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## SAN DIEGO'S TOP ATTORNEYS 2022



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Jamie Altman Buggy



Allison Worden



Shannon R. Finley



Jennifer N. Lutz



Douglas R. Pettit



William Eigne



John Gomez



Ronson Shamoun

Meet some of San Diego's top attorneys for 2022.  
Some of the best in their chosen fields. **PAGE 8.**

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**COVER STORY:**  
**San Diego's Top Attorneys**

Meet some of San Diego's top attorneys for 2022. Some of the best in their chosen fields. Page 8



**San Diego Business and the 32-Hour Workweek**

A bill in the state Legislature would make California the first state to introduce the 32-hour workweek. In San Diego, businesses and workers alike continue to ponder the bill's possible outcomes.



**Sustainable Sneakers**

After six years of research and experimentation, partners Michael Burkart, Robert Pomeroy and Stephen Mayfield are launching the world's first biodegradable shoe, through the company Blueview. Mayfield is the CEO.



**Creating Authentic Wildlife Habitats**

For the past 30 years, landscape architect Jim Neri has worked with a team of wildlife specialists at the San Diego Zoo and the Safari Park to make the wildlife habitats as comfortable and authentic as possible.



**TRAVEL: Dusty Passport Sees Daylight in Baja**

Travel writer Marlise Kast-Myers and photographer husband Benjamin Myers dusted off their passports to enjoy a trip to Mexico — surfing and relaxing near Puerto Nuevo, and enjoying the culture and cuisine in Valle de Guadalupe's wine country.

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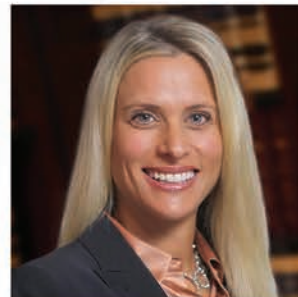




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# SAN DIEGO SCENE

## Sports betting giants compete in placing measures on California election ballot

*CalMatters*

The battle over sports betting is heating up, with at least two of four competing initiatives poised to land on the November ballot unless state lawmakers can strike a deal to avert a costly ballot box fight.

Online sports betting giants FanDuel, DraftKings and BetMGM submitted 1.6 million signatures backing their measure; around 1.1 million of those will need to be valid for it to qualify for the ballot. If approved, it will join another eligible measure to allow in-person sports betting at tribal casinos and four horse race tracks.

FanDuel, DraftKings and BetMGM are pitching their measure — which would require gaming companies to pay a \$100 million licensing fee and be licensed in 10 other states in order to do business in California — as one that would generate “significant revenue to fund homelessness housing and mental health treatment and provide financial support for California Tribal nations,” initiative spokesman Nathan Click told CalMatters’ Grace Gedye.

But many Native American tribes are campaigning against the gaming companies’ initiative.

“The out-of-state online gaming corporations’ flawed measure is full of loopholes and deceptive promises,” said Roger Salazar, a spokesperson for Californians for Tribal Sovereignty and Safe Gaming, which is backing another proposed ballot measure that would exclusively allow tribes to offer online and in-person sports betting. “These out of state operators don’t care about California. 90 percent of the profits from this measure go to these out of state corporations, leaving only pennies for the homeless.”

## Illumina’s GRAIL named ‘Best Overall Medical Device Company’

Illumina’s GRAIL has been named “Best Overall Medical Device Company” in the 2022 MedTech Breakthrough Awards. GRAIL is a health care company with the mission of detecting cancer early, when it can be cured. The Galleri test is the first of-its-kind multi-cancer early detection test available in the U.S.

With a single blood draw, the Galleri test provides early detection insights that help patients and their physicians be proactive about their health. The revolutionary technology can detect cancer early, even before an individual is showing symptoms. In clinical studies, the Galleri test demonstrated the ability to detect a common cancer signal across more than 50 types of cancers – more than 45 of which currently have no screening options – and predict where the cancer signal originated in the body.



## Governor, legislators won't budge in high-speed rail dispute CalMatters



A rendering of the proposed California High-Speed Rail. (Courtesy of the California High-Speed Rail Authority)

Lawmakers and Gov. Gavin Newsom have different opinions on what the next steps for California's high-speed rail project should be.

