Outside Interests Airstream Profiles Compilation

20 articles on unusual Airstream trailer transformations, originally published in the now-defunct Outside Interests, an Airstream online magazine

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And that little sweetheart is my own rig, a ’66 Globetrotter home office
This Argosy Is Its Own Painted Port in a Storm

Trading a successful bar for an Airstream adventure might seem an odd transaction, but for Chad and Cate Battles, the rewards of the road have put them way ahead in the win column. OK, it wasn’t exactly a trade: several months ago, the Battles sold the Bywater, their successful riverside boating bar in Asheville, North Carolina to fund a six-month trek across the country in their ’76 Argosy. “We figured we would sell all our belongings, bring along our adventure pooch, Maggie, and travel around the country and Canada for six months until we found a new town to settle in. In the meanwhile, checking out all the pretty sights and National Parks along the way,” says Cate.

It was an adventure in itself to get the 22-foot trailer ready, since it was basically a shell when they bought it. “We basically remodeled everything but the frame and shell including the flooring, electrical, insulation, cabinetry, and plumbing. It was a total gut job, but luckily it was we were able to do all the work ourselves, except for repacking the bearings and LP system,” says Cate. That remodeling also included the installation of a porthole, a gift from a friend that came from a decommissioned freighter.

Porthole or not, the most immediately striking thing about the Argosy is its paint job, a mural which took Cate two months to complete. “The changing landscapes around the camper encompass the theme of Woody Guthrie's ‘This Land is Your Land,’ as you can see many places mentioned in the different scenes. Some are places I always dreamed of visiting, and some places I've added along our journey,” she says.

One challenge facing the Battles was their decision to either boondock or use free campsites, thus their frequent use of the AllStays app as well as the FreeCampsites website. That decision did prove venturesome: “Just a few days ago, we drove into Death Valley at night and looked for ‘the pads’ (a free camping spot outside the park), but because it was pitch black, we mistakenly drove our car down a dry creek bed instead of the road and ended up getting beached. When the sun came up, we saw the RVs at the pads literally across the street. We had to MacGyver the stuck GMC Envoy out of the ditch, hook up the camper and back down the path,” says Cate.
Their fellow travelers take a positive view of the colorful Argosy, says Cate. “We get lots of honks, thumbs-up, and often people ask to get their picture with it.” But their enthusiasm doesn’t quite compare with hers on Airstreaming: “My feelings for Airstreams started as a lifelong infatuation and has turned into a deep burning love. We love Airstreams, and especially our camper because it's lightweight, the perfect size, unique, and fits our quirky personalities. It also handles well in high winds and tows like a dream.”

The Battles are hoping to sell their home in Asheville, and through their road odyssey, find a new one by Christmas (and get their pet goat, Frankie Rae, back with the nuclear family). In the meantime, their Argosy has proven to be a worthy—and then some—home on wheels.

Check out the great blog posts of their journey (including drone videos!) at https://argosyodyssey.com
This Austin Airstream Sounds as Good as It Looks

Austin, Texas has long been known for its eclectic music scene, and it continues to be a source of musical ferment and experiment. In the last few years, it’s also become renowned for its Airstream scene—it’s hard to toss a Stetson without it landing on some Airstream business’s antenna, whether the trailer has been converted into a shop selling fiery tacos, vintage cowboy boots or old-school Old Fashioneds.

The Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) is hip to the Airstream act: since 2012 their restored 1976 Sovereign Airstream has been touring the country promoting all things Austin, and doing it with sound as well as style. “It wouldn’t be an Austin Airstream without a sound system for playing albums by Austin artists, and a place for musicians to plug in and play live. Last year we had a new chrome bumper installed to match our new amplifier-inspired wrap with the Austin branding,” says Jennifer Walker, director of marketing communications for the ACVB.

That amped-up Airstream spent three months being overhauled for the Bureau’s business, having been gutted and refitted with leather bench seats, stainless tabletops along the walls (with wooden storage underneath), as well as a cooler for chilled beverages. The trailer has done some serious summer touring, making stops in Atlanta, Washington DC, Chicago, Minneapolis, New York and Toronto, among others. “It’s used to distribute materials, information and Austin promotional swag,” says Walker. “The Airstream is also a VIP lounge for media, musicians and meeting professionals. We also host musical performances in front of the Airstream while travelling—allowing us to promote local artists around the USA.”

The ACVB was clear on the concept that Airstreams were already a part of the Austin air, so they brought their own trailer to the party. “As we were promoting Austin as a destination for visitors, we thought, what represents our city better than an Airstream? In the past 10 years or so food trailers have become a very big part of the culture of our
city,” says Walker. “So we thought, an Airstream certainly represents one of the things visitors know about Austin.”

That thought has been met with lots of positive response says Walker. “The iconic Airstream with the custom Austin-branded wrap is quite eye-catching—be it on the highway or parked at a BBQ festival in New York City. We get honks and smiles on the road and lots of folks stopping by for a photo. Musicians and journalists love it too—at festivals the Airstream offers a cool place to sip on a beverage and have an interview or performance.”

The Bureau is now planning their Summer 2015 Road Trip, and they’re considering pulling that snappy Sovereign all the way out to the west coast. Whatever level they turn those amplifiers up, bringing a little bit of Austin way out west sounds just fine.
What’s Silver and Grows in a Viennese Garden?
Anyone who knows a bit of Airstream history is probably familiar with founder Wally Byam’s Caravan Club, which shepherded Byam and a flock of trailers on wild excursions through Central America, Europe and Africa in the 1950s—photographs of the trailers at the Eiffel Tower and at Egypt’s pyramids are particularly mesmerizing.

So, it’s probably no surprise that a vintage trailer’s purchase could be arranged in Germany, shipped in a container from the US to a shipbuilder in Croatia to be retrofitted with luxury components, and then brought to the Hotel Daniel in Vienna to be one of its luxury rooms. After that journey, the 1952 Clipper itself probably would have enjoyed luxuriating in its custom bathtub.

