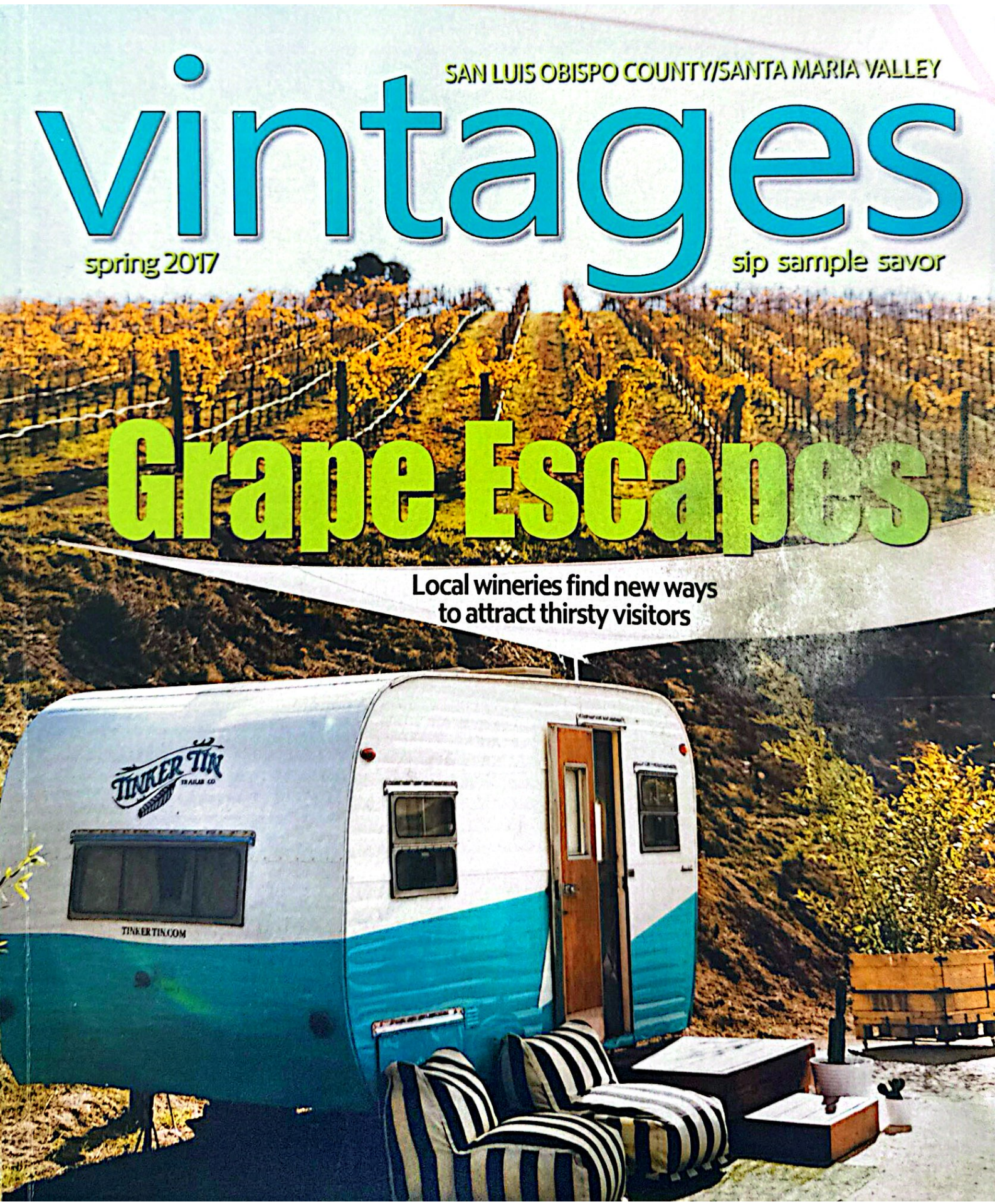
SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY/SANTA MARIA VALLEY

vintages

spring 2017

sip sample savor



Grape Escapes

Local wineries find new ways to attract thirsty visitors

Scanned with CamScanner

COURTESY PHOTO

hese vintage trailers at Alta Colina winery are on the edge of a small lake.

