Most people decorate their gardens with things like quirky gnomes, whimsical birdhouses, burbling fountains. But that was a bit mundane for Brad Steward and the other founders of Caravan Outpost in Ojai, California. No driftwood collages for them — they decorated their garden with 11 Airstreams. And then invited guests.

Steward and the other Outpost founders have backgrounds in film and television production, apparel design, and the digital sphere, and they blended those talents to create a distinct boutique guest environment. “We built a beautiful garden on our property to celebrate the local environment and our commitment to creating a peaceful and beautiful space for people to meet friends and make memories,” says Steward.

“When you think of the great gardens of the world, they all feature some sort of compelling sculptural element that contrasts and balances the greenery. We see our Airstreams in the same light; they complete the Outpost in a way that a traditional trailer or hotel room would never be able to serve,” he says.

These striking aluminum sculptural elements — the trailers — are all modern 28-footers, with each interior given a custom look. “Our customers tend to be from the film, web, and design businesses, so they are highly informed and particular on interior design. The existing Airstream decor is nice, but it isn’t a match for our customers, so we mix things up and keep the decor consistent to the Outpost experience,” says Steward.

Trailer names are customized, too. “There’s ‘Claire,’” whose brief video tour on the website reveals an interior table sporting a turntable and a Kris Kristofferson album — vinyl is not only back, it’s way back. In “Earl’s” video, you can see what looks like a vintage convertible Chevy Blazer pulling up outside the Outpost and the happy visitors being led into Earl. Besides videos, each trailer has an individual slideshow on the site that includes a floorplan, occupancy stats, and a list of amenities. (Earl is dog-friendly by the way.)

Steward has some firm opinions on the aesthetics of the Outpost and of the Airstreams themselves. “We made an early decision to not ‘spay or neuter’ our Airstreams. By this I mean we don’t gut them, turn them into loft hotel rooms, or do anything to take the spirit of Airstream out of them. It’s my particular taste, but I wince a little when I see a modified Airstream. I want the original and authentic of everything at the Outpost, so we keep our Airstreams that way too,” he says.

Ojai itself has some high aesthetics, being in a valley on the picturesque edge of the Los Padres National Forest and near the Topatopa Mountains. Depending on freeway clog, it’s roughly an hour north of Los Angeles, but it tilts Mediterranean in its weather and its vibe. Good wine tasting, hiking, yoga, and hot springs abound, and the Outpost is happy to set up packages that include such frolics. They also host events for guests, like sumptuous farm-to-table dinners. If you want to go full Outpost, you can shop in its store on-premises or online, which has branded shirts, jackets, and mugs. There’s also an LP from Lee Hazlewood that’s going for $50, if you want to stand out from the crowd.

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Steward says that the Outpost concept came from the founders’ histories of traveling and adventure. The Airstream creed, he says, suits his Outpost guests: “The world is immediately binary for them. When they are in an Airstream they desire more freedom, more fun, more travel, more experience. On the other side, their brain sees an opportunity to want less. Less possessions, less anchors, less time at the office, less electronics,” he says.

For the Outpost, “Airstreams were a natural fit, and brought history and iconic design.”

The Thomas Fire of late 2017 brought a month of devastation to Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, and the later deadly landslides were a reminder of the impermanence of things and the cycles of growth and destruction in coastal California.

The Outpost was in the fire’s evacuation zone and shut down for three weeks, but it and nearby downtown Ojai emerged mostly unscathed. The LA musicians and celebrities have returned to Ojai, as have the spiritual seekers and the day-trippers. And some Airstream enthusiasts too.

“Airstreams aren’t trailers, they’re a giant aluminum pill you swallow to inoculate you against a boring and dreary life!” says Steward. “My favorite stories are when we meet people and hear their adventures as a child in an Airstream. We have had so many guests who enter an Airstream with their head full of memories. I call it ‘The Pause’ — it’s that moment when they step up those metal stairs and open the door. You can see their mind is full of memories and good things.”

The good folks at the Outpost let guests revel in The Pause, and then they get down to business: “We just give them a few minutes, and then show them how to work the air conditioner,” Steward says.

It’s easy to be cool in Ojai.