It took a couple of months in Croatia to bring the coach up to its designer sheen, which is in good company at Hotel Daniel, whose banner of “Smart Luxury” permeates its rooms and grounds. The trailer is located in the hotel’s garden, so that bathtub—even in an Airstream in the very middle of Vienna—comes with a good and green view.

The hotel (and its not-garden-variety Airstream) is the handiwork of Graz-based entrepreneur Florian Weitzer who says, “Airstreams are a general symbol of freedom, independence and easy mobility that is a perfect companion for the hotel concept. We surprise travelers by little fresh details that form together an inspiring and laid-back experience, far from any sort of hotel-chain charm.”

Some of the Daniel’s charms include a full, in-house bakery serving international treats, an eye-catchingly curved sailboat sculpture jutting off its 7th-floor, bees busily making honey in their colony boxes on the roof, and tomatoes, cucumbers and pumpkins (and that Airstream) growing in the garden. There are even hammocks in some of those modernly appointed rooms, and Vespas for rent to tool around through the deep history of Austria’s capital city.

Guests of Weitzer hotels (there’s another in Graz) are delighted by both the modern polish of the buildings and their artistic, eccentric flourishes. And for the lucky visitors at the Hotel Daniel, by its unusual trailer. Weitzer says, “They even sometimes align their trip on the availability of the trailer, and they are surprised by the comfort that the trailer offers. For them, it’s of course the adventure that counts—in the middle of a city!”

Guests in the Airstream can get their well-deserved garden-side rest—and after all that traveling, that vintage trailer deserves its leisure too.
This Trailer’s So Shiny Your Drink’s Ice Might Melt

Greg Medow was fiercely dedicated to his concept of turning the shell of an old Airstream trailer into gleaming, state-of-the-art mobile bar. So fierce that after he’d spent nearly a year and a half on the trailer’s exquisite refurbishing, the trailer was impounded for another year because some time back the trailer had been stolen, and was technically owned by a Canadian insurance company. Ouch.

“That was an additional year of pain and suffering,” says Medow. “But the whole restoration was difficult. I bought just the shell: no floor, just the ribs and outer skin. Nomad Airstream in New York took my unique design and did custom work on everything—the stainless steel work for the multiple sinks, ice bins, shelving, coordinating the piping and electrical to fit and work well. Weight balancing is tricky, because you have to account for ice bins empty and full, added liquors and tables and chairs. But it turned out to be an amazing beacon,” says Medow.

What was the shell of a 17” Caravel became the Bar Car, which has had a steady stream of bookings for weddings and other events since Medow towed it back from New York to his home above the San Francisco Bay. The rentals include selecting from various liquor packages, a bartender, and a supervisor—often Medow himself—who’s there to lend an additional hand behind the bar, as well as to troubleshoot and to socialize.

“It’s like what you see at a catered wedding with a table with liquor and equipment; my trailer is that table,” says Medow. He has a catering liquor license, part of his long entrepreneurial experience in the restaurant and bar business in San Francisco. “I can I can do festivals and fairs, with additional paperwork,” he says.

Though San Francisco–based, the Bar Car is set up to travel three hours any distance in the Bay Area, but for additional costs, he’ll travel as far as Los Angeles or San Diego. Some companies don’t want to rent the trailer to serve alcohol, but rather to market
their products. “Because of its high-polish, it’s different than your standard food truck, and it draws people toward it who say ‘what is that?’ Companies put temporary logos on the trailer; it becomes a bar-themed product launch,” says Medow.

“People find value in it when I pull up,” says Medow. “I do events with food trucks, where they pull in, do the event and pull out. With the Airstream, it’s more of a production and a presentation. When I do an event at someone’s home, I usually do custom cocktails, often named after the street the people live on. Someone lived on South Clark, which is a great name for a bourbon cocktail. A client came out of her house, saw that I had that drink listed and said, ‘That’s amazing. I have to buy the trailer,’ he says.

Medow did about eight months of research before he bought the Airstream, even considering other brands. “I love the 60s,” he says. I looked at some other kinds of teardrops whose brands I forget. But there’s something Americana about Airstreams. There’s nothing like that shiny, polished aluminum, the logo, everything. It’s a head-turner. When I drive down the highway, I get honks, and when I park, people pull up. It really draws attention— that’s what I was hoping for and what I got.”

Greg Medow had a pretty good thirst built up before his Caravel was up and pouring. But he and his customers will raise a collective toast to say the wait was worth it.

Check out the Bar Car at http://barcarsf.com
At CreekFire, They’re Fired Up to Get the Trailers Rolling In

Opening a large RV park—one with far broader ambitions than being a mere RV park—takes vision, hard work and persistence. And no doubt you can toss “luck” into that framework as well. But the folks behind the work-in-progress CreekFire Motor Ranch are starting out with a shiny face, front and center: a vintage Airstream that will be the food truck for their lake-house bar and grill, as well as used at the pool for events.

And because the CreekFire folks know that marketing starts long before the product is final, they’ve been spending time at trade shows, using, of all things, a mocked-up quasi-Airstream as their tradeshow booth. There’s something about an Airstream that catches the eye of the camping crowd, even if they aren’t owners themselves. As Matt Lipman, president of CreekFire Motor Ranch says, “Airstreams have that classical, Americana simplicity that goes hand in hand with what we are trying to create at CreekFire.”

The ranch, which will open next summer, has a prime location 20 minutes outside of Savannah, Georgia, recognized by travel aficionados and experts as one of the country’s most vivid, historically interesting cities. The 105-acre park will have scads of amenities, including a resort-style pool and hot tub, boat and canoe rentals, tennis and basketball courts, a nature trail, a driving range and free Wi-fi. And don’t forget the 1963 22’ Safari that was sourced from a refurb shop during a recent Alumapalooza week. CreekFire is still working on the menu for the trailer’s grilled offerings, but the preparation is likely to be as polished as the aluminum.

