

MILPAS ON THE MOVE

BEING A "GOOD CITIZEN" OFTEN LEADS TO BAD THINGS. BUSINESSES PAY FINES AND EXORBITANT FEES; BUMS PAY NOTHING, EVER, P. 12

IN THE GARDEN

RANDY ARNOWITZ IS NEITHER A SPROUT NAZI NOR OVO-LACTO HAIRSHIRT, BUT HE DOES GO ALL-ORGANIC WHEN IT COMES TO HIS PLANTS, P. 20

LOVE MIKANA

FINE-FEATHERED FOOD FESTIVITIES INCLUDE FRIED CHICKEN AND WAFFLES AT DRAKE WINES, DEEP IN THE FUNK ZONE, P. 29

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MIDTOWN MADNESS



by
Matt Mazza



IT'S CALLED THE SANTA BARBARA AUTO CAMP BUT IT'S REALLY A CHARMING LITTLE HOTEL THAT CATERS TO ADVENTUROUS TOURISTS AND AIRSTREAM ENTHUSIASTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD...

LIFE IN THE TRAILER PARK

I never really envisioned living in a trailer park after graduating from law school at Cal. There's nothing *wrong* with living in a trailer park, of course, I just didn't see it for me and my family.

But things have changed in the past ten years. We have, in fact, called a trailer – in a park – our home.

Twice.

The first time was in South Africa in late 2011. We'd flown into Cape Town from Istanbul as part of a long trip we took as a family and settled into a refurbished **Airstream Trailer Park** atop the **Grand Daddy Hotel** on Long Street. The Daddy used huge cranes to deliver the Airstreams to the roof of the hotel some five stories up, and then had them stylishly re-imagined and designed by local artisans. Ours was called **Moontides** – think blue and silver and quasi-lunar and you'll get the idea – and was part of a small community of six other trailers situated around a cool outdoor stage for live music performances and a small bar. Everybody had great views of the city and peek-a-boos of **Table Mountain**.

Bustling Long Street, Cape Town's main thoroughfare, pulsed below us, and we spent hours exploring its shops

...continued p.5

THE BEER GUY

PAGE 8

PRESIDIOSPORTS

PAGE 16

MAD SCIENCE

PAGE 23

OPEN HOUSES

PAGE 31



MAZZA'S MISSIVE

by Matt Mazza

...continued from cover

and restaurants and cafés and outdoor markets as a family. Then we'd head back to the Airstream, sit in lounge chairs out front and listen to some mellow South African musician knock out a few tunes over a cold drink.

Pretty cool, as unique hotel experiences go.

We have fond memories of our time living in that trailer park; we'd go back in a heartbeat if the opportunity presented itself. (And if you're going to Cape Town any time soon, you might check out the old Grand Daddy – it was a fun stay and they treated us really well.)

Reliving the Good Old Days in the Trailer

It was against that backdrop that I found myself standing in front of **Santa Barbara Auto Camp** on De La Vina last weekend. A few days earlier, I'd driven by

the shiny Airstream trailers available for nightly rental and had an idea.

"Why don't we stay there for a night," I thought, "we can relive some of the glorious family time we spent in Cape Town. The wife and kids will love it. (And me for thinking of it.)"

It seemed like a brilliant idea at the time, and I made arrangements with **Ryan Miller**, the project and operations manager for the SBAC, to spend a Saturday night in one of the trailers.

Then both my kids got sick – really sick – and couldn't make it. So there I was, facing a night in the park alone.

Not quite what I envisioned but I resolved to make the most of it.

And make the most of it I did.

A Little Community

Admittedly, De La Vina is not Long Street. But the park is surprisingly conveniently located, and the guys at



Julia Johnson (left) and Linda Engelsiepen, relaxed well on a short trip from L.A. (Airstream Trailer Parks have that effect on people.)

SBAC have thoughtfully included beach cruisers with each Airstream they rent out, so getting around is really easy.

I was immediately and quite pleasantly surprised when I pulled up. The park grounds – at least those immediately surrounding the Airstreams, which is pretty much where I hung out – are very clean and landscaped. It is really a hospitable, welcoming little spot they've created, and I felt right at home.

