

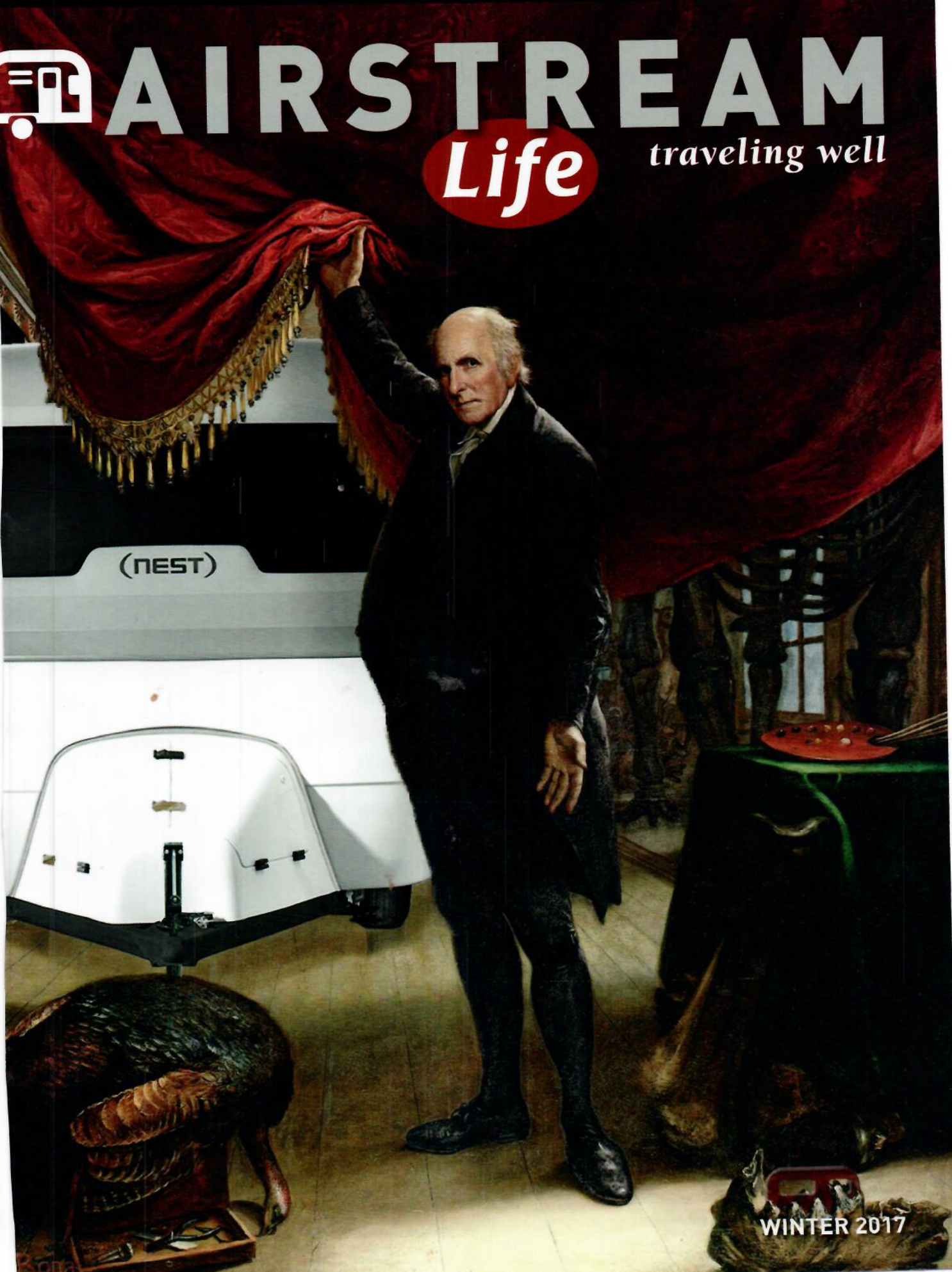
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AIRSTREAM

Life

traveling well



WINTER 2017



The Mobile Law Center

After practicing law for more than 15 years, Stephen Stern started to reconsider his approach. Instead of waiting for clients to find him, he thought — taking time off work and juggling their daily responsibilities to come to his office — what if he went to them instead? What if he made his practice less about him and more about the people who needed legal help the most?

