

DINA MERRILL & TED HARTLEY

When Dina Merrill and Ted Hartley sat down for some table talk recently, it was about how John Ford's classic John Wayne-Henry Fonda western *Fort Apache* could be remade—in space.

"Fonda's character is sent from planet Earth to help people in Jupiter and the John Wayne character is there, befriending the flora and fauna," explains an enthusiastic Hartley.

The couple has good reason to have these fanciful visions. Ever since they, along with a group of investors, purchased the once-majestic RKO Pictures, which made lasting hits during Hollywood's heyday, the couple has been mining the vaults of the studio for films with remake potential. RKO's legacy includes *The Enchanted Cottage*, *Stage Door* with Katharine Hepburn and the so-called "cavalry trilogy" of Ford westerns that includes *Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* and *Rio Grande*. Last year's *Mighty Joe Young*, the \$50 million Disney fantasy, was their first hit.

The couple not only found a way to inspire each other at work but in life as well. Merrill—who broke with her high-society upbringing to become a successful working actress in movies like *Butterfield 8* with Elizabeth Taylor and *Operation Petticoat* with Cary Grant—first met Hartley when he was a naval attaché. At the time she was married to her first husband, Stanley Rumbough Jr., then a White House aide. Hartley, a pilot who became an actor after he broke his back in a 1961 Navy crash landing, encountered Merrill again in 1986 after her divorce from Cliff Robertson. They married in 1989, 40 years after they first met.

While Merrill works in movies, like Robert Altman's 1992 *The Player*, and mines the RKO trove for possible material, Hartley handles production, including an upcoming remake ("We call them 'adaptations'") of *I Walked with a Zombie*.

Though they have a home in Brentwood, California, the Hamptons is their real retreat. For Merrill, who gave up a Malibu place years ago and has lived in the Hamptons for almost 30 years, being in the Hamptons means "being on one of the world's most wonderful beaches."

