

A Q&A with WENDY WAX

Author of *Ten Beach Road*, *Magnolia Wednesdays*, *The Accidental Bestseller* and Other Popular Novels

You grew up in St. Pete Beach and on Pass-a-Grille Beach, yet this is the first time you've set a book there? Why *TEN BEACH ROAD* and not one of your earlier ones?

Actually, Tanya in *The Accidental Bestseller* got to live in St. Petersburg and on the very last page there are these movie-like blurbs at the end laying out the friends' futures. Tanya's rewarded with a home on St. Pete Beach and a sixty foot houseboat. So I guess even two books ago I was nostalgic about life on the water and back on the beach.

In *Ten Beach Road* I put a derelict beachfront mansion at the heart of the story and, frankly, I rarely think 'beach' without the words St. Pete or Pass-a-Grille in front of it.

What was it like to grow up "on the beach?" And can you still do cartwheels?

It was wonderful. To this day nothing relaxes me like the feel of hard packed sand beneath my bare feet—I absolutely don't believe shoes of any kind should be allowed on the beach. Add the sound of waves on the shore and the caw of a seagull (as long as someone's not feeding it anywhere near me) and I'm happy. I tried hypnosis once to cure a fear of flying and when I had to come up with a relaxing image, that was it.

I confess I haven't tried a cartwheel in a long time. I'm going to be in St. Pete Beach again soon. I'll have to try one. I'll just have to make sure no one has a camera out at the time!

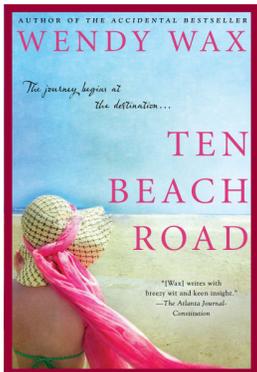


You have Madeline, Avery and Nikki escaping from their hard labor and relaxing Gulf side at a beachfront concession stand and other places such as *The Cottage Inn*. Are any of these real?

Almost everything on Pass-a-Grille in *Ten Beach Road* is real or a fictionalized version of an actual place. Whenever I'm in town I meet my friend Ingrid for breakfast at The Seahorse, and then we poke around the shops on Eighth Avenue before we walk and talk our way down the beach to the Don CeSar.

When I'm in town with my husband and sons, we often have breakfast at the Paradise Grille, which used to be a concession stand, and then walk back to wherever we're staying. There's also The Hurricane, which I've been going to since childhood, The Brass Monkey right on Gulf Way overlooking the beach, and The Black Palm, which I've heard great things about. There's also a really neat artists' collective called A Little Room for Art, where I've bought gifts and things for the house. And of course Evander Preston's custom designed jewelry and Shadrack's, an old school beach bar, have been sitting right near each other on Eighth Avenue pretty much forever.

The fictional Cottage Inn sits where the real Island's End is located. And I did 'mentally' knock down a condo on the spot I wanted for the fictional Bella Flora on the southwestern tip of Pass-a-Grille. The magnificent view from Bella Flora is very real.



OK, Madeline, Avery and Nicole enjoy margaritas (frozen and not), sunsets over the Gulf, sunrises over Boca Ciega Bay, pressed Cuban sandwiches—the list goes on. It begs the question—how much of *TEN BEACH ROAD* is autobiographical?

My affection for St. Pete Beach and Pass-a-Grille is very real. I hope that comes across in *Ten Beach Road*. However the story itself and the things that happen to those particular characters are a product of my imagination. As to the sunsets, they didn't recently name St. Pete Beach the "Sunset Capital of Florida" for nothing.

.Do you believe that setting plays a more important role in this novel than in other of your books?

Definitely. I could have put Madeline, Avery and Nicole's sole remaining 'asset' anywhere, but I think this particular setting contributes a lot to the story and the protagonists' friendship and growth. Another setting would have demanded a very different kind of house and a very different experience for the main characters. And, of course, you can't conjure up a threatening hurricane just anywhere.

