

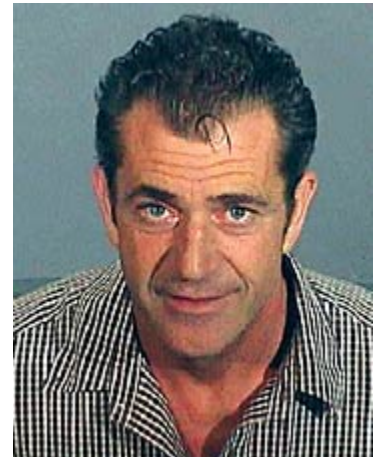
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MALIBU – Soon after Mel Gibson's gonzo meltdown, someone posted a handmade sign on Pacific Coast Highway that read, "You Are Now Leaving Melibu" – a reference to his booze-fueled rant to a cop who arrested him on the main drag. Mad Max reportedly declared, "I own Malibu" to avoid the pokey.

If Gibson is king here, he lords over rafts of celebrity serfs. Every A-list Hollywood hambone and mogul seems to have a multimillion-dollar crib in scandal-by-the-sea "Melibu."

Maybe "Braveheart" didn't notice, but tabloid royalty Brangelina and brood reside in a paparazzi-fortified compound along the 27-mile star-studded coast. Billionaire bigwigs including Steven Spielberg have oceanfront pads. Pinhead parent/pop princess Britney Spears, who drove in town with her baby boy in her lap, is Gibson's neighbor. Extreme made-over Cher lives in a Malibu manse she's making over after auctioning off the Gothic Revival decor.



L.A. County Sheriff's Department
via Getty Images
Would-be Malibu "owner" Mel
Gibson in his now famous booking
photo.

The man who may be the real, albeit elected, king of Malibu plays down the celebrity baggage. In fact, Mayor Ken Kearsley, a retired schoolteacher, wouldn't know Malibu yokel Julia Roberts and the twins if he bumped into them at the local Ralphs.

"I wouldn't know a celebrity if I saw one," says Kearsley, a surfer and father of four grown children. The last movie he saw was almost 40 years ago – "The Graduate." "I've got too many books to read."

Pacific Coast Highway was infamous long before a Jew-blaming Gibson was pulled over July 28. Nick Nolte was immortalized in a crazed mug shot in 2002 after he was busted for DUI by a lawman who said the actor was "drooling." Years earlier, a gun-packing, heroin-toting Robert Downey Jr. was popped for speeding on PCH a month before he stumbled into a Malibu neighbor's home and passed out in her kid's bed. More recently, a shady Swede became famous when he crashed his \$1 million, rare Ferrari Enzo at 162 mph on the highway.

We have 13,000 residents and 13 million people coming across that highway. Odds are, strange things will happen," Kearsley says

Gibson, who made mega money on "The Passion of the Christ," owns a \$24 million oceanfront abode in Malibu. But he doesn't "own Malibu." That honor likely goes to billionaire Jerry Perenchio, chief of the Spanish-language giant Univision. Perenchio's Malibu Bay Co. may be the largest landholder in Malibu with key commercial properties. He's also the guy who got into a jam with the state Coastal Commission for building an illegal, non-permitted nine-hole golf course on his Malibu estate.

"Multibillionaire Larry Ellison, one of the world's richest men and CEO of the software company Oracle Corp., has also snatched up residential and commercial properties in town.

"They both own a lot more than Mel does," says Anthony Marguleas, president of Amalfi Estates, a local real estate company.

Not all of Malibu's elite live here full time – for some, it's a second or third home, a getaway from the Beverly Hills shack. But don't dare call this place “exclusive Malibu.” The mayor hates that. He points out that regular folks, such as engineers and lifeguards, are residents. And he notes that he and his wife bought their house for \$38,000 in 1961.

A seven-bedroom, 11-bath bluff-top spread owned by “Ocean's Eleven” film producer Jerry Weintraub is currently on the market for \$65 mil.

It's understandable how “The Patriot” might think he's head of paradise. The city, which has stretches of wall-to-wall villas that block the beach view, is “isolated by design,” notes David Levy, a psychology professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu.

“People with a sense of power and money have a sense of entitlement. They think they're more important than they are,” Levy says.

He figures Gibson has “dozens of people who would challenge him” in his ownership claim. The 'Bu is drowning in egos – for a long time, billionaire DreamWorks co-founder David Geffen fought to keep the riffraff, er, public, off public beaches near his Cape Cod-like oceanfront sprawl.

Malibu Mel's subjects would also include Jeffrey Katzenberg, Tom Hanks, Pierce Brosnan and De Niro. “Yentl” has got to be queen. Pack rats Babs and hubbie James Brolin once ticked off neighbors with plans to build an oversized manor to store their memorabilia next to their massive chateau.

The mayor prefers other topics. “We've got an ocean we have to clean up,” he says. Malibu, after all, is known for many things: the locale for “Baywatch,” the banning of Styrofoam, and upscale rehabs such as Promises, where Ben Affleck and Downey detoxed.

When not hiding behind shoreline fortresses, celeb townies slurp sushi at Nobu in the Malibu Country Mart, a hub of shops where scenes from Gibson's photog-loathing “Paparazzi” were filmed. The director must've had ESP because last month Lindsay Lohan screamed and cursed at the paparazzi as she tried to maneuver her car out of the mart's driveway.

The “Melibu” sign surely affirms Mel's delusions. “Poor guy!” laughs Rebekah Evans of the Malibu Chamber of Commerce.

And no, the chamber doesn't plan on touting “Melibu” in any of its tourism brochures