

BEST OF THE WEST

MARCH 2014

OUR 12 FAVORITE THINGS THIS MONTH



1. *Cultivating veterans*

Our returning soldiers need jobs, and our country needs more farmers. For these two crises, Michael O'Gorman, who for decades ran organic farms in California's Salinas Valley, came up with a single solution: Teach veterans to farm. His Farmer Veteran Coalition matches vets with farmer mentors all over the United States; distributes information on government aid; and gives money and advice to participants like former Navy radar specialist Kelly Carlisle, whose quarter-acre urban farm and CSA in East Oakland supports her nonprofit, Acta Non Verba. She works with kids ages 5 to 13, who plant, harvest, and sell the vegetables; 100 percent of the proceeds goes into their savings accounts. "I enlisted in the Navy to find a purpose," Carlisle says. "Three weeks into boot camp was 9/11, and I found my mission." Something similar happened when she left the Navy, came home, and saw hopelessness in East Oakland's youth. "I decided to be part of the solution. This is what I'd fought for." farmvetco.org; anvfarm.org.

Photograph by DAVID FENTON



2

BLOOM COUNTIES

Look out! This spring, arroyo lupine, purple needle grass, and California desert bluebells are taking over L.A. County with the help of landscape provocateur Fritz Haeg, the arts group Los Angeles Nomadic Division, and the plant experts at the Theodore Payne Foundation. The project, *Wildflowering L.A.*, involved sowing four blends of native wildflowers at 50 sites last fall. The plots were chosen for their visibility and for the impact the flowers would make. Now you can reap the benefits: Visit wildflowering.org for a map and info on what's blooming. At the more manicured end of the botanical spectrum, the 69th annual Santa Barbara International Orchid Show holds court midmonth: Along with taking in a weekend's worth of arrangements and advice, you can tour seven leading local nurseries—this is the cymbidium capital of the country, after all. \$12; sborchidshow.com.



3 Gas, Food, Lodge

The latest mini trend in hotels? Quirky meets woody. Three fine, fun examples:

Wildwood Snowmass

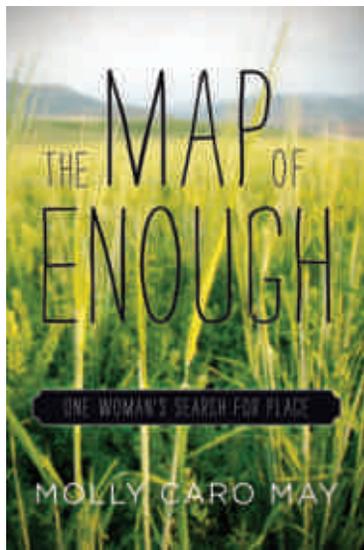
The formerly rundown Wildwood Lodge, in Colorado's Snowmass Village, has gone 1960s ski-lodge retro. The renovated 145 bedrooms are still small, with space-saving captain's beds, but you're meant to be down in the lobby—an alpine version of Pee-wee's Playhouse—involved in a rousing game of Trivial Pursuit or having a Fat Tire Ale in the bar. From \$199; wildwoodsnowmass.com.

Basecamp Hotel

Closer to the *Moonrise Kingdom* model is the Basecamp Hotel in South Lake Tahoe. (One of the two suites even has a tent set up in the bedroom to house the bed itself.) More good-scout touches include camping lanterns on the desks, wool-blanketed bunk beds in some rooms, and communal dinners three nights a week. From \$129; www.basecamphotels.com.

Ojai Rancho Inn

This 1950s mom-and-pop motor court was recently bought by a pair of mom-and-pop entrepreneurs. The couple kept the knotty pine paneling and rustic lodgepole beds, but they traded the mass-market cowboy kitsch for an Arts and Crafts vibe. This spring, they're adding a poolside wine bar called the Chief's Peak. From \$99; ojairanchoinn.com.



4

GOOD READ

Before restless, rootless Molly Caro May left New York City with her fiancé in 2009 for 107 acres of woods and grassland in Montana's majestic Gallatin Valley, she'd gloried in being a global nomad—a pattern set in childhood, when her executive dad moved the family to various foreign postings. Then she learned the joys of staying put. In her beautifully written memoir *The Map of Enough: One Woman's Search for Place*, out March 18, she explores the challenge and allure of creating a real home in an age of ever-more-virtual interactions—and reminds us why we love the West. Spoiler alert: Although the experiment was supposed to last only 12 months, she still calls Montana home. \$25; counterpointpress.com.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TESSA TRAEGER/TRUNK ARCHIVE, EVA KOLENKO

5 CANDLE WITH CARE

Last year, James Minola, co-owner with wife Chelsea of the design firm Grain on Washington's Bainbridge Island, was playing around on their shop lathe with beeswax candles from Oregon. He carved some into the shape of furniture legs, snapped a few photos, and posted them on Instagram. In three days, they garnered so many little hearts that he made a batch of candles to sell. Now, the honey-scented Totem candles are Grain's most popular new product. From \$22; graindesign.com.