As much as I believe in the importance of setting, I still tend to be spare in my descriptions of places and people. That's mostly because, as a reader, I don't enjoy tons of information about setting or character appearance. I only want the bare bones so that I can envision things myself.

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You include glimpses of many different architectural styles that are an important part of the ambiance of St. Pete Beach and especially the Pass-A-Grille historic district. Which appeal to you most? If you were to build your dream house, what would it look like? And who among Florida's architects past and present would you want to design it?

I'm very drawn to clean lines and contemporary 'airiness.' When I first started antiquing ages ago with my sister, I was repeatedly drawn to Art Deco furniture and accessories, a style that Avery really loves. Architecturally, I've always admired the Arts and Crafts Bungalow and I'm a great admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright's designs.

While researching *Ten Beach Road*, I toured a number of wonderful homes in northeast St. Petersburg and absolutely fell in love with the Mediterranean-Revival style of architecture, which was so popular in Florida and California in the 1920s. I read a history of Addison Mizner, who was responsible for transforming Palm Beach architecture. I was fortunate enough to tour the one Mizner on the west coast of Florida. The owner shared a lot of her personal restoration stories and experiences, which really helped me flesh out my characters' experiences with Bella Flora.

I'd love to live in a historically significant home—but only if I had the wherewithal to pay professionals to restore it. No one in our family is allowed to own tools.

As *TEN BEACH ROAD* progresses, you expand the cast of characters, adding Madeline's pregnant twenty-something daughter Kyra and Chase's two teenage sons. Is this the first of your novels to give a large role to the children of one of your protagonists? When you first gave Kyra a voice, did you know that she would evolve into a fully developed character and contribute so much to the story?

I have actually had strong secondary characters in many of my other books and typically work with a large 'cast of characters.' Sometimes it's planned, but other times characters do seem to grab on and become more than I initially intended. Lacy in *The Accidental Bestseller* was one of those; she was originally only meant as an insult to Kendall, but became the fairy godmother of the story—that person who still believed in the power and purpose of publishing.

In *Ten Beach Road* there are five women, all very important to the story, who spend the summer at Bella Flora. I must admit by the time I finished I was swearing my next book would be a single character written from one point of view. But of course, that's not at all what seems to be happening.

You're known for exploring the importance of women's friendships in your work. In *Magnolia Wednesdays*, *Vivi* seemed to have to learn how to be a friend. In *The Accidental Bestseller*, four women may have been guilty of taking the strength of their friendship for granted. In *TEN BEACH ROAD* you seem to be taking a closer look at issues such as trust, risk taking, honesty, and mother/daughter relationships. Do you agree? Did you start out in this direction? Or did the characters take you there?

I don't start out with 'themes' in mind, but I seem to have some issues that I keep coming back to. In fact, I've had a number of interviewers point out that I seem to keep writing about 'secrets.' When asked why, I didn't have an answer, so I now say "that's a secret."

The mother-daughter relationships in *Ten Beach Road* were intentional, but I didn't know how they'd play out until I began writing. Watching a story and characters evolve in unexpected ways is one of my favorite parts of the process. There are a lot of things you simply can't know or imagine about characters until you've spent time with them.

Did your past life as host of the Tampa radio program *Desperate and Dateless* have anything to do with you choosing matchmaking as Nicole's high-profile career?

Well, I'd like to say yes but the truth is I was a radio person who ended up hosting *Desperate & Dateless* back when I was both of those things. Nicole was inspired by an article or two I saw, which led me to a book about a real dating guru/matchmaker. I was kind of fascinated with the idea of making a living that way. I made her a matchmaker to the affluent, because I wanted her rise from poverty to be marked, and the loss of her fortune deeply emotional.

Can you tell us anything about your next book? *Setting*? *Situations*? When it may be published?

My next book, currently titled *Reality Check*, is scheduled for release in June 2012. Two estranged friends living very different lives are about to mix it up in ways they never could have imagined—but I did!

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