California Democrats are locked in one of the most consequential disputes in modern state history over the future of the Los Angeles-to-San Francisco high-speed rail project after a decade of troubled construction.

The \$105 billion bullet train project — for which \$10.3 billion has been spent so far — would be the largest single investment in state history, the most ambitious civil works effort in the nation and now a symbol to many experts of how not to build a railroad, all of which define the stakes in the current impasse.

The feud has festered for 16 months, since Gov. Gavin Newsom asked the Legislature for a \$4.2 billion appropriation in early 2021. The request has triggered a standoff with Assembly Democrats, who have steadfastly refused to hand over the last remaining funds from a 2008 bond measure for high-speed rail.

The battle involves who will exert control over the project's future, how to improve its efficiency and how the remaining funds can yield the greatest benefits, which involve sharp disagreements that could be difficult to resolve.

"The project is not proceeding according to a robust plan, which results in waste and other inefficiencies," said Bent Flyvbjerg, a business expert in mega projects at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School and IT University of Copenhagen. "Given the political divisions, the cost growth, the schedule delays and the lack of a sound future revenue source, this project is going to the graveyard of famous boondoggles."

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Ronson J. Shamoun, Principal Attorney and CEO of RJS LAW, is an Adjunct Law Professor at the University of San Diego—School of Law where he teaches a Tax Practice and Penalties class. He was recently presented with the following awards:

- San Diego Metro Magazine- Best Attorney 2016
- San Diego Magazine- Top Attorney 2016
- San Diego Business Journal- Best of the Bar 2014, 2015 & 2016
- Martindale Hubbell's- AC Preeminent Rated 2014, 2015 & 2016
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## County affordable housing efforts putting 3,400 units in San Diego

Since 2017, the County of San Diego has invested \$175 million towards the creation of affordable housing, according to a report delivered to the Board of Supervisors. The funds have leveraged about \$1 billion in local, state and federal monies, as well as private funding, which are being used to create 3,390 affordable housing units that have housed and will become home for more than 35,000 San Diegans.

The wide-ranging efforts include 44 developments—10 completed, 13 under construction and 21 future projects—in 24 communities throughout the region, including eight county excess properties and four developments in unincorporated areas of the county.

The affordable units will provide

housing for low-income families, seniors, veterans, developmentally disabled people, transition-aged youth, people who are homeless and people experiencing homelessness and have serious mental illness.

To date, 10 developments have been completed, resulting in 835 affordable housing units that have become home to over 2,900 people throughout the region.

The 13 developments under construction are expected to create over 950 affordable housing units and are expected to be completed between now and December 2024. The 44 developments could generate 3,400 construction jobs and about 1,000 permanent property management and maintenance positions.



Valley Senior Village in Escondido is expected to be completed by summer 2023.

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## UC San Diego's new Downtown hub Park & Market opens to the public *by Jade Griffin*

From performances by renowned local musicians and a Family Arts Open House, to a conversation with Los Angeles Times columnist and award-winning author Jean Guerrero, UC San Diego Park & Market — the university's long-planned presence in Downtown San Diego— opened to the community with a bang.

Located on a full city block at the intersection of Park Boulevard and Market Street in San Diego's East Village neighborhood, and steps away from the Blue Line Trolley connecting UC San Diego's main campus with the U.S.-Mexico border, UC San Diego Park & Market is designed to serve the entire San Diego community as a social and intellectual hub for civic engagement, learning and collaboration. The flexibly designed space represents the university's commitment to connecting with the cultural heritage

and shared values of the region's diverse social, cultural and economic community.

Local businessman and philanthropist Malin Burnham and his wife, Roberta Burnham, committed a \$3 million gift to support the partnership between the Burnham Center for Community Advancement and UC San Diego in their creation of a "civic collaboratory" at Park & Market. The collaboratory will be focused on bringing great minds together from all backgrounds to focus on advancing the region. The Burnham Center for Community Advancement—a think-and-do tank that serves as the nexus where community stakeholders and multi-sector partners come together to identify regional needs, find innovative solutions and tackle some of our binational region's most pressing issues—is housed at Park & Market.