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6 Transformers

Not surprisingly, fire hoses and climbing ropes are usually replaced long before they show signs of wearing out. Two Bay Area-based upcyclers thought it was a shame to consign these former lifesavers to a landfill. LauraLe Wunsch transforms hoses from firehouses all over California into handsome mats, firewood carriers, even furniture. (Before her company, **Oxgut**, moved into its Emeryville space, she used to wash the 50-foot hoses in her yard and hang them on a clothesline.) Ryan Dempsey of **Dog Patch SF** braids donated belay lines into dog leashes, available online and at his booth in the crafts market across from the Ferry Building. He donates 20 percent of his leashes to animal shelters. *Oxgut: Mats from \$165; oxgut.com. Dog Patch SF: Leashes from \$25; dogpatchsf.co.*

7 EASY RIDING

Borrowing a concept popular with cycling-mad Europeans, Scottsdale's year-old Bespoke Inn is geared (sorry) to the needs of serious riders and neophytes alike. In the heart of downtown's galleries, shops, and restaurants and just a few blocks from Scottsdale Stadium (spring training!), the four-room neo-adobe B&B offers its own repair shop and easy access to miles and miles of glorious Sonoran Desert bicycling. Bespoke rents road bikes and has comfy city bikes for guests to use gratis. And breakfast at the inn's top-rated Virtù restaurant is included—fuel up! From \$389; 2-night min.; bespokeinn.com.



8 Powder rangers

Did winter just slip right by you? We've got two last-chance spring-break skiing options, both great for families. The first is Montana's **Big Sky Resort**, which in 2013 added Moonlight Basin and Spanish Peaks to become the biggest ski resort in the country. The merger also opened up a lot of terrain for beginners, mixed with enough black-diamond runs to keep everyone happy. The second option is one-fourth the size and convenient for Californians: **June Mountain**, in the central Sierra, which in its latest incarnation has forsaken the edgy X Games demo and returned to its Mayberry roots. Case in point: Kids 12 and under now ski and snowboard for free. *Big Sky Resort: One-day lift ticket \$99; bigskyresort.com. June Mountain: From \$72; junemountain.com.*

FROM TOP: JEFFERY CROSS (2), CHRIS HINKLE

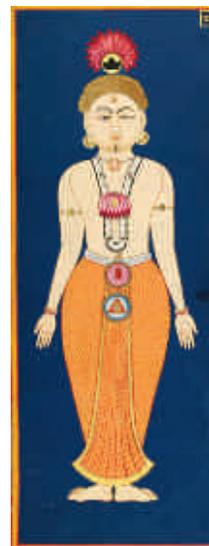
9 *Sitting pretty*

A few years back, L.A. shoe designer

Charlotte Stone and her husband, artist/woodworker Steve Nasker, found an old lawn chair at a prop shop on La Brea Avenue. Stone made a new macramé seat and back out of bright plastic cord, and before long it was the most sought-after seat in the house—and the inspiration for the clean-lined, bent-plywood Palapa Lounge Chair (\$800), the first product from the couple's new company, Pacific Wonderland. They've since added stools and a rocker, all made locally. Coming soon, a lawn version of the Palapa that can stay outdoors 24/7. pacificwonderlandinc.com.



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11 OM SWEET OM

When the good people at the Asian Art Museum heard that the Smithsonian was mounting *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*, the idea of bringing the exhibition to San Francisco for its only West Coast stop was—as curator Qamar Adamjee says—a no-brainer. Don't miss the 1938 film footage of Sri Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (often called the father of modern yoga) practicing with a very young B.K.S. Iyengar (now one of the world's most famous teachers). \$17; through May 25; asianart.org.

10 SMOKEY THE BEER

March is the perfect month for a season-spanning brew. A centuries-old German tradition being reinvented in the New World, smoked beers are made with wood-smoked malts that have an earthy tang reminiscent of wintry stews as well as summery barbecues. We like the porters best, such as **Epic's Smoked Porter** (epicbrewing.com), out of Salt Lake City, and **Deschutes Brewery's Class of '88 Imperial Smoked Porter** (deschutesbrewery.com), from Oregon. **Uncommon Brewers** (uncommonbrewers.com) in Santa Cruz, California, does something a little different to make their **Bacon Brown Ale**: They steep a bacon-cured pork leg in the beer before fermentation. (Trust us—it's great.)



12 TRAVELERS' TAILS

San Francisco International Airport's yoga/meditation room apparently wasn't enough to tame stress for passengers in transit. So authorities called in the experts: dogs. All shapes, all sizes, all adorable. Now, thanks to the SPCA, the Wag Brigade calms jittery flyers, deploying seasoned therapy dogs—and their equally well-trained handler/owners—every day in all SFO terminals. (Look for the vests that read PET ME!) Our favorites so far: Donner, the mellow black Lab, and Kona, a gentle giant of a Greater Swiss Mountain Dog. flysfo.com.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: DAVE LAURIDSEN; COURTESY OF THE MEHRANGARH MUSEUM TRUST; DAVID FENTON; JEFFERY CROSS (3)