“Many times, people do nothing about their legal issues and then find themselves later in a very precarious, difficult situation legally because they didn’t take the actions to defend themselves or to stand up for their rights,” Stern says. “I wanted to serve that population ... and that led to going to the people instead of expecting everybody to come find me.”

Now, Stern travels California’s central coast in the Mobile Law Center, a revamped 24-foot 1978 Airstream Argosy motorhome, to do just that — bring affordable, accessible legal services directly to those who need it.

Once he decided to take his practice on the road, Stern had to decide what vehicle to use. He considered a brand-new Mercedes Sprinter for its reliability and gas mileage. But a Mercedes did little to support his message of affordability. What about an old airport shuttle? Too clunky, he thought. An old step van? Too dark — and not the most welcoming for clients.

“And then it hit me: Airstreams!” he recalls. “It’s just that perfect feeling and look.” Their windows bring in natural light, and their height allows people to stand and walk around inside. “I realized an Airstream was really the perfect design and feel for what I was trying to do.”

After a short Craigslist search, he found the ideal model: the open, airy, 24-foot Argosy. He bought his Argosy from a woman who had envisioned a bright future for the RV, but never had the time to pull it off. She likened the Airstream to Sabrina, Audrey Hepburn’s character from the 1954 movie of the same name. In the movie, Sabrina undergoes a dramatic transformation, becoming unrecognizable to those who knew her before.

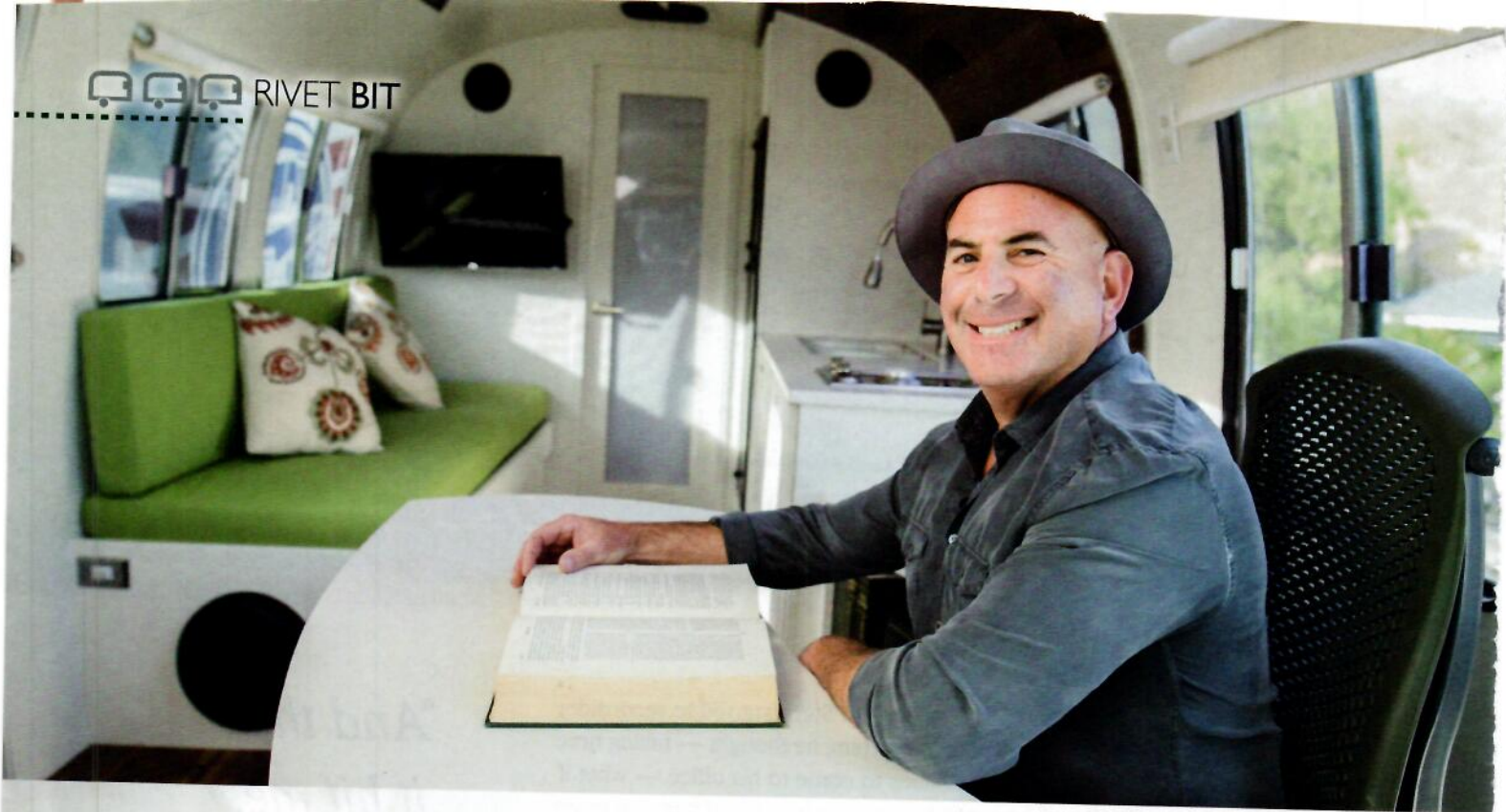
“She sold it to me because I explained to her my vision of what I planned to do with her Sabrina, which fulfilled her dream,” Stern says.