Mittal, offers an exotic feast for the senses: ibrant blue walls, colorful daybeds topped ith piles of plush pillows, seductive Indian usic and alluring aromas of cardamom, ose hips and other spices.

Most winemakers eschew smells, wor- ed they'll interfere with the aroma and aste of their wines, but with a culinary ackground, Neeta wanted to showcase ow the wines accompany food and cook- ng. It's less about the protein, she says, nd more about the flavors and season- ngs you're using.

That's exactly what the by-appoint- nent spice pairings aim to highlight. The Mittals start with a mild sheep's milk heese, which they dust with various pice blends to complement the vintage, arietal and season.

Most every tasting includes a pairing ith the family recipe for garam masala, blend of over 20 brown spices used to arm up everything from vegetables to ews that Neeta's mother sends over from India. For a Rhône-dominant blend, the LXV team combined rose hips, rose petals, cardamom, jasmine, cinnamon, sea salt and cocoa, a mix they described as well-suited to cream sauces.

Neeta offers recipes or suggestions for each spice mixture, which are also sold in packets for $5. The pairing for a cab franc-syrah-merlot blend, with smoked tea, paprika, garlic, black pepper, fennel, sarsaparilla, rosemary and marjoram, for example, is perfect for a steak or paneer rub.

To end on a nonchocolate sweet note, the Mittals pair their rich syrah with dried blueberries dusted with sarsaparilla, co- coa, vanilla and nutmeg, a combo that can be made into a sauce to accompany game meats.

Details: Spice pairings, $20, offered by appointment only, so a staff member can walk you through the tasting. Hours are noon to 7 p.m. Thursday to Monday. www.lxvwine.com.

Other pairing options: If traditional cheese and charcuterie are more your style, Le Vigne Winery has among the largest selections in the area, along with fresh-pressed paninis. More paninis, salad and dessert to accompany tastings are on the menu at AronHill Vineyards' small bistro. Enjoy a seated tasting along with a meal from the full menu at Cass Vineyard and Winery, or hit the popular open-air Barton's Kitchen Window for Chef Jeffry Wiesinger's award-winning creations at Barton Family Wines.