Lipman is looking to purchase more 50s and 60s Airstreams to use around the ranch and to sell. “My wife is an interior decorator and she loves them,” he says. The love was extended to the tradeshow booth, which was custom-fabricated to depict an Airstream sitting at a campsite. “Everyone loves our booth,” Lipman says. “It stands out all over the country.” The company is going to continue marketing up and down the east coast and online up until their soft opening next summer.

CreekFire hopes to open the doors to a broad market of travelers, from seasonal to single-nighters, from the Orlando and Atlanta areas for weekenders, and from families
to retirees. The site’s location just a half-mile off of I-95 is ideal, and no one will remember the highway once they’re sitting around that beautiful lake. All RVers are welcome, but if your rig is an Airstream, you’ll get a special nod.

See more about the park at https://www.creekfirerv.com/
This Airstream Has Fleas (and Vintage Ones at That)

So you love vintage motorcycles, and maybe even riding those motorcycles in vintage clothes, which you also love. And maybe you ride those motorcycles all the way to Wisconsin (by way of Florida) from New York to check out some vintage trailers, which you think might make great vintage-goods shops, shops that could be the signature stores for a recurring weekend flea market in an empty Brooklyn lot. It’s a bit of a convoluted tale—but then again, many tales that involve a love of vintage Airstreams are.

“We just love vintage things,” says Hisaki Kiyohara, one of the principles behind Akichi Flea, which opened this summer in a Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. Vendors in the market sell vintage clothing, collectibles, art and antiques, and more, but one of the vendor’s stores really shines: “Deadman Walking,” purveying vintage goods out of a customized 1971 Airstream Sovereign.

Kiyohara and his crew actually trucked three trailers home for their vintage-merchandise venture: the Sovereign, a ’61 Airstream Overlander, and a ’51 Spartan. The other two trailers are used as vendor storage now, but the plan is to make them into shops as well. Kiyohara and friends spent some time transforming the Sovereign into Deadman, putting on the exterior artwork and employing selected 2x4s in a herringbone pattern for the floor. “We used wood stain to make the floor look old. The walls were also rebuilt—very roughly!—with installations to create the atmosphere of a countryside flea market,” says Kiyohara.

_Akichi_ means “empty space” in Japanese, which ties into the group’s interest in transforming a scruffy, barren urban lot into a lively place of fun and commerce. They wanted to contribute to the neighborhood both by cleaning up the Akichi space and bringing people in to see and participate. People have responded—especially to the
Airstream: “People love how we customized it into a shop. We’ve had Airstream lovers tell us they came from the West Coast and London, just to check out our Airstreams. It’s great to share stories with others who love Airstreams!” says Kiyohara.

The flea market will stay open until October, and probably resume in spring of next year. But Deadman Walking will stay opened year-round. “We are still looking for vendors who are interested in being part of us. We would like to have something for everyone,” says Kiyohara.

It was no small effort to bring the trailers back to Brooklyn: 60 hours trucking from Florida, 30 hours from Wisconsin, and on the way home from Florida, one of the trailers suffered a broken window and a runaway tire. But Kiyohara and his friends at Akichi know it’s worth it: “We understand the sense of beauty of an old Airstream trailer,” he says.

Check out Akichi Flea at http://akichibrooklyn.tumblr.com
Give Your Trailer a Doctorate Degree

You might think you were pretty smart to buy an Airstream, a gateway to adventure and the open road. And you might think you’ve got a pretty smartly designed trailer, it being an Airstream and all. But it’s likely you can’t walk up to your trailer and say, “Airstream, lights on, music set at a middle volume, and cue up Netflix.” But if you tricked your trailer out with some Control4 technology, you could do that—and more.

Control4 is a global provider of smart home solutions, and my goodness, their goods will put your Airstream’s brain on overdrive. Control4 took a 28’ 1998 Excella that they bought in Baja and turned it into something NASA might envy. They wanted to demo that even in a limited space, their tech can seamlessly connect various devices and automate their use. “Control4’s platform works with more than 10,000 connected consumer electronics devices,” says Brad Hintze, Senior Director of Product Marketing for Control4. “This gives customers the ability to get started with Control4 using their existing products, and offers them the freedom to scale as their home does,” he says.

“Whether they wish to set up one room, a few rooms, or an entire home, customers can enjoy automated scenes like “Welcome Home” that will turn on lights, disarm the alarm, set the thermostat to their liking and activate their favorite streaming music playlist throughout the house or in certain rooms,” says Hintze.

Before Control4 took over, the Excella was outfitted with a customized hydraulic door and high-end furnishings by 3D Exhibits in Las Vegas, so that the electronics would match the trailer’s trappings. Control4 added multi-room audio/video, a one-room entertainment solution system, automated QMotion blinds, indoor and outdoor speakers, portable and in-wall touch screens and handheld remote interfaces, an Amazon Echo for voice control, and customized keypads that allow for control of lighting, audio and entertainment. Whew!

The Airstream exhibited the technology at Boston Design Week, the NY Auto Show, Orlando’s AIA conference and is on its way to the Dwell on Design show in LA. The
company emphasizes the convenience of easy device integration to enhance a homeowner’s—or trailer owner’s—life.

“For example, on one of the keypads in the mock home theater room there is a button labeled ‘Movie Time.’ One touch dims the lights to 25%, background music is turned off, and the Blu-ray player on the TV turns on, creating the perfect environment for watching a movie,” says Hintze. The mobile nature of the Airstream makes it easy to set up at a lot of different shows in a short time frame, and draws a lot of foot traffic from curious show attendees because it is so unique,” he says.

Airstreams are unique on their own, but a Control4 Airstream is a step beyond. “Our plan is to continue to find new opportunities and events to bring the Control4 Airstream experience to,” says Hintze. “We thought that the Airstream trailer was perfect because of its portability and unique look. There’s a lot of initial interest that draws people in because of the nostalgia that the Airstream brings. Visitors to the trailer have been surprised at just how much technology is packed into so little space, and how accessible smart home technology really is.”