He kept her in the loop throughout the renovation, and now “she’s just ecstatic,” he says. “She’s so pleased to see what’s happened to her Sabrina.”

To transform Sabrina into the Mobile Law Center, Stern worked with Santa Barbara-based Innovative Spaces, a design-build firm that specializes in restoring vintage trailers like Airstreams.

“My analogy to building trailers is it’s basically like restoring an old classic car and then building a house inside,” says Nate Stover, Innovative Spaces’ founder

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Need legal help in central California? Stephen Stern can come to you in his 1978 Argosy 24 motorhome.

and CEO. In the Mobile Law Center's case, restoration included remediating both physical issues — like a leaky roof and seams and rotted floors — and mechanical issues stemming from the RV's 40-year-old piping and wiring systems.

"They did a lot. They completely gutted it," says Stern. "They're meticulous. They went through piece by piece and restructured it, re-strengthened it, and did everything they needed to do to build it out."

Stover's team fixed the leaky shell, installed new engineered flooring, rewrapped the upholstery on the captain chairs and completely replaced the dash. But they also kept a careful eye on the RV's mission, making careful design decisions to maximize its space and effectiveness.

"The biggest part was to keep it usable as for camping but have it be able to integrate into an office," says Stover. "I didn't want the space to feel small. You don't want to go into an office and feel like you're hunched around a little table in a corner. You want to have that spacious feel."

To maximize interior space, Stover kept all cabinetry low and design elements below countertop height. The design also incorporates a lot of natural woods; clean, white finishes; and a soothing pistachio green for the upholstery. Stern likens the design to a yoga studio: clean, calm, and open.

But the Mobile Law Center is also a business, and it needed the technical backbone to support it. Stover designed a powerful rechargeable battery system — complete with solar panels for trickle-charging — that can run all of Stern's computers, Wi-Fi hotspot, and printers for a full two days.

"I didn't want to run that engine and pollute; I really wanted to stay as green as possible," Stern says, "so we added that to the infrastructure."

All in all, Stern brought the Mobile Law Center from idea to Route 101 in about 10 months. The revamped Argosy has been cruising the coast since April, helping Stern bring his consumer legal expertise directly to those who need it from Paso Robles to Ventura.

"I've never spent so much time being strategic about designing my law business. Usually, you just hang up a shingle: 'I'm a lawyer. I'm licensed. Come see me!'" he says. "It's been an incredible experience."

Find Charles Carver's Austin law office in the Ideal Soul Mart parking lot or online at cwcaververlaw.com.

Find Stephen Stern's Mobile Law Center online at mobilelawcenter.com.