Roberta and Malin Burnham committed a \$3 million gift.



Photo by Erik Jepsen/University Communications.



# 30 Years in Business — 10 Things I've Learned

By Teresa Y. Warren,  
 Founder & President, TW2 Marketing

TW2 is celebrating our 30th year! I started my beloved company when my two sons were quite young and my husband had a demanding career with a chaotic schedule. I wanted my career to provide flexibility, so I had time for my family while doing what I loved.

Thirty years later, those boys are now grown men, my husband is retired and my boxes are checked – I have created many wonderful family memories and have had an amazing career, which I have adored.

For three decades I have built and managed a successful business, making all of the decisions, sometimes with the help of a few trusted mentors, advisors and friends. Looking back, there are so many things I have learned.

Here are my top 10.

**1. Trust your instincts.** Of the relatively few business problems I have experienced, if I had listened to my gut, I probably would have avoided most of them. If you aren't sure you can work with a potential client, you probably won't be able to. If you know better but do something anyway, chances are it will come back to haunt you. Listen to your inner voice and follow it.

**2. Be loyal.** TW2 has clients who have been with us for more than 25 years. We have outsource partners who we have worked with almost as long. Could we have replaced them with clients who might have paid us more and partners who billed us less? Yes, but we haven't. There's more to business than just making money and building long-term relationships is one of them. These relationships not only resulted in a lot of work and referrals over many years, but also forgiveness when something went wrong. Extra effort when a deadline was coming up fast. And life-long friendships.

**3. Don't apologize for wanting to make money.** A mentor told me this a long time ago and it still rings true. All businesses need to run in the black and all business owners and their employees should be fairly compensated. You charge what you need to make a profit that you determine. If someone thinks your



Teresa Warren

fees are too high, then they won't appreciate the value you bring. (See #1 above for what to do next.)

**4. Everything costs more and takes more time than you think.** Always have a 20% cushion for when costs exceed expectations. Give yourself more time than you think you'll need, whether it's one hour or one month.

**5. Be ethical and tell the truth.** Karma is a b\*\*\*h and she'll come for you if you aren't completely transparent and above board. As my background is in the law, from day one TW2 has operated on a strong set of ethics and we've tried never to waiver. I learned a long time ago that when you lie, it always comes back to haunt you. (Sorry, Mom!) So, don't.

**6. Be yourself.** A friend once told me that when interacting with clients I shouldn't be so personal. But that's who I am. I'm a storyteller and some of my best stories are about things I've encountered in my life. I'm not afraid to share. It's my personality shining through. Don't try to be someone you aren't. People don't want to do business with posers. And if they don't like me as I am, I don't want to do business with them anyway!

**7. Be accessible and responsive.** This doesn't mean being available 24/7. It does mean responding to emails after hours if the situation is urgent or someone needs information or reassurance right away. Or it means letting a client know that their Friday afternoon request will be worked on, starting Monday morning. At TW2, you are a 'rulebreaker' if you work weekends. From time to time, all of us are rulebreakers because it's needed, but we don't make a habit of it. And if a client has a problem with that, see #1 above.

**8. Give guidance and expertise.** Don't just tell clients what they want to hear – they are hiring you because you have the skills that they don't possess. (If a client doesn't want your input, see #1 above.) Teach your team and then watch them soar. Share your knowledge with anyone who wants it.

**9. Keep things in perspective.** Work is often stressful and demanding. Problems happen and you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders. When I find myself in a dark place, I think, "Will this matter one month from now?" "Or one year from now?" Almost always, the answer is no. What TW2 does is vitally important to our clients and to our team. But we're not curing cancer or making life and death decisions. Keep in check the significance of what you are up against and don't let yourself be overwhelmed.

**10. Laugh and have fun.** Anyone whose been in a meeting with me knows that I often say funny, silly things – or at least I think they're funny. (See #6 above) So much of our days are filled with tedious tasks. When the opportunity comes to make something enjoyable – even for just a few minutes – why not do so? And don't forget to laugh often, especially at yourself!

