

SNOOP PATROL

Crouching tiger, hidden E.T. doll

There's Dennen written all over this house

By Elaine Matsushita
TRIBUNE REPORTER

He's the kind of songwriter who crafts a lyric with poetry and precision, finding words with the perfect meanings and sounds to convey a feeling, a thought. To move you. The kind of songwriter who, when talking about the weather in his hometown in Northern California, describes the summers as not simply hot—but "putridly hot."

And so we wonder: Could it be that Brett Dennen, who sings out on social issues as well as love, just doesn't want us to get *too* clear a picture of his Santa Monica home? The little two-bedroom he shares with his dancer-girlfriend, Sarita Moore, and roommate, Jay Clark.

Because when we ask what the house looks like in our recent phone interview, he replies: "It's a little two-bedroom ... somewhere in between, like, a beach bungalow and ... like a \$4.3 million mansion."

"Somewhere in between an Airstream camper and [laughter] the Starship Enterprise."

Oh, it's just the 29-year-old having a little fun. He immediately gets into our snoop mission, and talk about his love of gardening, E.T., herbal alternatives and Neil Young flows easily like his songs. "It's in this really amazing location in Santa Monica," he says about the greenish-gray 1940s stucco. "It's on this little hill that's really quiet. And it's a dead-end street ... so you feel like you're out in no-man's land but you're really kind of in the heart of everything."

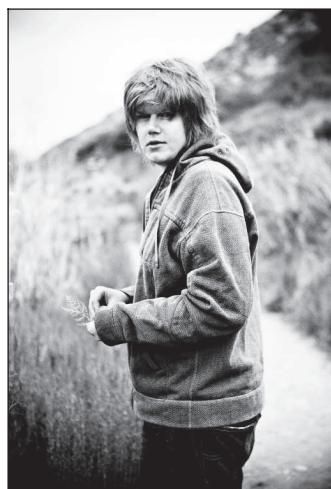
And things are happening for Dennen. Last summer, he toured with John Mayer and Colbie Caillat. He followed that up with the fall release of his third CD, "Hope for the Hopeless," and a tour that brought him to Schuba's earlier this month. If you missed him, he'll be back in town in February at the Park West.

What item in your home says Brett Dennen lives here? Well I've got a lot of yerba mate gourds [used to drink the infusion of leaves from the yerba mate bush that's native to South America] ... and, obviously, instruments. All kinds of guitars and dulcimers and *charango*—it's from Bolivia. You know that Paul Simon song "El Condor Pasa"?? Prrrrrring, prrrrrring, prrrrrring. That thing.

What's on your nightstand? Well, I don't have one right now. But we have a little desk that's right there. And I've got a cigar box that's filled with harmonicas and an autographed photograph of Paul Simon on it. ... I managed to coerce a friend of mine who used to own it to give it to me—because I was a bigger fan than he was. ... He said, "Well, when you play your first gig in front of 20,000 people, I'll give it to you." ... Or actually I think I made the suggestion, knowing that I was about to go on tour with John Mayer.

One thing on a wall in your living room: A ukulele. I played a wedding a few years back and the bride and groom went to Hawaii for their honeymoon. And they bought me a very beautiful ukulele and sent it to me [as a surprise].

One thing you have in your



Dennen now and then: "[E.T.] was the best movie ever. I mean, it's like every kid's dream to find an alien."



house from your childhood: I have an old E.T. doll that I got when I was *tiny*. ... It has this sort of, like, brown vinyl fabric that it was made out of. But it started to peel off, so it looked like E.T. with this, like, really terrible skin disease. But now, all the vinyl is peeled off. So now he looks kinda freakish like E.T. when he's pale and white and shriveled.

Three things we'd find in your medicine cabinet: Pretty much every kind of Chinese herb there is. And then, a few months ago, my girlfriend fell off her bike and broke her teeth, and she had to get some serious painkillers. So we have some of those in there. And then we have a brick of this vintage Chinese tea called *pu-ehr*.