Plenty accessible, plenty smart.
This Cigar Wrapper Is Aluminum

You can’t fault Michigan brothers Brian and Jason Maynard for snagging the 31” 1974 Airstream from the guy who was living in it in his aunt’s driveway: it was the perfect fit for their proposed Cuban Missile mobile cigar-bar concept. And since the trailer has now hosted events like a cigar-themed charity fundraiser for the Westland City Police Department SWAT team, it’s not likely that guy’s going to insist on his money back.

Perfect fit it was, but in need of some special care to get it cigar-event ready. “The remodeling took approximately 4 months from start to finish,” says Brian Maynard. That work meant gutting the trailer and putting in custom features like the wall-to-wall Brazilian cherrywood floor. “The most challenging part was getting the wood panels for the walls to bend and match the curve of the trailer framing, especially at the ends of the trailer where there are compound curves,” says Maynard. “The only way to get it done was to soak the panels in water for a few hours, then put them out in a hot parking lot and let them start to curl up naturally. Then our refurbishing company used about 600 rivets to attach the panels.”

The brothers have been working the trailer rentals out of a four-county area in Michigan for the last nine months, and business has been booming. “We have had 100% positive feedback from anybody who has been inside it,” says Maynard. The Airstream’s humidor is furnished with a rotating stock of premium cigars of different styles and prices: “We leave the cheap cigars with the plastic tips to the gas stations and frat houses of the world; nothing but quality smokes in the Cuban Missile!”

Customers don’t have to worry about clawing their way through waves of smoke. “The ventilation was our chief concern,” says Maynard. “There are two quiet-yet-powerful electric vent fans in the ceiling. I have personally seen more than 15 cigars burning at once in this trailer and the air had a very pleasant residual cigar smell, but no smoke,” he says.
The trailer rentals start at $500 for four hours, and go up from there. Events have ranged from weddings and country-club golf outings to a whiskey festival, and even a Detroit live TV broadcast. Whether whiskey or water, rental parties must supply their own beverages, and there’s a cigar hostess available upon request.

The trailer seems to get as much attention as the cigars. “It takes most people a good three or four seconds after stepping through the door to get their bearings and figure out exactly what they’re seeing. Then it’s, ‘whoa—this is awesome!’” says Maynard.

There is some symmetry between the shape of a cigar and the shape of an Airstream, and Maynard nails it: “We needed something instantly recognizable, classy, iconic, and unique,” he says. Even the guy who had it in his aunt’s driveway probably would agree.

http://www.cubanmissilelounge.com
A National Park on Wheels

Airstreams have had a long, congenial relationship with the National Park system—the two rather grew up together, with Airstream kind of a kid brother to the older park system. Indeed, this year Airstream produced the Pendleton trailer, a commemorative issue recognizing the park system’s 100th anniversary.

Having been a seasonal ranger for Grand Teton National Park for years in the 70s, Doug Leen knows a fair amount about the parks and their history. He’s touring around to all the parks now in a 1948 Airstream Trailwind, which by its contents and design is a mini-national park on wheels. His 1973 discovery of an original Works Progress Administration (WPA) poster, one of 14 commissioned between 1938 and 1941, led him on a winding trail in search of other originals, resulting in him years later finding the negatives for 13 of the images. His business, Ranger Doug’s Enterprises, initially reproduced the 14 WPA posters and was later commissioned by many of the other parks to produce new prints in the vintage style of the originals.

Leen bought the 19’ (20’ with the longer tongue he added) Trailwind in 2013, but the first two shops he engaged for its restoration weren’t up to snuff, so the restoration took 2 ½ years. “In frustration, I moved from Alaska to Cody, Wyoming where the trailer was finally towed, and did the work myself using an RV repair shop, two welding shops and a custom furniture shop,” says Leen. Besides the remarkable custom furniture work done by Lester Santos, there is a magnificent interior diorama of national park scenes painted by Janet Bedford, depicting Monument Valley, the Grand Tetons and other inspiring vistas.

Leen is currently traveling to all the national parks lecturing on the park system, the WPA and the history of the posters while camping out in the Trailwind, which needed a bathroom and shower added as well. The trailer is his fourth Airstream: “The previous three were all vintage Bambis. The first one was previously owned by the president of a
chapter of the Vintage Airstream Club and it was tricked out. Unfortunately, some drug addict stole it for a portable meth lab. It blew up, taking another trailer and house with it—what a loss,” says Leen.

Leen has also given talks to art galleries and at corporate seminars, but he thinks a year on the road in a small trailer might be enough. “After one year in a 20' trailer, I'll be ready to go home to Alaska—we'll see.” The vintage Airstream, with his logo on the side, gets a lot of attention on the road. “Everyone points at it and rubber-necks as I drive by,” says Leen.

Leen is happy that there’s a historical symmetry between Airstream history and National Park history. “Airstreams go hand-in-glove with our National Parks. They have become synonymous with American mobility and freedom on the road,” he says.

See Doug Leen’s poster work at www.rangerdoug.com
Elon Musk Will Put a Rentable Airstream on the Moon Soon

The Airbnb phenomenon is so entrenched now that it’s no longer a phenomenon. You can rent places to stay of every size and shape pretty much all over the globe, and they can range from exotic (and luxurious) tree houses to sagging backyard tents. And some of those available rentals—not all through Airbnb—are those in pretty out-of-the-way places. Some of the most intriguing are in our old pal, the Airstream.

Let’s start with needing salt for your margarita. If you stay in the Airstream in the Bolivian salt flats, there’s no need to bring any in your cooking supplies. This is an otherworldly destination, in an environment that’s little traveled. There are several touring companies that will set you up in fine style in the trailer, and trek you to a nearby volcano and pre-Inca ruins. The trip includes a support vehicle with a kitchen to serve you Bolivian cuisine and wine. You’re on your own with the margaritas.