It was more of the same when I opened the door to the trailer. Clean, comfortable, well designed and suitable for a couple and a kid (maybe two but

that would have been pushing it in the space I was in). There was a small sitting area, a comfortable couch opposite a mini-kitchen (I suppose you could cook in there but with so many restaurants and cafés nearby, there is likely little or no need), a cozy bedroom with a surprisingly comfortable bed and a bathroom with a full shower and claw foot tub and (**Malin + Goetz**) products (think rum bar soap and eucalyptus body wash). There were also a couple beach chairs for sitting on the grass outside and sharing a glass of

...continued p.14

...continued from p.5

wine near the barbeque.

In fact, that's right where I found my new neighbors, **Julia Johnson** and **Linda Engelsiepen**, who were visiting from L.A. and having a great time. "We love the trailer," they both laughed, "It's different, like staying in a little community. Last night we had a couple neighbors over for some apps and a glass of wine – super fun."

I stayed in their little yard and chatted for a moment before heading back to **Santa Rosa** (my trailer and, coincidentally, my hometown), grabbing an old acoustic guitar that needed some fixing, and then walking over to **Jensen Guitar & Music Co.**, where I found **Chris Jensen** working hard on a beautiful steel string.

"Hey Chris, got a minute to take a look at this one?"

He smiled. "Sure."

I like Chris.

Within fifteen minutes (and for just fifteen bucks), he had my old axe ready for action, which, in turn, meant that I was at least partially ready for my night at the trailer park.

"Thanks Chris," I said as I walked out the door, "I'm staying in one of those Airstreams across the street tonight."

"I used to live over there," he laughed, "looks like they've done a pretty good job with the place. Have fun."

Midtown is (Very) Cool

My kids were bummed that they couldn't spend the night (neither Wendi



Chris Jensen fixed my guitar in fifteen minutes. He's the man. (Thanks Chris, and thanks for selling me that very guitar 18 years ago. Let's just say that it has made it through a few campfires.)

nor I could imagine staying in the trailer with two sick, coughing kids, so their complaints didn't stand a chance), but they came down with Wendi for an early dinner. **TAP Thai** is a favorite for us so we strolled down after playing around the park for a bit.

We usually start with the corn cakes and summer rolls but this time the kids



Who is that guy enjoying the read?

wanted crispy sesame tofu with sweet and sour sauce (yummy little treat, actually). Then we split some *tom kha gai* for the table – nothing better for stuffy noses – and shared a delightful eggplant salad, a *pad thai* and some steamed vegetables and rice. Wendi drank *cha dum yen*; I had a Chang (or two... what can I say, I was staying in a trailer park for crying out loud). Nice little meal, and the service was terrific too.

Check out TAP Thai if you haven't. It's simple and it's easy and it's pretty damn good.

After Wendi and the girls went home for the night, I got online back at the

trailer and took care of a little work.

Then I walked next door to **Jimboz Lounge** for a beer.

For those of you who don't know Jimboz, it is the former **Freeman's Lounge** that now has a neon sign out front that reads, simply, "Lounge." It's the kind of place where you can go for a friendly bartender (**Stacey**, local barmaid extraordinaire, was quick with a smile) and a cold beer by yourself to watch a game.

I like that kind of place.

My barstool neighbors consisted of a reasonably intoxicated scientist from UCSB – no, not **Rachelle Oldmixon**, our very own mad scientist from UCSB – and, lo and behold, a local writer/media person. It made for interesting conversation and I had a blast at Jimboz.

In fact, bartender **Jack** – a very cool, very funny guy from Massachusetts – said it best (in a terrific Boston accent).

"This place is a great local."

You're right Jack. I'll be back.

I'm a Moron...

I walked back over to the trailer when it seemed reasonable to do – remember, I had no kids and no wife for the night – and quickly realized that I had inadvertently left my keys to the trailer sitting on the counter inside before I closed the door to head to Jimboz.

In other words, I'd locked myself out of the damned trailer. And there were no back up keys.

So I texted Ryan.

He politely advised that there is nobody on-site with a spare set, so he'd have to send someone down.

Great.

Within ten minutes, co-owner **Matthew Hofmann** arrived with keys and a friendly smile.

(Think of me smiling sheepishly, horrified and embarrassed by my stupidity.)

"Well, how do you like it?" he asked.

"A lot, you guys have done a great job and the neighborhood is cool too," I stammered as he unlocked my door for me.



Inside the San Miguel Airstream.

The Santa Rosa Airstream (and its glamorous bathroom), fully restored by Architect Matthew Hofmann.



