



A trailer for every trade

By Tom Bentley

The “Sailor Jerry” Airstream ensures you’ll have a rum old time. Yo-ho-ho! **BELOW:** Harleys, eagles, rum, and Airstreams — there’s some true mobile America. Six similar “Sailor Jerry” Airstreams toured the US during the Summer of 2011.

There’s no shortage of ways to get your face fed out of an Airstream in Austin. The progressive Texas town is often a couple of wheels ahead of the pack, and when it comes to Airstream food trucks—whether you want gourmet Asian, gourmet doughnuts, gourmet tacos, gourmet cupcakes or even gourmet hot sauce—all your appetites will be met. Hot to go out of a gleaming aluminum coach.

But what happens after your belly is full and you still hanker for that special atmosphere only an Austin Airstream can deliver? Wipe your face and bring your boots: Austin is also host to a bevy of interesting Airstream-based businesses. First up, let’s not stray too far from the food concept. What goes better with food than booze? Sailor Jerry’s Austin Airstream would argue that nothing does, and they’ll even tattoo you on the subject so you won’t forget.

The spiced rum purveyor sent six vintage Airstreams across the country this past summer on their “Hold Fast” tour, in honor of their namesake Norman “Sailor Jerry” Collins, an icon of tattooing’s heyday. Their Austin-based trailer was parked at the South-by-Southwest (SXSW) conference, inking up band members who were performing at SXSW. (A tat supplies a memory that lasts longer than a cupcake.)

“The vintage Airstream brand pairs up well with the iconic and nostalgic Americana period Sailor Jerry Rum is trying to encapsulate—distinctive and built to last,” said Dana Dynamite, head of Dynamite PR, which represents the rum.

Sailor Jerry customized their 1972 27-foot Overlander with select drapery and upholstery, Sailor Jerry’s iconic flash art decals on the exterior, and a custom drop-down movie screen for outdoor theatre compatibility on the driver’s side. The company bases a trailer in Austin because Austin is considered one of the country’s live music capitals, which aligns well with Sailor Jerry’s support of independent music and bands. Rum, tattoos and Airstreams—surely someone in Austin has written a song about it.

But if you’re doing all-things Austin, it’s not only tattoos that carry the look. Even nontraditional





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Austin touches on some Texas traditions, and one of those is Western wear. What better place to purvey vintage Western duds than a vintage Airstream? Brett Chasteen chose a 17-foot, 1969 Caravel for his Pearl Snaps vintage clothing store, and it's served him with silver status: "It is the best marketing tool I could have—a real conversation starter. People either want to buy the trailer or they want to chat about their Airstream memories," said Chasteen.

For three years, he's been moving the clothing-crammed Caravel to various Austin locations, setting up a shop on the run. "I do pop-up shops for special events, outdoor concerts, and vintage/flea markets. I can pull up anywhere and be set up with hundreds of vintage western shirts and boots within an hour," he said.

Chasteen appreciates the Austin lifestyle (and those food trailers we mentioned). "Austin is just the type of place to embrace a trailer-based business. There are hundreds of food trailers all over town offering any type of food you could imagine, and I saw this as an opportunity to have my own mobile business. Austinites have a great appreciation for vintage clothing, whether as a throwback to the past, a way to recycle, or even a way to save money. As a city with a thriving music scene and a major university, my vintage clothes and boots really appeal to the local bands and the huge student population," Chasteen said.

As far as trailer-commerce competition is concerned, for Chasteen, it's the more the merrier: "I think it would be exciting

RIGHT: Brett Chasteen's vintage Caravel sells vintage western duds. **BELOW:** Chris Johnson's 1968 Globe Trotter named "Daisy" makes a fine Airstream Photo Booth for capturing memories of Austin.

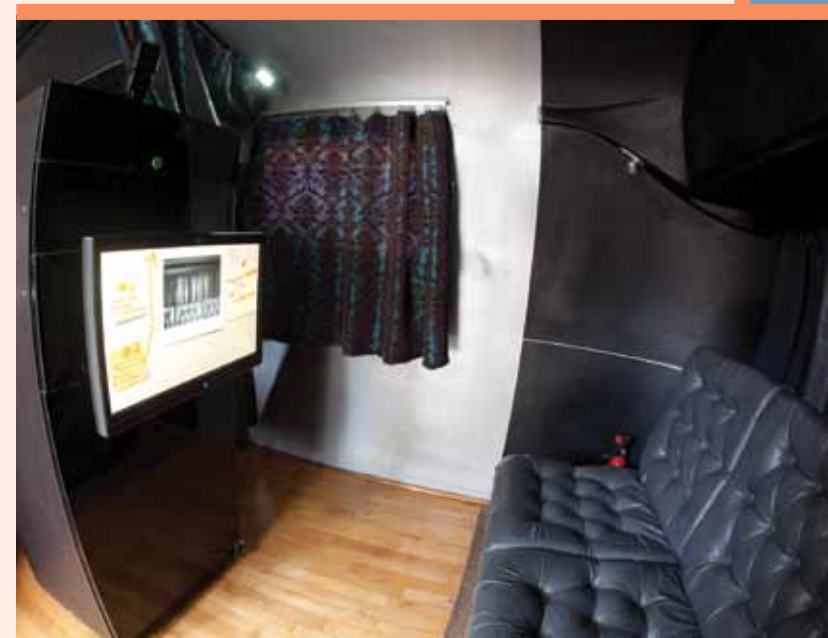
to eventually take over a vacant lot with an 'All Airstream' market—exclusively businesses based out of vintage Airstream trailers. I think it has great potential in Austin."

