

# JAMES CAMERON

*His Santa Barbara Exit Interview with Les Firestein*



## All-Time Successful Director Lives by the Credo “Don’t Be a Tall Poppy”

In answer to the question, is James Cameron the quintessential Santa Barbaran? The most accurate answer is he probably *was*. That’s because the mega-hyphenate writer-director-producer-scientist-engineer-submarine designer-Mariana Trench explorer and Reggio Emilia school founder has put his Central Coast personal Shangri-La up for sale now that he’s raised his family and written both *Avatar* movies there. Let someone else enjoy the Galapagos north of Goleta.

It’s easy to see how James Cameron and Parcel 89 at Hollister Ranch were a perfect match. Cameron checks all the same boxes as Santa Barbara: nature loving, understated, environmentally concerned – and obsessed with the water and natural beauty.

For a guy with a lot to brag about, Cameron is not showy. He cares deeply about human advancement and sustainability and the interaction between the two. For many years Cameron’s “Parcel 89” in Hollister Ranch (as he affectionately and nondescriptly refers to it) was the perfect vortex for the director-scientist-explorer’s wide-ranging studies and interests.

Yeah, Cameron’s spread is unspoiled and lush as few other acres on this planet are. But it also has a working subsistence farm, all sorts of mammalia roaming the free-est range to ever exist, and miles of isolated coastline that look like they once did not just before Europeans but before homo sapiens. Some time after God but before Darwin.

Interestingly, Hollister is also a great place to live out the dystopia if things go more “Terminator” than “Avatar” – which as of this writing is how things are trending. To this end, Parcel 89 has multiple helipads, and can sustain itself completely off grid thanks to highly advanced solar and wind generation. The property also has every kind of well, both for agriculture and for the aforementioned homo sapiens and their support animals.

Yeah, it looks like Avatar but actually exists in Santa Barbara County



*Cameron and his wife, Suzy, check all the same boxes as Santa Barbara: nature loving, understated, environmentally concerned – and obsessed with the water and natural beauty.*

## Don't Be a Tall Poppy

Should you decide to purchase, joining you in Hollister Ranch are like-minded neighbors like Yvon “The Earth Is Our Only Shareholder” Chouinard, the man who founded and gave away his company Patagonia in order to benefit the environment. But Cameron is quick to point out that the vibe inside Hollister is decidedly chill: “There’s an expression in New Zealand ‘Don’t be a tall poppy’ because the too tall poppy basically gets cut down.” Interestingly, the more legendary Cameron becomes, the more he seems to gravitate to non-celebrity culture.

When I ask Cameron why he’s selling after a quarter century chillaxing on one of the plum parcels on Earth, Cammy says Hollister was perfect when he was incubating kids and movies mostly in L.A. But now that the kids are out of the house, he’ll be spending even more time on an even more remote 2,500 acres of farmland – in the enviably hard-to-get-to New Zealand.

Looking back on his quarter century at Hollister Ranch, I ask Cameron what it all meant.

“That stretch of coast is magical,” says Cameron. “Sometimes we would helicopter but most of the time we’d drive up the coast and you could just feel the layers of stress peel away as we got further into nature and more connected to the land. Frankly, you can’t go there and not feel deeply moved.”

I ask Cameron if Hollister offered him fertile environs for his imagination. “It’s a fertile environment for everything,” says the director. “And, yes, to answer your question, I wrote much of both *Avatars* there as well as other projects.”

I ask what made this particular enclave such a perfect incubator for the mythical worlds Cameron tends to create. “First and foremost, Hollister is an incredible sanctuary,” says Cameron. “But for the worlds I try to conjure, there’s nothing like going down to the Gaviota Galapagos, and observing precisely how a certain bird takes flight, or hunts, or precisely how a whale breaches, or just watching the undisturbed surf.”

Sounds like a study in serenity, but I know there’s been more to Cameron’s life in Hollister than collecting seashells



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with his wife Suzy Amis, big plant-based family dinners harvested on site earlier in the day, and tending to their subsistence farm. Cameron’s mind is too restless to simply be the Gardener of Eden.

“It’s true we have a couple of barns on the property that I use as workshops for submersibles, robotics, and camera systems for my deep ocean expeditions, because that’s how I like to relax – by engineering things.” Things like what, I ask. “Sometimes it’s a piece of filmmaking equipment for a shot that’s not yet been attempted. And of course I’ve made lots of stuff for my obsession with oceanography.”

“Do you build submarines out here?” I ask. “Not the submarines themselves,” says Cameron, “but some of the equipment that goes *into* the submarines.” I ask James Cameron if he was aware there’s a meme out there comparing his highly sophisticated world-record-setting deep sea sub with the ill-fated overgrown cigar tube known

as the OceanGate submersible. He says he hasn’t seen that particular post, but what makes a submarine great isn’t its equipment – it’s its engineering. “And we like to engineer things for the duration,” he adds.

If you’re interested in how James Cameron engineered Parcel 89 at Hollister Ranch, please contact: Emily Kellenberger (805) 252-2773.

Meanwhile, the director of the upcoming *Avatar 3* and other absurdly ambitious projects is on to greener pastures. If there is such a thing. 

*For details on Jim Cameron’s Parcel 89 at Hollister Ranch Here’s the QR link.*