It turns out that Matthew also owns local architectural design firm **HofArc**, which now exclusively does Airstream renovations, and is looking to expand the Airstream hotel business with his partner **Neil Dipaolao** of **Mesa Lane Partners** (which recently built the stunning **LOOP** student housing project in Isla Vista). Neil and Matthew are looking at a number of interesting locations and concepts – and were quite aware of the **Grand Daddy Hotel** in Cape Town. Small world.

We talked for ten or fifteen minutes – Matthew and Neil are thrilled with the park and how it's going – and then he hit the road. But not before reminding me, gently, to keep the keys in my pocket this time.

Thanks Matt, I really appreciate both the hospitality and the quick help. (I'm still sorry for the inconvenience and remain completely horrified.)

...And I'm Getting Hungry Again

It was around 8pm at this point, and I was getting hungry again. So I jumped on my cruiser and rode a few blocks up the street – past **The Refillery** and **Trader Joe's** – to the **Uptown Lounge**. I'd heard that they are serving some pretty good wood-fired pizzas up there and wanted to check it out.

The rumors are true.

I sat at the bar and shared a pesto arugula combo and a meat lovers pizza with an amiable bartender and some

friends I bumped into – **Mike** and **Maria Westmacott** – and was about to hit the road (I'm getting too old for two bars in one night... kind of) but spied friend and Uptown (and **Chase Bar & Grill**) proprietor **George Marino** across the room.

"Place looks great, George, and the pizzas were delicious," I gushed.

"Thanks man," he replied, "we've been busy and are always drawing more crowds for good food and good drinks. Glad you liked it."

George is an easy guy to get along with, so I ended up staying a bit longer and having a blast before hopping back on the cruiser and coasting back down to Santa Barbara Auto Camp.

Where I slept soundly. Quite soundly indeed.

The Morning After

I woke up around 7am – it is surprisingly quiet in the area at that time, even despite being close to the street – called Wendi and the girls to say good morning, and then mounted my trusty cruiser again and headed up to **Steve's Patio Café** for breakfast with Publisher **Tim Buckley**.

After I told him about my (very fun, very comfortable) night in the Airstream over some coffee and eggs and bacon (his extra crispy, mine extra wispy), he reminded me that **Our Daily Bread** and **Los Agaves** and **The Daily Grind** are all soon coming to the area to add to the mix of stuff to do. And **Edomasa** and the **Santa Barbara Chicken Ranch** are great

...continued p.25

...continued from p.15



Wendi and Kim, my (pregnant!) sister, enjoy some sun in the yard.



Airstreams make children happy. (From right to left, that's Lily and Kate with their cousin Presley.)

places for a quick bite with friends too.

We finished up, and then I coasted back down to the Airstream, packed my stuff, and headed home.

It was St. Patrick's Day, after all, and I had to start my special corned beef and cabbage.

Something, I hear, they eat a lot of in

trailer parks.

At least the ones I've been to.

Stuff I Like

I like **Santa Barbara Auto Camp** and truly had a blast at the Airstream and checking out the neighborhood



Downright dazzling (delicious?) dames Lizzie Peus (co-chair), Jen Rameson and Nakisa Herrick (Parent Council Co-Presidents) and Jill Levinson (co-chair).

(all of which I liked as well). Frankly, I'd recommend it as a perfect place for a slightly more adventurous couple or even just some friends or other out-of-towners for the weekend. It would be fun to barbecue in the park one night and then hop on the cruisers and see

where they take you. There is good food and drink all within striking distance, and State Street and downtown are just a short ride away. (Be careful at Jimboz, though, the place can sneak up on you.) Check out www.sbautocamp.com for information and (reasonable) rates, call (888) 405-7553 or just drive by 2717 De La Vina Street. Have fun!

I also like **All Saints-by-the-Sea Parish School** – both Lily and Kate are graduates and Wendi and I remain strong supporters of the program, approach and terrific staff. Unfortunately, we were unable to attend the annual fundraising gala a week or so ago – this year themed **Mad Fun by the Sea** (a nod to *Mad Men*) at the **Coral Casino Beach and Cabana Club** – but have been to a few of them in the past and know them to be quite a good time. In fact, I've heard that a number of people had a lot of fun this year – really a lot, and there are pictures to prove it – and wish we could have been there. Maybe, if we're lucky, we can buy our way into the **Cocktails & Crooners** soiree despite not being able to bid on it this time around. Come on **Levinsons**, what do you say?

I like the great outdoors. Go for a hike up in **Mission Canyon** or **Rattlesnake Canyon** (or take a drive down to **Romero Canyon**). It's time to start working off the winter coat. For me, anyway.

Peace.