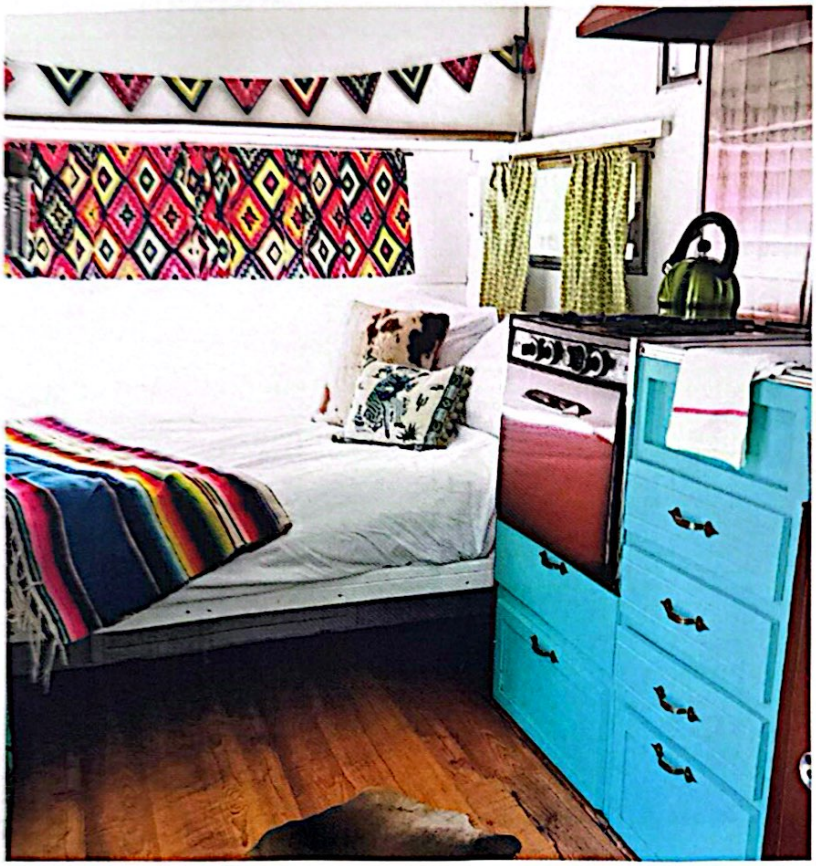
STAY

Elevated camping at Alta Colina

Between on-site bed-and-breakfasts, vacation rentals and guest cottages, doz- ens of wineries offer places for visitors to stay overnight. But those seeking a real connection with the land should check out the more rustic option offered at Alta Colina Wine's new Trailer Pond.

A stay at Alta Colina starts like any

Scanned with CamScanner



COURTESY PHOTO

The interior of this 1962 Aristocrat trailer has been updated with a cozy and vintage feeling.

other visit, with a stop at father-daughter Bob and Maggie Tillman's tasting room off Highway 46 West. Sample the 130-acre estate's organically farmed, handmade Rhône varietal wines, then grab a bottle or two and head up the steep, winding drive — past exposed hillsides revealing the fractured shale soil the vines root into — and up to a serene pond ringed by a half-dozen vintage trailers.

Watch the sunset from the floating dock, 1,800 feet above sea level, surrounded by nothing but vines, hills and valleys in every direction. When it's time to tuck in, snuggle into the trailer's cozy bed and fall asleep to the calming lullaby of the vineyard at night. Wake and prepare a fresh cup of organic Joebella coffee right in the trailer — lovingly restored and appointed in period detail by Tinker Tin Trailer Co.

Take a hike among the vines, relax with a book on your shaded front patio, or schedule an outdoor yoga class and wine tasting on the hillside deck nearby. Prepare simple meals at the cute outdoor kitchen at the far end of the trailers, arrange for catered meals or head for a bite in town — only a 10-minute drive despite feeling a world away.

Details: The weekend package for two, $750, includes a two-night stay, bottle of wine, wine-and-cheese tasting and catered breakfast both mornings. Weeknight stays are $250 per night with free wine tasting. 21 and over only. Book at www.tinkertin.com. Contact Tinker Tin directly for group and event rental details and options.

Other options: For a more budget-friendly option, check out the Que Sera Syrah Vineyard Winnebago on www.airbnb.com for $90 per night. Or forget the trailers and camp the old-fashioned way at Pianetta Ranch & Winery, where you can pitch a tent among the vines. Pianetta accommodates groups up to 50 and will arrange tastings, tours, dinner and more. Book at www.hipcamp.com.

PLAY
Tossing around the vines at Castoro Cellars

You'll find bocce ball, bean bag toss and other games dotting the lawns of tasting rooms around wine country, but rarely will you find a game that takes you straight into the vineyard itself.

But that's exactly what you can do at Castoro Cellars, where the Udsen family has created a disc golf course meandering through its Whale Rock vineyard.

Not familiar with disc golf? The game features 18 holes, just like the club kind, but instead of hitting balls toward a tiny hole, you're tossing small, Frisbee-like discs with the goal of landing them in chain-strung metal baskets. The family-friendly sport takes just minutes to learn, though like its namesake, can take a lifetime to master.

Luke and Max Udsen, sons of Castoro co-founders Niels and Bimmer, are keen disc golfers themselves and alighted on the idea as a low-impact way to provide a fun diversion and get people better acquainted with the vines that

Please see page 22

Scanned with CamScanner