If the pretty polish of a newer Airstream doesn’t take you, you might be better served by the wide selection of vintage trailers at the BelRepayre Airstream & Retro Trailer Park an hour south of Tolouse, France. Bring your own trailer if you’ve got one, but there are 12 vintage Streamers done up in fine style if you don’t. Each has its own garden, barbecue and view of the Pyrenees. Oh, yeah, the French thing: you get your fresh croissants delivered in the mornings.

If you hunger more for big ocean views than croissants, the Malibu Dream Airstream might be the ticket. This sweet ride is snuggled into a private bluff that looks out to the Channel Islands and Catalina. And that lookout is large, because the trailer has had a big chunk of its side removed and replaced with sliding glass panels that open on to a big deck. This is a view that lives large.

And if you want to cruise a bit south from Malibu, you can continue with the Airstream theme at Kate’s Lazy Meadow. Not too far from stunning Joshua Tree, Kate (of B-52s fame) has six vintage Airstreams with wacky décor, kitchenettes, high desert views—and air conditioning for that sharp sun. But there’s a pool too, so even if you’re hot, you’re cool.
Speaking of cool (and hot at the same time), this Belize beauty is on the edge of the jungle, not far from a Mayan village. It’s close to archeological sites, and there’s good hiking at the nearby Pine Ridge Mountain Reserve. For those more modern archeologists, there’s also zip-lining, tubing and horseback riding.

It’s only natural that Airstreams are a part of this new—and still developing—wing of the travel experience. Airstreams have been on the road, or parked off it, for more than 75 years. Now more than ever, where there are travelers, there will be Airstreams to meet them. And if you don’t make it to that Bolivian site, do remember the salt.
After Some Bumps, the Kabine Hits the Road

Some Airstreams are rolling histories, of long journeys, of decades of care, of family connection. But some Airstreams go on journeys with their owners that are as much about metaphors as miles. Kim Hayes bought her ’65 Safari in 2004, but since she was driving a Honda Civic at the time, the 23’ trailer had to spend most of its days in storage. At the first storage facility, it suffered roof damage (probably from an industrial crane) without anyone claiming responsibility.

When it was moved to another storage facility, a 2010 tornado there threw a boat against the trailer’s backside, bashing some big bruises into its aluminum shell. Hayes began a three-year journey to get the body fixed. From the first days of ownership, Hayes had a vision to open a shop in the trailer to retail her artworks, but that vision had to take the long view. With the help of P&S trailers for the body, and SPACE Architecture and Design for the interior, by 2015, the Safari was nearly ready.

“I always wanted a little space to call my own, and a little shop,” says Hayes. Hayes dubbed the trailer the “Kabine,” the German word for “hut” or “cabin,” referencing her German ancestry. “But the cabinetry is inspired by Japan, where my grandmother and her family lived when she was a child. And I had been collecting things for years and had worked at a modern furnishing store, where I purchased modern design lighting and other accessories that I wanted incorporated into the design,” she says.

Since this August, Hayes (and her dog, Americone Dream, the second half of her “Two Girls and a Trailer” pairing) have been running a pop-up shop from the trailer at various sites around St. Louis. Hayes makes between 50% to 70% of the fabric, paper and textile goods sold out of the shop, including photographic postcards inspired from her travels. “Postcards and travel go together and I want to inspire and assist in the tradition continuing,” she says. “I also love found objects and giving them new lives. Currently I am working on some pillows and old horseshoes. I am also spending time in a letterpress studio working with type and making printing plates out of my photographs.”
Hayes works with other artists she knows, and invites them to collaborate on works to show in the Kabine. The trailer is also available as a mobile pop-up shop rental. The Kabine’s evolution was an extended process, and Hayes has her momentum going. “This has been a dream for so long I am constantly thinking ahead, but at the same time taking it step by step,” says Hayes. “I am proud that the Kabine is staying focused and true to our mission of providing a thoughtful collection of small goods to outfit and inspire you for travel.”

The road might not be that long, but the passage can take years. “I wish this part of the journey didn’t take 12 years, but what I went through only brings more confidence in the vision for the Kabine, and the joys are more rewarding,” says Hayes. “Most recently when I was unhitching someone said, ‘You do this all by yourself?’ I said, ‘A girl gotta do what a girl gotta do.’”

You go, girl.

See what the Kabine is up to at http://www.thekabine.com
Airstream Karaoke: Even the Armadillos Are Rocking

Some things are acknowledged classics: the ’59 Caddy, the gin martini, the Airstream trailer. Some other things, which might have started out on the cheesy side—say, Saturday Night Fever—have edged over toward the classic, by virtue of nostalgia and time. You might think the same of karaoke: once an eye-roller, and now a kind of innocent (if beer-fueled) old-school fun.

You might not think that classics and a little cheese go together, but you don’t know Brent Buford and Ron Rendon of Armadillo Karaoke. They’ve combined a 26’ retrofitted 1972 Airstream Overlander with a commercial karaoke system with added tech touches, and they’re towing the trailer and the tunes all over Austin to various events. And they’re killing it.

“We had tossed around various karaoke concepts for years—believe it or not we actually wanted to combine it with a mini-golf concept and make it more of a permanent fixture, like an entertainment-oriented trailer park. But the trailer just appeared one day, and it was a good enough deal that we decided to grab it and see what we could do with it,” says Buford.

What they did was gut it, install a “horseshoe” of bench seating for 20, new electrical and AC, a video system, and a Voicebox karaoke system that’s used in brick-and-mortar venues. They added in mobile hotspot capabilities so that customers can search for songs and cue them up from their smartphones. And when the songs start streaming, there’s no need for listeners to sit: dancing is definitely an option.