# SAN DIEGO'S TOP ATTORNEYS 2022

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**Michael Gleason** When Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP expanded to the West Coast and opened an office in San Diego, it needed a leader to help further HLP's mission of growth in a key region of the country. The firm looked to one of its own, partner Mike Gleason, who represented businesses in complex civil litigation in the firm's Cleveland office. He was named partner in charge and has helped expand the San Diego office to 22 employees since opening. He is also co-chair of the Litigation Practice group. He defends and represents companies in complex litigation. He serves as a board member for the San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, a private, non-profit organization that provides pro bono legal services to the most vulnerable members of the San Diego community. He also volunteers at the Feeding San Diego warehouse, sorting food with his children. He has led the firm's participation in the annual "Food from the Bar" competition for the past seven years. He is an AV-rated trial and appellate lawyer with over twenty years experience. He also volunteers as a youth basketball coach. He holds a Juris Doctor degree from Cornell University.



**Jamie Altman Buggy** A talented litigator, Buggy is a partner at Harvest LLP. She has an in-depth understanding of litigation and leverages her knowledge and a no-nonsense attitude to achieve successful results. She excels when the situation at hand lacks precedent, requiring an out-of-the-box approach and entrepreneurial attitude. From the beginning of her legal career she has proven adept at independently handling difficult and sensitive matters. She is active in the community and is a former vice president of the Veterans Research Alliance, a local non-profit designed to raise money to fund innovative research and programs for San Diego's veteran community. She has also served as a board member of Home Start, a non-profit child abuse prevention and treatment agency, and is a volunteer pro bono attorney for the San Diego Volunteer Lawyers Program. Over the past two years she has counseled over 100 landlords and tenants regarding Covid-19 restrictions. She has worked tenaciously to guide landlords through a complex range of laws. She has defended a business owner in a partnership dispute and successfully a real estate developer in partnership disputes related to hotel development, resolving the case through a settlement for six percent of the demand. She is a graduate of the University of Southern California and holds her Juris Doctor from the University of San Diego Law School.



**Allison Worden** Worden is a senior trial attorney and partner at Gomez Trial Attorneys who focuses her practice on helping victims of catastrophic personal injuries. She now leads the firm's sexual assault, child sexual abuse Practice Group where she vigorously litigates on behalf of victims, and is committed to holding those responsible, accountable. She brings tremendous trial experience having tried over 100 cases to jury verdict and another 2 bench trials as a Deputy District Attorney in San Diego. As a prosecutor, she investigated and prosecuted all levels of crime including sexual assault, sexual abuse, and molest, nursing home abuse, domestic violence, vehicular crimes, fraud, robbery, gangs, homicides and capital cases. Since joining Gomez, she has resolved hundreds of cases on behalf of clients with consistent results well in seven figures. She is on the board for the San Diego Inn of Court, and also serves as an instructor and workshop leader for the San Diego Inn of Court Colleagues of Evidence and Trial Advocacy programs. She earned her bachelor's degree and Juris Doctorate from the University of San Diego where as an undergraduate she was named to the West Coast Conference All-Conference team as a soccer goalkeeper for four years in a row, inducted into the San Diego Hall of Champions and ranked nationally as a top five goalkeeper. She also is an adjunct professor in the USD Department of Political Science.





**Shannon R. Finley** Finley is a bright young attorney who in here short time practicing has quickly established herself as a leader in the field of employment law and has litigated in both state and federal courts. She has also made significant achievements in the legal profession and has been promoted to shareholder/partner at Pettit Kohn. She recently contributed to the Employment Practices Liability Consultant with her extensive article entitled “Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Discrimination: A Landmark Case Explanation and Best Practices for Compliance. She is the current president-elect of the Lawyer Club of San Diego, a member of the California Women Lawyers and has been recognized as a Rising Star by San Diego Supe Lawyers and has received the C. Hugh Friedman New Lawyer Award for her leadership and professionalism in the San Diego legal community. She is a graduate of the University of San Diego Law School.



