



Bird Rock residents weary of MTV dispute

BY MATTHEW T. HALL REPORTER - SAN DIEGO THURSDAY, JULY 14, 2011 AT 7:38 P.M.

Lots on Chelsea Street in San Diego's oceanfront Bird Rock neighborhood sold for \$550 nearly 100 years ago. They never drew the lookie loos they do now.

For that, the community has the longest-running reality TV show to thank. Or not.

This slow stretch of southern La Jolla has streamed with visitors since last month when word spread that the 26th season of MTV's "The Real World" would film in a \$3.3 million, 6,845-square-foot house on a quiet dead-end road.

Its asking price in rental listings? \$40,000 to \$50,000 a month.

The arrival of MTV's photogenic cast — all together now — "of seven strangers picked to live in a house, work together and have their lives taped" — and the admiring and adversarial hordes that followed — quickly became an aggravation.



K.C. ALFRED /P>

A police officer patrols near the home where MTV's "The Real World" is being filmed in Bird Rock.

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Some residents were upset about months of commercial filming on residential property. Others were angry about the crowds that the production attracted.

For weeks, visitors came by car, by bike, even on foot. They came in ones and twos and groups, day and night, quietly and much less so, and they kept coming.

Resentment festered for weeks until the production company increased security and agreed to turn off roof lights at 10 p.m. and pay for off-duty police officers to discourage night visits, after Councilwoman Sherri Lightner's office intervened.



Girls ride by and take a picture of the Bird Rock home where MTV's "The Real World" is being filmed. — K.C. Alfred

Now, residents are tiring of the dispute. Several declined interviews around the house Thursday, and Michelle Fulks, who coordinates Bird Rock's Neighborhood Watch program, politely declined an interview request via email.

"Quite frankly," she wrote, "it is a nonissue for the community as a whole."

Disruptions are nothing new to Bird Rock, whose main business district endured several years of economic hardship starting in 2004 when five roundabouts were noisily installed on La Jolla Boulevard as traffic-calming measures. More recently, in 2007, the community garnered attention when a group of young men known as the Bird Rock Bandits were

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involved in a fatal fistfight.

Resident historian Philomène Offen traces Bird Rock's history to 1906, when a man named Michael Francis Hall called it Bird Rock By-the-Sea while subdividing it.

It's generally believed to be named for an offshore pelican perch, which ironically has continued to collapse as the community has grown from an enclave of working-class cottages to its current collection of multimillion-dollar homes.

"It was never considered a desirable place to live," Offen said. "It was considered Baja La Jolla."

An explosion of commercial and residential development in the early 1950s, including the opening of Bird Rock Elementary in 1951, changed that. There were 30 families in the area in the 1930s, Offen said.

Now, residents say theirs is a close-knit community of 1,400 or 1,500 families, anchored by Bird Rock Elementary School and a commercial district in which Bird Rock Coffee Roasters, across the street from Starbucks, is a central meeting place.

Lawyer Joe Parker, the president of the Bird Rock Community Council, called where he lives "more of an extended family" than a neighborhood.

"Bird Rock reminds me very much of the old, old San Diego, where it's still so small everyone knows each other," Parker said. "I want to know what's going on in my life, I'll just talk to someone else."

"You have to work a little bit to get here," said Joe LaCava, a land-use consultant who moved in in 1985. "I always joke that it takes me a half hour to get anyplace, 20 minutes to get to the freeway and then 10 minutes from there. ... People who are here want to be here. They're not just passing through."

That's changed with the lookie loos, he said, but that's not necessarily bad.

"If it brings a few more folks and that helps out the merchants, that's probably a good thing," LaCava said. "As long as it's not too many."

Offen called the reality TV cameras and crowds "a temporary problem" like the roundabout construction that tore up the area's streets or the angst that accompanied a large collapse of the Bird Rock pelican perch offshore last year.

"That's what I think is nice about Bird Rock," she said. "It just has a — what is the right word for this? — a stability, a stability that just rolls with these things."

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