“There's plenty of room to move around!” says Buford. “These trailers are actually very spacious once you rip everything out of them. I'm 6' 2" and I can tear it up in the trailer,” he says. Armadillo doesn’t supply outside tables or chairs, but once they tow the Overlander to the venue, the renters can surround it with any fixtures or furniture they
The business is new, but they’ve had quite a few events so far, mainly private parties, corporate gatherings, and a neighborhood festival. The partners, who both have full-time gigs, are restricting their tow range to the Austin area for now, but they are thinking about the future: “We want to do more of them,” says Buford. “It's a tricky business, because the trailers can be hard to find, and they take quite a while to remodel. But we hope to eventually have a fleet of them.”

It’s not practical to install a miniature golf course in most Airstreams, but Armadillo Karaoke is working out well as a new classic. “Airstreams are iconic—everyone knows immediately what it is,” says Buford. “Austin has become a big town for food and entertainment trailers, and the majority of them are Airstreams. I love that the trailers are so capable and sturdy that you can do almost anything with them, yet still pull them around with any average truck or SUV. Ultimately, though, Airstreams have a "cool factor" that customers love—it's pretty neat to have a party at your house with a gorgeous Airstream in your driveway.”

You can cue up “Stayin’ Alive” at http://www.armadillokaraok
A Copper Studio That’s Not Small Change

That old quote “You shine up like a new penny” needn’t be applied just to characters in movies or books. Anything with classic good looks—say, perhaps a 1961 Flying Cloud Airstream—just needs a bit of sprucing to hit the road in fine style. The Kit and Ace trailer has those good looks down cold, and since it’s a showroom for Kit and Ace’s “luxury loungewear” merchandise, the Flying Cloud has plenty of good (and stylish) looks in its interior too.

The company is the brainchild of Shannon Wilson, wife of lululemon founder Chip Wilson. Shannon teamed up with her son JJ in a quest to design comfortable yet sophisticated clothing, with a designer look but a performance-wear feel. It was JJ who spearheaded the design of the Airstream, dubbed the Copper Studio. “We opted to paint it copper because it’s one of our key brand elements—there are hints of copper in all our retail spaces and it speaks to the luxury feel of our brand. Plus, it’s incredibly eye-catching to drive a big copper bullet around!” says Anna Cordon, a PR representative for Kit and Ace.

The Airstream is handsomely appointed, a result of its refurbishing by Hofmann Architecture of Santa Barbara, CA. The right side has a gullwing window that opens onto Kit and Ace goods, and the rear window is the shape of the K&A logo. It took Hofmann around two months to make the Airstream into a clothing showroom, including painting it that distinctive new-penny color, a custom-blended shade just for Kit and Ace. Besides refurbishing older trailers, Hofmann also gets new shells from the Airstream factory for custom renovation.

The trailer hasn’t stood still after its touching up: a Kit and Ace team piloted the gleaming Cloud across the country last year, pulling a trailer-load of “Technical Cashmere” t-shirts from West Coast to East to let potential customers see and feel the magic of their fabric innovations. Besides the nuisance of two flat tires, the copper beacon smoothly delivered on all its shiny promise.
“The immediate reaction was one of surprise and excitement. People are often initially a little confused to see an Airstream kitted out as a retail space, but the feedback we’ve received around the design and the innovative details we put into it has been great,” says Cordon. Last year’s tour was so dandy, they’re finishing up this year’s US tour at the SXSW conference. But new pennies get no rest: after that, the Copper Studio’s going to Australia, where it’s going to tour Down Under.

Kit and Ace know their stuff about fabric, but they seem to know their old aluminum as well. “We chose an Airstream because they speak to travel in a classic yet luxurious way. We needed something mobile and an Airstream was a much more elevated option than something like a step-van. We are a brand that creates clothing from noble fibers like cashmere and silk, so we wanted to ensure that the luxury feel came through, even though we were moving around,” says Cordon.

Copper can’t technically be classified as a noble fiber, but “elevated option”—yes.
This Trailer Flies Without Ever Leaving the Ground

At first glance, this seems like an idea that would never fly. Well, it doesn’t actually fly, but you know what I mean. Don’t forget that the father of Airstream, Wally Byam, was inspired by the designs created by Hawley Bowlus. Bowlus happened to have overseen the construction of an uppity little aircraft known as the Spirit of St. Louis. So, clamping an actual 1957 Pratt and Whitney radial airplane engine on an Airstream trailer and setting it in a pavilion at the international airport in Munich, Germany might only be a half-crazy idea.

But the trailer isn’t merely something to be amazed by. You can buy lunch out of it, and while amazed, sit and eat nearby. “We wanted something special for this great location—we wanted an eye catcher,” says Michelle Gebhardt, director of marketing for the airport. The winged trailer is a business: Smokey Joe’s, which serves a selection of red and white currywursts, with various sauces of increasing degrees of heat. Smokey indeed.

You can’t chomp on one of those big dogs inside, since that’s taken up with all of the wurst-working equipment. After buying the 29” 1972 Ambassador International from Airstream Germany, modifications on the trailer took about two months, including removal of all of the interior furnishings and replacing them with a deep fryer, fridge and hotplate. The trailer had to be fully rewired to accommodate new electronics. And then there was that little issue of the wings: they were custom-built and mounted on the Airstream sides.

There are also some information panels about the Airstream on an exterior wall. The trailer has been serving spicy wursts since 2008, and they have an impeccable safety record: no crashes no evacuations at sea and no emergencies—just the occasional need for water or soft drinks after orders of the hottest sauce.
Following an interesting idea to its winged conclusion sometimes works out just right. “We were looking for something original to turn into a curry sausage stand, but it had to fit to the airport—so the idea was born,” says Michelle Gebhardt.

The Airstream might remain on the ground, but that idea definitely took flight.
This Museum Is Housed in Aluminum

It’s only fitting that the University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s Museum on the Move (MoM) is a vintage Airstream, because the trailers have such a rich history of their own. As Professor John Troutman, the history instructor that brought the museum concept to life says, “What vehicle to support a mobile museum is more historical, and timelessly attractive, than an Airstream?”