**Jennifer N. Lutz** Lutz is a founding shareholder and co chair of Pettit Kohn’s employment and labor department. Her litigation career spans over two decades, developing a strong reputation as one of San Diego’s premier and go-to employment law attorneys for both employment litigation and employment counseling. She has an extraordinary record of favorable outcomes and successes in a variety of cases in state and federal courts. She is a widely sought out author and speaker and serves as an employment law instructor at UC San Diego Extension. She is a speaker/trainer for the San Diego Chapter of the California Restaurant Association. She has been recognized by Best Lawyers in America for her work in both Employment Law-Management and in Labor and Employment Litigation. She has been named as one of San Diego’s Top 25 Women Lawyers and has been named to the Best of the Bar. She is a graduate of the University of Arizona College of Law.

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## TOP ATTORNEYS



**Douglas R. Pettit** Pettit is the founding shareholder and chair of the Professional Liability Department. With a litigation career spanning nearly three decades, he has developed a strong reputation as one of San Diego's premier attorneys. He has tried over 50 cases in his career and has an extraordinary record of favorable outcomes and successes in a variety of litigation areas, including professional liability and business litigation. He has been inducted into ABOTA, the American Board of Trial Advocates. Membership in ABOTA is by invitation only to highly accomplished civil trial attorneys who have demonstrated excellent trial skills. He also serves as a lecturer at the University of San Diego School of Law, where he teaches a course in Experiential Advocacy. He has achieved Martindale-Hubbell's rating of AV Preeminent which is the highest rating for legal ability and ethical standards. He has been named San Diego's Legal Malpractice Lawyer of the Year. He has been named Best of the Bar and as a Best Lawyer in America. He is a graduate of Washington and Lee College of Law.



**William Eigner** Eigner has been called the "go to guy" for mergers and acquisitions and emerging companies. He serves as a catalyst for his clients success. His clients have grown from his involvement from a two-person start ups to public companies or acquisition targets of Silicon Valley's, Europe and Asia's largest companies. He serves as a director of EvoNexus and has been active in San Diego Venture Group and the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. He serves or has served on the boards of advisors of Encore Semi, eSub, Solyahealth, 3+2 Pharma LLC, Acenda and other companies.. Eigner is a trustee emeritus of San Diego Police Foundation a former trustee and land chairman of the La Jolla Town Council. A partner at Procopio, his practice emphasizes M & A, venture capital, angel financing, seed capital and the financing, governing, operating, buying, selling, and merging of growing and established companies. His M & A, financing, and contracts practice includes work in various, sectors, including telecommunications software, cybersecurity, electronic commerce/internet, energy, clean technology life sciences and medical devices. He holds both undergraduate and law degrees from Stanford University.



**John Gomez** Gomez founded Gomez Trial Attorneys in 2005 and is the firm's lead trial attorney. He has been voted the number one trial attorney in San Diego, has been named the Plaintiffs Products Liability Attorney of the Year, a Class Action and Mass Tort Attorney of the Year and Avvo rates him a 10.0 out of 10.0. Since 2000, he has recovered over \$500 million in settlements and verdicts for his clients with more than 100 separate recoveries of one million dollar or more. He has obtained verdicts in excess of one million, ten million and one hundred million dollars. Most notably, he has obtained five separate jury verdicts of more than one million dollars in which the defendant offered nothing prior to trial. He also serves in a leadership role relating to numerous coordinated litigations involving defective drugs and medical devices. He is a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates, as well as a member of the Summit Council, a national group of the country's finest trial lawyers for plaintiffs. All members have obtained at least one ten million dollar verdict and at least three one million dollar verdicts. He donates enormous time to charitable causes and coaches each of his kids in soccer and basketball.