Three things we'd find in your refrigerator? Coconut juice. Lots of vegetables for the juicer and you would find, let me see, apple cider vinegar. It's the best stuff ever ... you can drink it, you can use it for cleaning your bathroom and you can put it in foods to make your food taste good. You can brush your teeth with it. My mom swears by it. ... [she] drinks, like, a shot of it every day. It just cleans you out.

What is the biggest collection in your home? I have all my baseball cards from when I was a kid. (This includes an autograph from Rickey Henderson when he played for Dennen's favorite team: the Oakland A's.) They take up like three giant Tupperwares.

What can you see out your bedroom window? I've got a fig tree and then a little fountain that I built that's right under my bedroom window. It's always trickling.

What reading material would we find in your bathroom? Popular Science and Popular Mechanics and Backpacker magazines. And, occasionally, my girlfriend will grab, like when Vanity Fair does a big issue like the green issue or the Africa issue.

If we came unexpectedly, would we find your bed made—or not made? Depends on the time of day you'd come, because I usually don't make my bed but my girlfriend usually is the one who has to have the bed made. And so, she'll leave early to go, lately, she's been going to yoga teacher training early in the morning and she's gone all day. So if I'm home all day, I won't make it. But then I'll make it right before she gets home.

Best furniture bargain you ever got: Well, most of my furniture is hand-me-downs from my grandma—pretty old wood stuff. So I didn't really pay for any of it. But we have one couch that we all collectively bought together. ... The couch is like a green soft thing that you just sit in and you sink into and you never want to get out of.

What CD or artist would we find in your player (or on your iPod)? There's always Neil Young on my record player or my CD player. "On the Beach" is the best album.

Biggest surprise in your garden: I've got a bamboo forest in my front yard. ... I don't really like it. I've got this native plant thing going in the front yard and the backyard and it doesn't really [go with it]. The bamboo is 30 feet tall. ... Have you ever seen that movie 'Crouching Tiger, [Hidden Dragon]' [the scene where they're fighting high up in the bamboo trees]? I tried it.



Asked if he has ever met Paul Simon, whose autographed photo sits near his bed, Dennen says no. Would you like to? "Oh yeah!"

your backyard? That's where I grow vegetables and have barbecues and practice my flips and hula-hoops. Oh, and I've got a worm farm. I grow everything, I mean, everything—pumpkins and watermelons, corn, squash, leafy greens, tomatoes, tomatillos, onions, garlic, all kinds of stuff.

Do you hang your toilet paper with the paper hanging over the front or down the back? Over the

front. It doesn't matter, it still does the job but to me, it matters because I think it looks tacky the other way. And sometimes when I'm in people's bathrooms, I change it. ... It's kind of fun to mess with people.

Do you do any snooping of your own when visiting friends? I'm a freak with kitchens. I like to see what kind of pots and pans people have—like if they have a pot that looks like, oh you can

make really good risotto in that. ... And then knives. I'm a geek about knives. ... and cutting boards too. My dad's a carpenter so he's built me, over the years, tons and tons of cutting boards. And I keep them all oiled up.

Who would you like us to snoop in on? Oh, I'd like you to snoop around Eddie Vedder's house.

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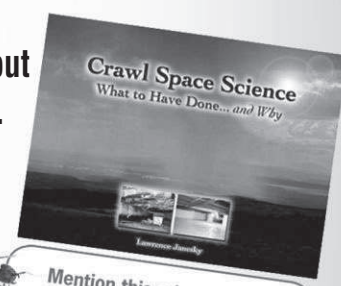
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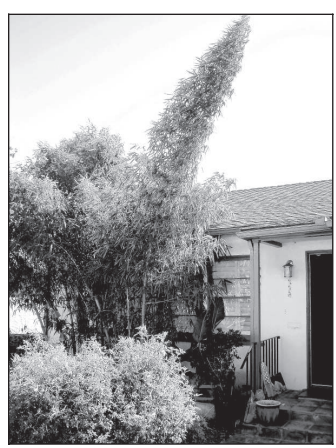
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Bamboo towers over Dennen's home (a la "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon").