

# A Visit to Steve Stills' Retreat

BY RITCHIE YORKE

LONDON—The house is 350 years old and it really looks it. It has thick old oak beams, leaded bay windows, an iron chandelier, a wine cellar, a forest of nooks and crannies, antique bricks around wormholed wood and 20 acres of beautiful gardens.

A masterly-landscaped brook tumbles into several circular ponds, filled with ducks and swans and geese, surrounded by tall willow trees with daffodils and crocuses nestling in the grass. What the English call a river gently winds its way across the bottom of the estate.

A speedy black Mercedes 600SL waits in the graveled driveway, near the small movie theater. Its owner—and the owner of another Mercedes and two Ferraris—is softly sitting in the warmth of a log fire in the living room, deep in thought and looking every inch a mod country squire in a dark green antique velvet suit with black and red cowboy boots. An American southerner transplanted south of London.

On an ancient sideboard sits a vase of freshly-cut daffodils, still glistening from the midafternoon shower. There are two 12-inch speakers at one end of the room, and a shelf of albums — Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, the Buffalo Springfield, Aretha, Neil Young, Ali Akbar Khan, Bach harpsichord pieces and Creedence Clearwater.

## Celebrated Owners

A couple of rooms away, in the southwest corner, a grand piano which seems to be squeezed into the room is lit by the last burst of the fading sun. You look through the windows at the row of roses and the daffodils in the orchard and the old stables, and you can easily picture a Keats or a Shelley sitting in the same spot, overwhelmed with inspiration.

You quietly speculate on the long history of the house. In the last year alone, it has had three show business owners, all internationally celebrated. First there was actor

Peter Sellers, who spent a lot of money restoring the place (and adding many mirrors to please his Scandinavian wife, Britt Eckland). Sellers sold the estate to Ringo Starr, as a sort of special incentive to lure the Beatle drummer into his movie, "The Magic Christian."

But Ringo soon found the 7 a.m. set call impossible to meet when you had to motor in to Central London from Southern Surrey. So Ringo, who buys and sells estates with reckless abandon, offered it to Steve Stills, who took a lease with option to purchase.

Stills plans to buy the house (for around \$250,000) in the fall and make it his base of operations and leave Los Angeles.

He arrived in London early in February, ostensibly to hang out and maybe make a solo album. He'd just finished the second Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young album and needed some different space in which to untangle his mind from the paranoia of having to work closely in the studio for 800 hours with three

other near-geniuses.

He started out by staying at the Dorchester Hotel, but now he was living in the house, driving the new Mercedes, and he had chalked up another 160 hours in the studio. He had almost completed 11 tracks for the album, released this month, which also features Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and others. And he was becoming Anglicized.

He was calling pounds "quids," he was drinking tea by the gallon and he was looking as pale as the Rockies in mid-winter. He was also looking weary, the result of 25 nights in the studio, with just two off. The singer-guitarist-writer explained how of all people, Ringo had come to play drums at some of his sessions.

"It was really funny," he said, glancing sideways, which can be highly dangerous when two miles of road are being ripped off in 60 seconds. "I met Ringo at a discotheque and somehow it turned out that he was making a record and needed some help. In return, I invited him down to my sessions to play on a couple of tracks. We set the time for 7 p.m.

### Arrived Late

"We rolled up about half an hour late, expecting Ringo to turn up later that evening. But there he was, a smile on his face, telling us he'd been there since 6:45. The stuff he did was great. Besides being very good, period, Ritchie is very good at playing to earphones. He just belts it out, with a beautiful sort of feeling.

"After that, I wanted him to play on all the tracks, but he thought people would think he had joined my band. So he just did a couple and we left it at that. I didn't argue with him."

And Eric Clapton? It was a minute or so before Steve replied, because he was intensely involved in tailing an E-type Jaguar which had foolishly passed him. "Eric? I love him, man. Eric's my brother, man. We've kind of been through the same changes and we're both just coming out on the other side. Eric has been a tremendous help to me with this album.

"The scene with Jimi Hendrix was different. We just stayed in the studio and jammed for four or five days and I put down four or five tracks with him. The whole scene was really weird, man. I just asked the cats to come to the studio.

"We're all a big community, I figure. Wasn't it some American poet who said something like we shall hang together, or we shall hang separately? It's like I'm will-

ing to help anybody whose music I dig, and I figure that if I do, these people will help me and that's sort of the way it's been."

Steve suddenly remembered that Atlantic had called to say the DeJa Vu album was over 1.5 million sales, and answered the obvious: Would a lot of people find it hard not to think of the Stills solo album as being, in fact, the followup of DeJa Vu?

"No, I don't think that will happen but I've got to leave it up to everybody to decide for himself. Neil Young once said that if everybody was

into it as much as I am, it would be total bedlam and that's true. For example, I'm very far into the Crosby Stills Nash and Young records. I'm always looking at it from three or four different directions, some a mile away. Graham Nash has that perspective as well.

"Getting that second album out of us was like pulling teeth. That's why it took 800 hours to produce, and why the first album took 600 hours. There was song after song that didn't make it. Others had to be worked on an awful lot. The track of DeJa Vu must

have meant 100 takes in the studio.

"But 'Carry On' happened in a grand total of eight hours from conception to finished master. So you never know. But Neil Young has his solo albums with Crazy Horse, and I think Graham and David will get stuck into theirs after the tour.

"This album has been stirring up inside of me for a couple of years now. I've just been waiting for the right time, the right amount of songs, and the right kind of songs. Which is to say not group songs."

Earlier, Stills had noted that he was becoming

conservative in his old age. "I certainly don't want to maintain a status quo, or preserve the conservative element of politics. My definition is that blowing it up isn't going to work, I mean no way. I remember getting into a fight with this little chick from the Weathermen in the middle of Chicago Airport and she really annoyed me coming on with all that revolution crap. I mean I would like to take some of those people to Latin America and show them a real revolution.

"I grew up there and I watched that stuff go down, man, and those people don't mess around. We'd end up with a bunch of kids with machine guns with a general leading them in the streets.

"The only way to do it is due process. And as long as it's long and it's hard and they ain't big enough to have the patience to wait, it's gonna be bloody. You know what it's gonna do to them because the kids don't want their land raped and they don't wanna walk down the street and feel uptight.