**Ronson Shamoun** Shamoun is San Diego's leading tax attorney. He is the founder and chief executive officer of RJS Law Firm. His practice involves federal and state taxation, with an emphasis on criminal tax defense, tax controversy, international tax, bankruptcy, and estate planning. He recently received the University of San Diego Mother Rosalie Clifton Hill Award for Service. The award is USD alum who personifies the spirit and philosophy of the university. He has generously contributed to the university with an annual scholarship to the USD School of Law and to the School of Business. As an adjunct professor in the USD School of Law he teaches Tax Practice and Penalties and Federal Tax Procedures and Policies. He co-founded the USD -RJS Law Tax Controversy Institute which brings together tax attorneys, CPAs, enrolled agents and tax preparers to discuss the latest changes in tax law. He has been named a Man of Influence and one of San Diego's top attorneys for several years running. He has received USD's Distinguished Alumni Award. RJS Law has been recognized as one of San Diego's Most Innovative Law firms. He holds his undergraduate degree, a master's degree in Accounting and his law degree all from the University of San Diego.



# HAHN LOESER

## CONGRATULATES

### MICHAEL GLEASON

on his selection as a 2022 finalist for *SD Metro's* Top Attorneys.

He is an innovator within our firm, an influential member of our community and a mentor to his colleagues. Congratulations to Michael and all the 2022 *SD Metro* Top Attorneys!



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**Joe Leventhal**  
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**Robert Tyson**  
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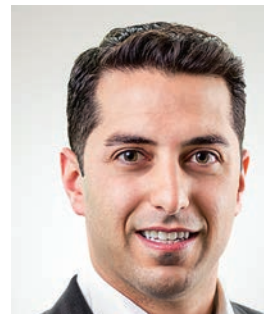
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# San Diego Businesses and the 32-Hour Workweek: Pros And Cons

Just last April, Californian lawmakers Evan Low and Cristina Garcia co-authored a potentially earth-shaking bill, AB 2932. If passed, it would make California the first state in America to introduce the 32-hour workweek. A heated debate ensued: employees and their employers took sides to argue about the pros and cons of such a move.

For now, it seems employers have won a rare victory. Legal intelligence resource JD Supra reported on May 9 that the California legislature held back from passing the bill — but not for the reason many might think. Instead of being convinced by the proposal's drawbacks, lawmakers only failed to advance the bill because they didn't have enough time to fully study its implications.

Official opinions on the issue remain up in the air — and in San Diego, businesses and workers alike continue to ponder its possible outcomes. But just how exactly would AB 2932 affect San Diegans if passed? We dive into the 32-hour workweek and its various pros and cons below.

## The 32-hour workweek

Proponents of AB 2932 argue that given modern technological advancements, the 40-hour workweek is no longer beneficial or necessary. They add that multiple countries have already established the 32-hour workweek, beginning with Iceland's successful pilot study

in 2015. Today, nations spanning from the UK to Japan are either conducting trial phases or have already put the 32-hour workweek in place. Yet it's also true that conditions in California are different, making the issue more nuanced than it appears.

## Assessing the benefits Increased productivity

Instead of using up the usual 2-day weekend for errands, they get an extra day to rest — and they're well-rested enough to tackle each new workweek head-on. In turn, the 32-hour workweek may also reduce their risk of incurring physical or mental health issues. For this reason, career development experts LHH believes that the 4-day workweek is the silver bullet for burnout. By giving employees time to both rest and settle responsibilities outside of the office, they can better focus on work and hand in higher-quality outputs.

## Lowered costs

The Conversation finds that by cutting just one day out of the workweek, businesses can save up to \$15 billion annually in rent, utilities, and supplies. The added flexibility it provides can also increase job satisfaction and employee retention, so companies don't need to spend more to replace them. Improved productivity can improve their bottom line in the long term, as well.

## Considering the weak points It might increase employer costs

In a recent statement, the California Chamber of Commerce argued that AB 2932 may increase labor costs instead. This is because it requires companies to pay employees the same salaries despite the cut hours, as well as overtime beyond 32 hours. Businesses may also have to hire more employees to match productivity with levels seen during the 40-hour workweek.

## It won't work for every business

"Although useful in some work circumstances, imposing such requirements on all employment is unwarranted," Kelly Cunningham from the San Diego Institute for Economic Research told the San Diego Union-Tribune in April. Customer-facing companies can specifically lose profits if they take a day off. As such, Cunningham sees the bill's sweeping requirement of a shortened workweek to be repressive. The bill also excludes unionized businesses, which impacts its inclusivity.

