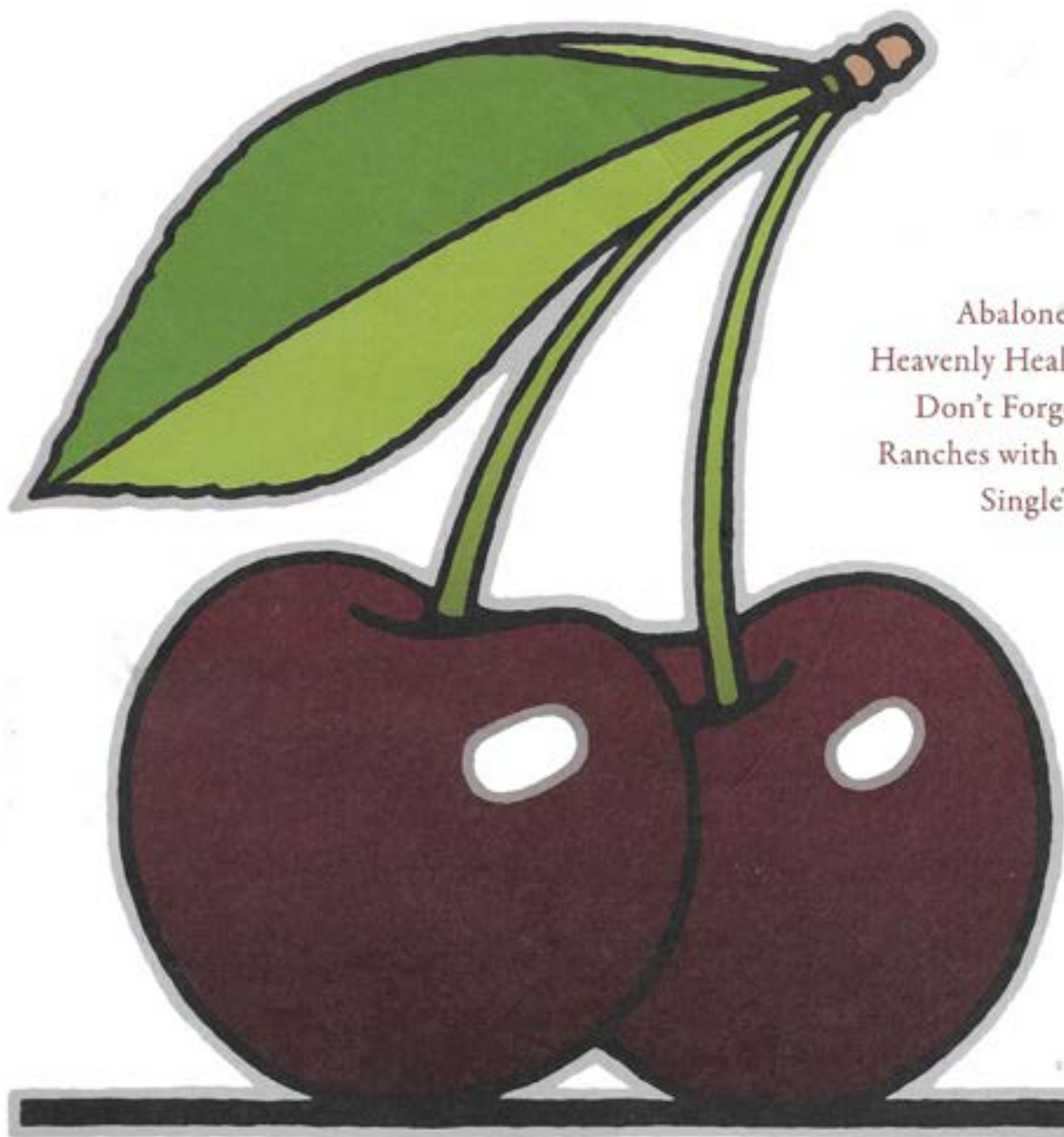


edible MARIN & WINE COUNTRY

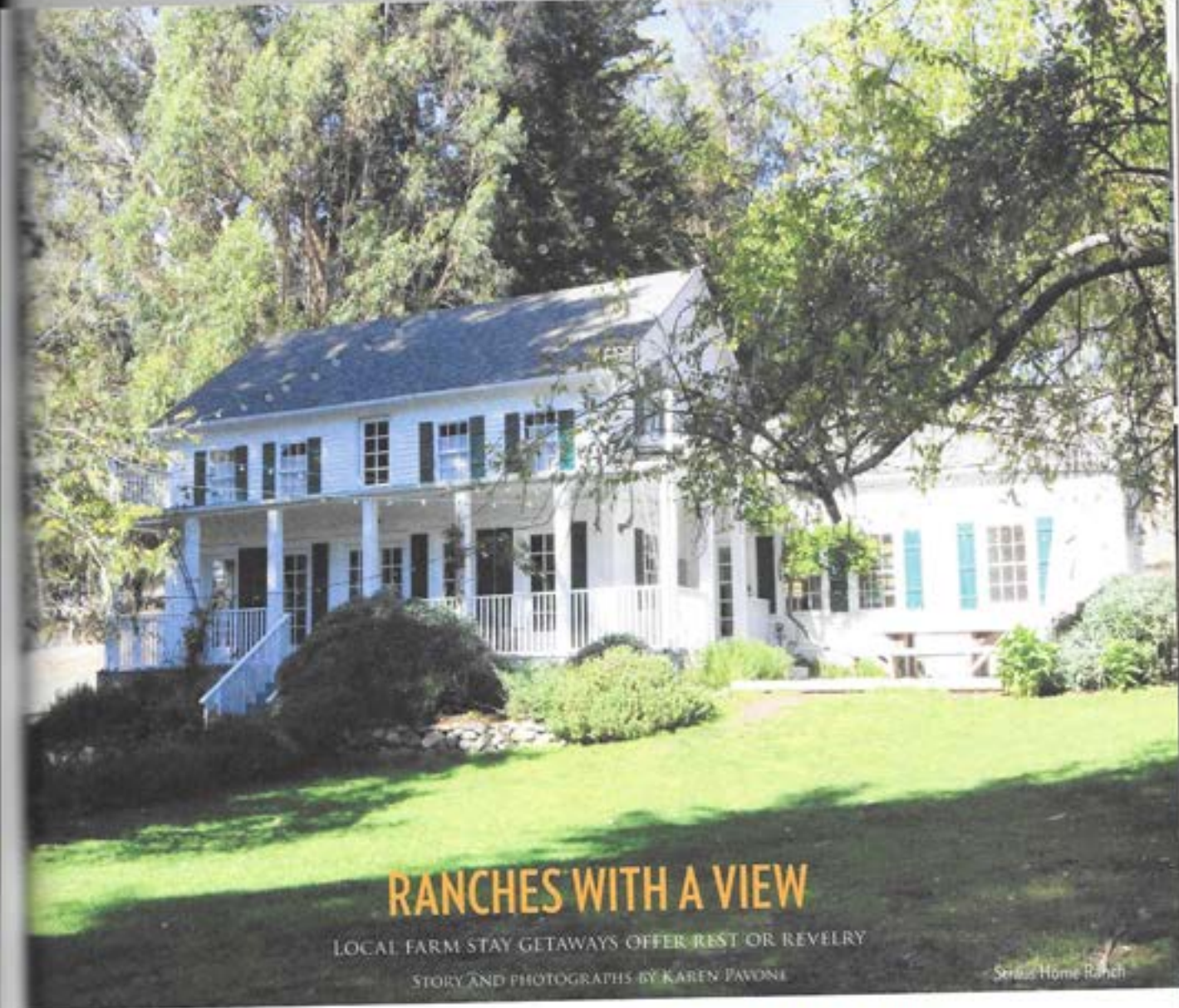
Issue 33
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Celebrating the harvest of Marin, Napa and Sonoma counties, season by season



Abalone Camp
Heavenly Healdsburg
Don't Forget Fido
Ranches with a View
SingleThread

SCHWAB



RANCHES WITH A VIEW

LOCAL FARM STAY GETAWAYS OFFER REST OR REVELRY

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY KAREN PAVONI

Straus Home Ranch

Need some down time to fan the fires of romance or bask in much-needed solitude? Maybe you're searching for the perfect place to celebrate a special ceremony or host a company shindig?

If country charm is what you're after, you're in luck. West Marin is home to a number of unique bed & breakfasts, secluded cottages and magical event venues situated on working farms and ranches. These beautiful properties offer more than a chance to escape urban life and soak in epic landscapes; they offer visitors an up-close-and-personal glimpse into this county's rich agrarian heritage, and vibrant present and future.

Each of the family-owned and operated retreats profiled here is accessible within a 90-minute drive from San Francisco, and offers all the creature comforts and amenities of home. Bring a sense of adventure or a just good book, and be sure to pack your hiking shoes (or maybe your dancing shoes). Whether peace, play or party is your heart's desire, these West Marin farm stays have what you're searching for.

STRAUS HOME RANCH, MARSHALL

Once upon a time, there was a farm, a family and a couple of cows...

So begins the story of the Straus family, one of West Marin's best-known dairying names, who established residence in this historic Colonial-style farmhouse in 1941.

Patriarch William (Bill) Straus was a German-born immigrant who fled his native homeland for Northern California in 1936 after Hitler came to power. Despite being a self-professed "city boy" who had never milked a single cow, he fell in love with 166 acres of choice ranch property overlooking Tomales Bay, and the grand old farmhouse that peered through the cypress grove to the water beyond. He bought the farm along with 32 Jersey cows, which he named after friends and relatives, and started a small dairy.

