



*Nikki Couture's Safari is quite civilized, and its vintage animal prints won't keep you awake at night.*

# Trailers For ~~Sale Or~~ RENT

By TOM BENTLEY

**For those who don't own an Airstream, it may seem that there are obstacles —**

expense, lack of time, ignorance of fundamentals—that keep them from even considering an Airstream outing. Seemingly, the closest they're going to get to an Airstream is looking longingly at its brilliant sheen as

one flows by on a highway. That's the sad song of, "Ahh, an Airstream. Maybe one day..."

That day has arrived. Whereas just a few years ago, you couldn't find an Airstream for rent anywhere, there are now a number of commercial enterprises that package the Airstream experience in a "try before you buy" rental. In our Summer 2009 issue we introduced the Airstream rentals available at certain KOA locations. In our Winter 2009 issue we described Airstreams you can rent in Europe.

Now, individual owners in the US are renting out their personal trailers, or setting up rental Airstreams in parks as a small business venture. No need to moon any more over those moonbeams glinting off a stranger's Airstream in the night—Airstreams new and old are available by the week or the weekend.

**It was a natural for Nikki Couture and her husband** to move into vintage Airstream rental after being in the vintage apartment rental business for five years in Tampa, Florida. She is a decorator who was drawn to Airstream design, and was hooked after experiencing vintage Airstream camping with her family. Their Silver Bullet Retreats rental business features their 1956 Safari, a 22-foot trailer that sleeps four. Couture used vintage animal prints from the 1800s as part of the restoration. As with a number of the personal rental outfits, Couture does not allow renters to tow the unit; Silver Bullet tows to various camping destinations in the area, with additional charges for long distances.

Silver Bullet just finished road-testing their latest addition, a 19-foot 1962 Globetrotter, which is now available for rental. They've been quite happy with how



Kristiana Spaulding's trailers bear the becoming looks of her trained designer's eye.



You can be sure that when you rent a vintage Airstream from John Abbott's Arizona-based Airstreams 4 Rent, it will be a sparkler: Abbott also runs a polishing business as part of his trailer business services. And indeed his three rigs—a 1959 24-foot Tradewind, a 1970 27-foot Overlander and a 1973 23-foot Safari—all display the shimmer of his handiwork.

Abbott also lets his renters tow the machines, after checking driving records and providing a free inspection of the tow vehicle. "We feel you can't truly experience the Airstream lifestyle if you're anchored in one place as if it were just a hotel room. Half the fun is setting your own schedule, choosing your own campsite, and having all the freedom an Airstream provides. Our renters can go as many miles as they want."

Abbott delights in teaching his guests all about Airstreams and their operation. He is a great resource for details on interesting camping spots in some of Arizona's spectacular canyon areas, particularly those not as populated as the Grand Canyon. "We really care about our guests and their vacations. We rent vintage Airstreams that guests can take out on the open road. These trips really bring back the 'good old days' and remind us about how nice it is to spend time together as a family," he says.

Santa Barbara Silver Safari, Meredith Klassen's California-based rental business is also founded on a vintage coach, a 1967 22-foot Safari Twin. She and her husband have done fairly extensive restoration on the rig, and much of the income made on the first two years of rentals has been invested in trailer improvements. "As anyone restoring a vintage Airstream trailer on a budget knows, the restoration process can be a slow evolution. But most of our guests are either enamored with vintage Airstreams or the era they came from, so they appreciate the opportunity we provide," says Klassen.

Silver Safari is a tow-in, tow-out service, and Klassen says her guests appreciate that they take the work out of camping. They stock the trailer with fine linens, down pillows and comforters, and a smattering of throwbacks from the trailer's era, like vintage aprons, oilcloth table covers, fresh flowers in vintage vases, and 1960s travel literature. "We call it 5-star camping," Klassen says. "Not many Airstream owners that we know would even consider sharing their cherished mid-century silver trailers with the Airstream-curious, so we think that makes us a little different from other trailer-rental outfits."

Most of the companies have accommodated interesting or unusual requests for rentals, such as for family reunions, as a

The subtle beauty of the Arizona desert is a winning match with the polished interiors of John Abbott's vintage rentals.



renters have treated the Safari and expect many repeat customers. "I think our trailers are special in that they are sturdy little vintage B&Bs. They are cozy and nostalgic and aren't what people expect from a trailer when they step inside," says Couture.

**Under certain conditions (towing experience, adequate insurance and a properly equipped tow vehicle), Cesar Medina of SoCal Airstream** will let renters tow his 2007 25-foot Safari. Renters have returned the favor: "My clients have treated the Airstream as if it were their own. They seem to understand and appreciate the trailer's uniqueness and the labor of love involved in keeping it in pristine condition." Besides the obvious draw of a modern, fully outfitted coach, Medina believes his service sets him apart. He emphasizes that he strives to accommodate every request and to be there to assist in the planning process.

He adds that the rewards come back to him as well as to his renters. "One of the perks of this business is that I get to meet great, interesting people from all walks of life, from captains of industry to schoolteachers and retired folks. Many different people, but with a few things that they share, like their love of the outdoors and of trying to find something new and unique to experience. Adventurers in every sense of the word." Medina is thinking of expanding his Southern California business with a smaller Airstream just for couples.

**For Kristiana Spaulding of Silver Trailer**, rentals are but one sweet piece of her Airstream-enterprise pie. She has been designing jewelry, many pieces of which have an Airstream theme, since 2002, and has a number of restored vintage trailers available for photo shoots. Besides that, she has a 1967 Airstream Tradewind and a 1960 Airstream Caravel for overnight rentals.

The Tradewind's renovation, with its custom-made furniture and fittings, was part of her Masters of Fine Arts thesis project. As well as being featured in several magazines, the trailer was used as a prop for six television episodes on The Learning Channel, each filmed in a different East Coast city on a 10,000 mile trip. Spaulding also has a no-tow policy, preferring to set up her clients at campgrounds off the American River in the Lotus/Coloma area of California's Sierra Nevada foothills.

"The location can't be beat," says Spaulding. "Guests are camping about as close as you can get to the American River whitewater and the setting is magnificent." Spaulding's rental business originally started out with her buying vintage trailers with the notion of fixing and reselling them, but the trailers got in the way: "I got so attached to each and every one that I can't bear to part with them!" says Spaulding.

lounge for a holiday party, weddings, television shows, business meetings, for magazine, catalog and other commercial advertising photo shoots, and even a request to tow the trailer to a wedding at the upcoming 2010 Burning Man.

While the rarity of a rental Airstream is becoming less so, it's still an unusual venture, and none of these companies have been offering their rentals for more than three years. However, they are all committed to it for the long haul, and considering the durability of the typical Airstream, these same trailers might be requested for the 2050 Burning Man. Of course, by that point, they'll probably be towed by vehicles running on moonbeams and neutron-fusion fuel. One thing is certain: They'll still be called Airstreams. ●●●

*Meredith Klassen knows how to set a scene (and a table) for the renters of her '67 Safari.*



### **Let your Keyboard do the Towing**

Trailer rentals run from \$65 - \$250 per night (many with two-night minimums) to \$750 - 1,200 a week, with additional fees for campground charges, outside- area towing, and in some cases, delivery and cleaning/setup fees. Most rental companies require damage deposits and signed rental agreements specifying trailer care. See each website for specifics.

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