Ultimately, AB 2932 is definitely groundbreaking in some respects — but San Diego businesses may suffer if it's not implemented properly. For more up-and-coming business news, check out our daily business reports right here on the San Diego Metro.



Commercial-quality biodegradable flip-flops.  
(Photo courtesy of Stephen Mayfield)

# Sustainable Sneakers: Scientists Create the World's First Biodegradable Shoe

Stephen Mayfield, Michael Burkart and Robert Pomeroy to launch their algae-based shoes through the company Blueview **By Emerson Dameron**

Stephen Mayfield, a molecular biology professor at UC San Diego, now has a stake in the business of footwear alongside partners Michael Burkart and Robert Pomeroy from the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. After six years of research and experimentation, these professors are launching the world's first biodegradable shoe through the company Blueview, of which Mayfield also serves as CEO.

What began as a project to turn algae into fuel shifted into a quest to develop high-performance biodegradable polyurethane foams, which are used as shoe soles. When that

material was finally developed, they set out to make a shoe that was also 100 percent biodegradable, which required developing 3D-knit sneaker upper material that was made entirely from plant fibers. When the shoes have outlived their usefulness, the polyurethane bottoms, known as Soleic Foam, along with the knit uppers, will fully biodegrade in compost bins, or even in soil or the ocean. That's a big improvement over rubber soles that stick around underground for centuries.

The group has also developed algae-based flip-flops using Soleic Foam, which are licensed to Reef through their company Algenesis, of

which Blueview is the consumer-facing brand.

We spoke with Mayfield about how he gets his inspiration and the crucial importance of spreading sustainability through the business world.

**How has your work in molecular biology been informed by your experience as a surfer?**

A. With surfing you are, by the nature of the sport, completely immersed in the ocean, so you cannot miss what people are doing to it, and the planet. Almost every beach in the world is now covered with plastic trash, and the more remote



and theoretically pristine that beach should be, the more that plastic trash sticks out. It's just so sad what we have done to our oceans. Climate change is also visible, but perhaps a bit more difficult to see on a daily basis.

So, seeing this environmental degradation—and it gets worse every year—I have simply decided that nothing could be more important than to work on solutions to these problems. So we decided to tackle one specific problem, ocean plastic trash, and see if we could make something that could positively impact that. We decided to make biodegradable plastics—and we did!

### What were some of the epiphanies that led to the idea for Soleic Foam?

A. First, petroleum comes from algae; it's just fossil algae oil, and plastics come from petroleum. So why not make plastics directly from algae oil?

Second, there are actually biodegradable plastics that exist—not many, but a few—so why not make those biodegradable plastics from algae oil?

### What have been the most surprising experiences you've had in working on this product?

A. Our first biodegradable polyurethane materials were of pretty poor quality, but after lots of trial and error, we managed to make them high-performance materials. I think a lot of people assume that bio-based and biodegradable also means low performance, and that's simply dead wrong!

### What's your wildest hope for the success of these shoes?

A. I hope we sell so many of our shoes that all the big fashion brands are forced to start using bio-based and biodegradable materials in their shoes and clothes. Think about the car companies switching to electric cars. They only made the change after Tesla looked like it might put them out of business. If we can make our shoes the top-selling shoes in the world, every single brand will switch to this material—that is my dream.

### Do you have any advice for science-minded people who want to get involved with sustainability in the business world?

A. Yes—just do it, in any form, in every way possible. Sustainability has to be the future of every business because if we don't switch to sustainable products and sustainable practices, the future on this planet is not something any of us want to experience. And every single company out there knows this. Even the giant oil companies are switching as fast as they can.

### How has being a part of the UC San Diego community influenced your ideas and attitudes?

A. I came to UC San Diego a dozen years ago to start a collaborative center on algae biotechnology, and from day one every single person I met was open to our collaborative ideas and our entrepreneurial approach, from the chancellor to first-year students. Everyone here understands the UC San Diego mission to bring scientific solutions to pressing world problems. That's what makes us, us.