The university located the 26’ 1954 Cruiser on an Airstream forum, and Troutman and a colleague picked it up outside of Birmingham, AL in February of 2013. Students from the School of Architecture and Design came up with concepts to remake the trailer into a functional (and modifiable) museum space. They hired a local contractor—and Airstream enthusiast—to gut it, rebuild the frame and floor, and rewire it.

Troutman’s graduate students developed the museum’s initial exhibit, “Crossing the Line: Louisiana Women in a Century of Change” during the fall semester of 2013. Students and Troutman worked out the lighting, exhibit panel mountings and exhibit “flow,” as well as acquired the show’s artifacts and images, and wrote the explanatory text. In the spring and fall of 2014, they toured the exhibit all over southern Louisiana—to historical association meetings, local civic group meetings, farmer’s markets, music festivals, and schools.

“That is one of our greatest successes in terms of developing this program—the Airstream draws people in, long before they read the exhibit description outside the door,” says Troutman. “Everyone wants to talk about the Airstream, tells us their Airstream experiences, and asks where we found it. That gets them in the door, so that they can see the exhibits that our students will design and install each year. Buying an Airstream to serve as the exhibit vehicle is the best decision we could have ever made.”

Troutman’s students love the MoM because it gets them professional, hands-on
experience in museum work and gets them out in the community—even out into Troutman’s driveway, which he describes as being “ground zero for installing our exhibits in the trailer.” The academic work for the museum’s next exhibit, covering the history of oil production in Louisiana’s oil-rich state, is now taking place in student seminars. In the fall, Troutman’s graduate student seminar will convert that scholarship into “Oil in Louisiana,” the next traveling exhibit.

Being a history professor, Dr. Troutman is eminently qualified to speak on the place of the Airstream in the historical record: “Airstreams are remarkable: Their popularity reflected the desire of Americans to learn about other parts of our country, and to expand the venues for their family time and their critical family experiences, beyond their homes, and onto the open road. The design aesthetic of these trailers is unmatched and a thing of wondrous beauty.”

Museum-quality beauty, it seems.

See the museum’s program and more at http://www.museumonthem
This Buffalo Could Tow a Trailer Anywhere

It’s not a big surprise that Ben Jenkins, the head of the design firm One Fast Buffalo would love Airstreams. He describes his internal roadmap as being “… about aligning work with life in a way that nurtures your creative engine and supports longevity of creative output.”

After ten years of expanding office space and too many meetings, he radically changed his business model: work from virtual offices, from September 1 to June 1, with summers off to play. “Burnout is absolutely avoidable if you fill your days with experiences that matter to you and fuel your work. Don’t separate life and art,” Jenkins says.

One significant catalyst in merging his art and his life has been his 1958 Flying Cloud, part of his refined vision since 2009, and a thing he calls “part of the family.” Jenkins found a kindred design soul, Eric Stoltz, to refurbish the trailer, which took 15 months. “Eric is minimalist, and I think that’s what makes him good. He does not overdo things. But he does all the small details right.”

Getting the trailer right and getting Jenkins’ mind right were parallel paths: he is a surfer and a fly fisherman, and his early work-burnout years didn’t afford him the time to find himself again in those pursuits. The Airstream opened up time. “I wanted to find a way to work where I could spend long periods of time near the outdoor activities I wanted to get good at: surfing and fly fishing. Not to mention I have 3 sons, ages now 12, 9, and 7. I wanted them to get more perspective and spend more quality time with them.”

Time Management by 8s

Since he’s owned the trailer, he’s used it for expeditions long and short, both as office and retreat. Dallas is home, but the road is where his mind opens. “We make an annual summer trek that generally takes us West. We go from Texas to the California coast most years and get right to surfing. Then at some point we turn back east and start the fly-fishing phase of the trip,” Jenkins says. “I keep a simple time management idea in
mind: 8-8-8. Sleep 8 hours, Work 8 hours, Play 8 hours. So that 8 hours of play is spent doing exactly what we enjoy most.”

Jenkins has managed to use travel and solitude as a way to connect to his muse, and the Airstream has been his partner. “Choosing Airstream over other brands was pretty simple: as a designer I think Airstream is the only one that really gets what good design is all about.”

Jenkins’s design talents stretch beyond marketing and branding for corporate clients. He was a minor leaguer in the Philadelphia Phillies organization, and his other company, Warstic, makes bats and equipment now getting recognition from major and minor league players.

Baseball, buffalo and Airstreams—what’s more American than that?

www.onefastbuffalo.com
www.warstic.com
The Great Outdoors(y), According to Airstream

Going for a weekend campout in your Airstream requires some prep work, but it’s more of a jaunt. Going for a year on the road is less jaunt than journey. Going for a year on the road while you’re running a full-time business takes journey into epic phases of challenge, discovery and delight. Even when you’ve hooked an RV park’s water feed to your toilet’s flush-out inlet so that you flood the bathroom. “But after 49 days of hook-ups we’re feeling pretty confident about the hook-up and water in/out situation,” says Jen Young, co-founder of Outdoorsy, the Airbnb for RVs.

Those 49 days are what Young and the other Outdoorsy founder Jeff Cavins have spent in their 2016 27’ Eddie Bauer Airstream since they stowed, sold or gave away all of their San Francisco home’s belongings and set out for a year-long quest across the U.S. The couple have rambled down California’s coast, through Arizona and into New Mexico so far, mingling with the RV owners and renters that make up their customer base.

“Living in the Airstream and traveling means we are literally immersed in our world of RVing, road and outdoor culture. And we love it,” says Young. The Eddie Bauer is tech-spiffy already, but the couple installed some Verizon 4G routers as well as two 2,000-watt generators to make sure they can be in constant contact with their Outdoorsy team and their customers.