But the life of a bachelor dairyman in this isolated region was a lonely existence, so when family friends on the East Coast offered to do some



Straus Home Ranch

matchmaking. Bill jumped at the chance. In 1949, he met his soon-to-be-wife, Ellen: a spirited, "whip smart" 22-year-old whose family had fled Amsterdam nine years earlier to escape the Nazi occupation. They married three months later, after a whirlwind 16-day courtship, and settled into life on the dairy with plans to start a family.

Today, the couple's four adult children—Albert, Vivien, Miriam and Michael—have fond memories of growing up on the ranch where they rode ponies, made hay forts in the barn and helped with the never-ending stream of chores that were a part of daily life on the dairy. Vivien remembers the stately farmhouse as a place where friends and strangers alike were greeted warmly with a slice of homemade berry pie or her mom's famous lemon cheesecake.

Though the house remains largely unchanged by time, the family has not. Bill and Ellen have passed on, and the dairy business is now managed by their eldest son, Albert. Recently, the family has made the home available for rent so that others can experience a piece of their treasured family legacy.

Situated off Highway 1 between the tiny village of Marshall to the south and Tomales to the north, **Straus Home Ranch** can comfortably accommodate up to 10 guests. A wrap-around veranda, lined with columns of climbing antique roses, invites guests to pause and enjoy peek-a-boo views of Tomales Bay at the entrance to the house. Inside, black-painted wood floors curve through the rooms on the main floor, which include a spacious living room with a 1910 Steinway grand piano. Gaze out the rippled antique glass windows and you will likely catch a glimpse of heifers grazing in the fields surrounding the property as they have for more than 60 years.

Across from the main house you'll find a large red barn and a smaller structure known as **The Shed**, which, along with the house and gardens, may be rented as an event venue for up to 100 guests. The large lawn in front of the home serves as a natural gathering area with a wood platform, made from a fallen 150-year-old cypress, that can be used as a stage for musicians. A short walk up the hill brings guests to a popular ceremony site where couples can exchange vows in a grove of old eucalyptus and cypress trees above Tomales Bay.

The Strauses hope **The Shed** will also be a future hub for local community events including yoga classes, family movie nights and art exhibitions. A private caterer is available on site for an extra fee.

StrausHomeRanch.com

THINGS TO DO NEARBY:

Sample award-winning cuisine and enjoy beautiful views of Tomales Bay at **Nick's Cove**. Patrons travel from near and far for Chef Joshua Seibert's seasonal dishes made with sustainably sourced ingredients from local farms, and fresh seafood from the nearby Pacific.

If you're an oyster lover, you can't go wrong with a visit to the **Marshall Store** or **Hog Island Oyster Company** (both off Highway 1 within a 10-minute drive), where you can down freshly shucked or barbecue oysters at a ringside outdoor seat overlooking Tomales Bay.

Bring your kayak and put in at **Miller Boat Launch** to explore the waters of Tomales Bay. At certain times of the year, visitors can paddle out to witness nature's bioluminescence phenomenon at night. Tours are available through PointReyesOutdoors.com. If you're an angler, bring your fishing pole for a chance to catch seasonal striped bass, perch, rock fish, halibut, salmon and crab.

During April through August, on the second Sunday of each month, **Straus Home Ranch** hosts **farm tours** of the property. Guests are treated to a walk around the grounds, including a chance to commune with local dairy cows, and a tour of the main house. The visit culminates at **The Shed** with a tasting of local cheeses paired with **Apple-Garden Farm** hard cider. Reservations are required.

STEMPLE CREEK RANCH, TOMALES

Three miles northeast of Tomales as the crow flies lies **Stemple Creek Ranch**; a thousand acres of lush pastureland tucked in the folds of a valley where the thread of its namesake creek winds to the Pacific.

The Poncia family's roots in local agriculture trace back to 1897 when patriarch Angelo "Pa Nono" Poncia arrived at the nearby outpost of Fallon from his native Italy. At that time, West Marin was an attractive destination for many European immigrants who found work in the dairies that dotted this coastal corridor.

For three successive generations the Poncias worked the family dairy, which delivered fresh milk, cream and butter by railroad from Fallon to Sausalito, where cargo was ferried across the bay to waiting patrons in San Francisco.

Over 100 years later, fourth-generation rancher Loren Poncia and his wife, Lisa, have rebuilt the family business around sustainable meat production. Their superior-quality grass-fed and -finished beef and lamb are prized by top chefs, specialty butcher shops and gourmet markets in the Bay Area and beyond.

While California's ranchers have faced the grim realities of unprecedented drought in recent years, the Poncias have managed to thrive with a business model that hinges on grass as its foundation.