ceilings and groupings of furniture. A large sitting area has a crescent leather sofa which encircles a table that rises up from the floor almost like a tree, changing from leather to wood to cracked glass on the way up. The table, 12 feet long, was built to curve around a ceramic model of a rare blue Bugatti Mr. Perkins used to own that sits on its surface.

In an area where the cedar ceiling is more than 10 feet high and is embedded with tiny lights meant to resemble stars, there's a more intimate sitting area, dominated by a 5,000-pound square glass table that resembles an ice cube. London sculptor Danny Lane took two years to make it look like a table made from a real block of ice that Mr. Perkins had seen in a magazine.

A desk, made of a long slab of travertine, is next to a bar formed from a slab of optical glass. An 8,000-pound glass sculpture with breaks in the glass with split prisms resembling a lighting strike acts as a room divider, separating the bar from a harpsichord custom-made to resemble the traditional Flemish model with intricate paintings inside; Mr. Perkins said he plays modern pieces by Philip Glass.

The master bedroom and bathroom in the penthouse are almost identical to those on the Maltese Falcon, with long sliding closets, low-sitting leather beds and built-in desks. Many of the paintings and sculptures in the penthouse used to be on the Maltese Falcon.

### A Big and Bold Penthouse

[Click here](#) for a 360 photo interactive of the penthouse



*Drew Kelly for The Wall Street Journal*

Tom Perkins's penthouse

The kitchen is what most evokes the feeling of a ship. Everything—except a rack of Demuth Winery Pinot Noir and backlit shelves of crystal glasses—is hidden behind closed cabinets coated with liquid metal that looks like pewter.

The penthouse's few touches of femininity come in the form of some art and furniture given to him by his first wife, Gerd, who died in 1994, and his second wife, the novelist Danielle Steel, whom he has divorced but who is still a good friend. A round table in the main room is there because Ms. Steel likes to play a lot of liar's dice, said Mr. Perkins.

Mr. Perkins stays in his penthouse during the week, heading for Belvedere on the weekends. Kathy Daly, who has worked for Mr. Perkins for 24 years, called the design "thoroughly Tom Perkins." She said he made decisions quickly and stuck to them.

Mr. Perkins's next adventure will be in September in Tonga, where he plans to take his 20-foot-long submarine, called "Dr. No" after the title character in the 1962 James Bond movie, underwater every day for a month in an attempt to be the first person to photograph mating humpback whales. "It could be dangerous. There's risk. But I think I know how to control risk," he said.

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### Corrections & Amplifications

The first name of Mr. Perkins's first wife, Gerd, was misspelled as Gert in an earlier version of this article. Also, Kathy Daly has worked for Mr. Perkins for 24 years, not 14 years.

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