“Our focus time is much greater and we literally have no commute—just get up, grab our cup of coffee in the kitchen and head to the main area to start work! We get more sunlight and fresh air in a single day than we would get in a full year working in an office building,” says Young.

They’ve been thrilled with the warm ocean breezes in Malibu, watched goggle-eyed at the beauties of the Balloon Festival in Albuquerque, and as of this writing were enchanted by the subtle deserts of Santa Fe. Cooking in and out of the trailer has worked like a charm. “The Eddie Bauer has a great gas burning stovetop and oven,
hidden microwave, secret extra expanded countertop space. And of course we have our beloved Weber portable grill,” says Young.

Their Airstream adventure has given them the chance to live the Outdoorsy motto: “Never Idle.” “It's as much for the owners of RVs sitting idle in driveways as for the renters who want nothing more than to explore this country the way it was meant to be explored: along the roads that connect us,” says Young.

Occasions like a meeting with Zappos' Tony Hsieh and Burning Man are in the offing, but in the meantime, Young and Cavins are digging the day-to-day: “Living in the Airstream and traveling means we are literally immersed in our world of RVing, road and outdoor culture. Every day brings a new backyard and adventure—and we love them all!”
Route 66: the Mother Road Ends at an Airstream

All things depart from, and all things return to the Mother Road. Poetic sentiments aside, there’s a shine of truth on that statement, just as there’s a shine on the 2015 Bambi that keeps that statement alive. The “Mother Road” was one of the names for the fabled Route 66, one of our country’s first highways, and from its 1926 unveiling, a beloved one. It wiggled a winding ribbon westward, starting in Chicago and ending in Santa Monica, California.

That rolling road emboldened drivers to get out and gobble up some country—and it was only a few years later that Wally Byam started producing the iconic trailers that let those road-trippers pull their stylish mobile lodgings right behind them. So it’s doubly fitting that there’s a Route 66 gift store on the Santa Monica pier, and that the store is housed in a sparkling Airstream trailer.

“We’ve been looking for something completely distinctive and synonymous to the Santa Monica Pier, which is also the western terminus of historic Route 66 and embodies the public’s overwhelming nostalgia for America’s original highway,” says Jeff Klocke, Vice President at Pacific Park on the Santa Monica Pier. “Pacific Park celebrates the Route 66 legacy with a custom Airstream that truly reflects America’s love for motor travel.”

Just as in Route 66’s heyday, the Bambi had to roll out west from the country’s heartland, having been designed by Timeless Travel in Denver, where it took six months to fit out its automotive decor (including its three old-fashioned gas pumps), unique shelving and lighting, and its specialty wood-deck flooring. But it came out on a flatbed trailer, so it didn’t pick up much road grime, unlike the Route 66 pilgrims of the Dust Bowl days.

The Bambi’s gleaming appeal is complemented by a custom point-of-sale counter that resembles the tail end of an Airstream, complete with riveted aluminum, custom
taillights and chrome trim. Shoppers can find a selection of Route 66 T-shirts, and branded handbags, clocks, shot glasses and coffee-table books about the fabled road. “Guests are often taking pictures in front of the custom Airstream,” says Cameron Andrews of Pier Communications.

In line with combining nostalgic trappings with a new Bambi, the two-acre Pacific Park has a Ferris wheel—that’s solar powered. Millions of visitors trek there annually to thrill to its steel roller coaster and other rides, which edge right over the blue Pacific. Route 66 itself may have felt like a roller coaster at first; it wasn’t completed until 1938, when our highway engineers were just getting the hang of interstate travel and its complexities.

Route 66, of course, was later shuffled aside by the Interstate Highway System, so that it was no longer a linked thoroughfare; however, segments in various states are designated National Scenic Byways. Put the top down and put it in gear: you’re always likely to see lots of shiny Airstreams out there with you.
Bottling That Rocky Mountain High (and Taking It Airstreaming)

It’s no surprise that one of the questions that frequently comes from people attending one of whiskey-distiller Stranahan’s Airstream trailer events is if their fans can take the trailer on a road trip or go camping. After all, the 2004 Safari is a dandy, and brightly badged with Stranahan’s product, as well as a fetching lass riding astride a whiskey barrel. Sadly for those thirsty fans, only Stranahan people get to take that 22-footer out for a cruise, but those high-proof spirits are more easily available.

Stranahan’s has been distilling whiskey in Colorado’s high country for a while, but the Airstream is one of their newer spirits. Besides the exterior promotional wrap, the Safari’s entire interior was redone, with hardwood floors, custom lighting, flat-screen TV and seating for 20 people. The trailer tours have been mostly around Denver, the distillery’s location, and in other areas in Colorado. “We are Colorado’s whiskey, and there’s truly nothing more Colorado than getting outdoors and enjoying this beautiful state we live in, in a beautiful Airstream,” says Erin O’Neill, Stranahan’s marketing manager.

One of the regular events hosted in the trailer is a live radio broadcast in partnership with Denver’s 850 KOA station. The broadcast is sports-themed, so football dominates at present. People call in and tweet to the broadcast, which also includes a segment on Stranahan happenings. “Stranafans” can attend the broadcasts, which often find the trailer parked near a friendly tavern where some of that high-mountain, high-proof heaven can be sampled.

The trailer tours have brought them closer to the Colorado Airstream community. “My favorite part is the Airstream community and the folks we’ve met in this community. For example, we now have a local pie vendor—The Long I Pie—that we work with, and her business is based out of Stella, her Airstream,” says O’Neill. Those pies undoubtedly have the hand-made touch, one of the unifying parallels between the “grain to bottle”
handcrafted process at Stranahan’s and the quality hands-on build of an Airstream trailer.

From sourcing their barley to hand-labeling their bottles, Stranahan’s gets up close and personal with their product, something all Airstreamers know well. The Stranahan Safari is going to be on the road again throughout 2016. If you see it going by, raise your glass. And if you happen to be in the Denver area and want to check out the Whiskey Safari, take a look at Stranahan’s event page.