Attendees at such a market would undoubtedly want to commemorate their pleasures there with a photo of themselves—especially if they happen to be getting hitched at the market. We're sure that Chris Johnson's Airstream Photo Booth would be just the ticket. Johnson and his wife Yvonne employ a 19-foot, 1968 Globetrotter for their work behind the lens, and he found Austin to be the ideal setting for his Airstream adventure. "Austin is a kind of Texas oasis, with lakes, streams, rolling hills, music and a spirit of independence. I think that's what Austin and Airstream have in common. Free-love, free-wheeling, independent-thinking machines. This is what makes it so attractive and nice to be here," Johnson said.

The Johnsons removed the Airstream's bathroom to make a functional office area, and replaced the stove with a high-end printer. The trailer is set up as a mini photo-studio, complete with a professional digital camera, studio lighting



Photo by Alison Turner





and a dye-sublimation printer for fast prints. They supply props for event guests to ham it up for shots taken inside and out of the Globetrotter, which also is rentable as a backdrop for fun-themed parties and events.

"We wanted to offer something fun and unique that fits the Austin area. An Airstream really fits because Airstream has become a kind of iconic piece of Austin. Everyone has a connection with them," says Johnson. The Johnsons are so connected with their trailer they named it Daisy.

And if you think technology and trailers don't go together, dare to mention that to Gowalla, the Austin-based smartphone application developer, connecting people with places, events and each other. The good folks at Gowalla also thought that SXSW was a prime venue for all things Gowalla, and after helping Threadless, the T-shirt manufacturer, with their 2010 Airstream tour, they knew Airstreams had the right stuff. They found their 1967, 19-foot Land Yacht on the Austin ABC studio's back lot, the trailer having been a prop in the "My Generation" show. They pulled out the water and gas lines, built a large closet, put in new A/C, flooring, cabinets, countertops, windows, lights and paint. Viola! The trailer debuted at Utah's Sundance film festival before it drew the crowds at SXSW.

According to Jonathan Carroll, Gowalla's music and events director, the trailer was a perfect fit. "Airstream is iconic, eye-catching, and a great value for the price, if you do it right. It fits so well with our company's design aesthetic. People loved coming by, and having their pictures taken there. It puts a smile on people's faces, and we like that!"

The company will be using the Airstream as a base for mobile events, like being the VIP lounge for a tequila tasting for a restaurant's last Cinco de Mayo party. There's always something happening in Austin, and Carroll wants people to know how to use Gowalla technology to spread the news.

"Gowalla is about discovering interesting things, sharing great times with friends. We feel Austin is a perfect fit for that: so many interesting things to do

here, so many wonderful people. Discovery and sharing are such a part of Austin, and we live that company mantra every day here."

If four crafts businesses and one trailer seems like bad math to you, you don't know the wonder women at WonderCraft. Individually they'd all dreamed of owning a boutique where they could also teach the craft of crafts, but after partners Beth Albrecht, Kimberly Sae-Eua, Jenifer Bryan, and Beth Hempton put their heads together, they decided on a boutique-on-wheels: a 1978, 32-foot Airstream Sovereign that had been languishing in a Texas field. They dubbed her "Stella."

Beth Albrecht explains: "We loved the iconic, shiny, recognizable, qualities of the Airstream and they're definitely the best-looking trailers available, but we also were attracted to the idea of restoring and upgrading an old grimy trailer into something new. The best feeling is that when a customer comes in with a look of amazement and wonder and remarks something like 'This is a great looking trailer, brilliant idea,' we are filled with pride and excitement too. Of course we are already plotting new ways to make her even more awesome."

Not that the women spared the initial refurbishing: they gutted the trailer down to the shell, installed reclaimed hardwood flooring, built benches that double as storage, installed an Ikea Expedit shelving unit over the wheel well on one side, added additional lighting, painted the interior orange, installed a new AC unit, stripped and shined up the outside and added their logo.

All the partners were aware of the Austin/Airstream connection, but they feel that WonderCraft offers a bit of an advantage. "Austin is very local-business friendly, as well as having a rich creative community that is welcoming and vast. Also, people are very aware of the Airstream and food-trailer trend here and thus we offer them something new, a chance to actually go inside. Most of the trailers and Airstreams are closed to the public and you can only peek inside, but people are able to experience our Airstream differently and many say it's their first time inside one," said Albrecht.

The WonderCraft artists invite Sovereign students to learn how to make things out of all types of materials. They also specialize in bringing people together for events, parties and for relaxed, creative hang-outs, as well as selling a curated selection of unique handmade items, keeping their tagline real: "Make things. Meet people. Buy stuff."

The WonderCrafters are opening a brick-and-mortar shop close to Stella, so the trailer will be used more as a creative workshop and event space. They'll continue to tow her out to big events around Austin, like craft shows and trailer events.

You probably have a sense by now that all Austin Airstream businesses aren't places where you can ask, "Can I get some pepper too?" But if you absolutely HAVE to have fries with that, we've got a little tip for you: check out the Trailer Food Diaries at <http://trailerfooddiaries.blogspot.com/>. It's all about Austin, all about Airstreams, and all about things you can put in your mouth.

Bon appétit! 🗨️



ABOVE: The Gowalla Airstream is all about making connections, between people, events, and places — and apparently, crazed encounters in trailers. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Stella the Wondercraft is a boutique-on-wheels for four different businesses.