Professor Stephen Mayfield with a pair of biodegradable sneakers.



When the shoes have outlived their usefulness, the polyurethane bottoms, known as Soleic Foam, along with the knit uppers, will fully biodegrade in compost bins, or even in soil or the ocean.



Pouring algae-derived polyol into flip-flop mold  
(Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego)

## Scripps Ranch High School grad helps launch 'Duality,' a new sneaker for Reebok and fashion retailer APB



Ben Gass, a Scripps Ranch High School grad and current freshman at the University of Oregon, with samples of the 'Duality' sneaker.

Ben Gass, a San Diegan and 2021 graduate of Scripps Ranch High School, was on the launch team of a new limited-edition sneaker called the APB X Yellowbrick CL Legacy "Duality." Some 150 pairs of the sneakers have been manufactured by Reebok and are being sold by fashion retailer APB (online at APBStore.com and in-store at APB locations in Columbia, Greenville, Charleston, Tallahassee, and Jacksonville). The creation of Duality was a collaboration between Reebok; APB; the national education and workforce nonprofit Jobs for the Future; and Yellowbrick, an online platform that offers university-affiliated courses for creators who are seeking to enter the fashion, sports, beauty, music, and media industries.

Launched in the spring of 2021, the partnership between the four organizations worked with 36 students, ages 17-20, to teach the knowledge, skills,

and experience that's needed for a pathway into the sneaker industry.

"When I was a freshman in high school, I made a bucket list that included the goal of working with a major company on a sneaker – so I'm thrilled about the exciting opportunity that my experience with Yellowbrick has made possible," says Gass, who is currently a freshman at the University of Oregon. "I was always into design and art, and in my senior year of high school I created my streetwear brand, LightningDB. My family encouraged me the whole time, and I truly appreciate their support of my pursuits."

The pro bono instruction that Gass received combined content from Yellowbrick's popular "Sneaker Essentials" (a ten-week course that was developed in tandem with Fashion Institute of Technology and Complex.com) with live mentorship from leaders at Reebok and APB. The instruction covered product development, sales, marketing,

and retailing. All participants produced a final project that included a unique sneaker design, a production plan, and retail/marketing strategies.

As a bonus opportunity, the three students who submitted the most compelling designs/plans were invited to collaborate on their concept for manufacturing by Reebok and sale through APB. Gass was among the trio that was selected to participate in the development of Duality. Net proceeds from the purchases of the Duality shoe will provide additional funding for the program.

"Our Sneakers Essentials course has been elevated through the work that we did on Duality with Reebok, APB and JFF," said Michael Godshall, chief creative director at Yellowbrick. "Ben was able to interact directly with Reebok and APB experts representing all facets of the industry, and we're immensely proud of what he accomplished."





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# Creating Authentic Wildlife Habitats

Landscape architect Jim Neri and Zoo team create habitats — not enclosures

By Delle Willett

For the past 30 years, landscape architect Jim Neri has worked with a team of wildlife specialists at the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Zoo Safari Park ([www.sdzwa.org](http://www.sdzwa.org)) to make the wildlife habitats as comfortable and authentic as possible.

After 12 years at KTUA Planning and Landscape Architecture, working extensively on Zoo accounts, Neri opened his own firm in 1997, and the Zoo followed him as a client, involving him in many capacities.

With his portfolio of 30-plus Zoo and Safari Park projects, Neri feels very fortunate to be part of the Zoo team creating projects as complex as a small city.

Said Neri, “It’s very intriguing. The team members are all specialists, dedicated pros working together to find a balance and

make the space look and feel like a habitat, not an enclosure.”

What Neri loves about zoo landscape design is that the idea you start with must be good, a “bamboo design, strong yet flexible,” that can withstand changes right to the project’s end. “It can be a bit frustrating at times since the plans are more of a guide, but in the end, it works because all the pieces are there, you just have to keep arranging them until they are right.”

With a BA in ornamental horticulture from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and an MA in landscape architecture from Cal State Pomona, Neri especially appreciates the Zoo’s Horticulture Department whose boundless plant knowledge helps inform each distinctive habitat.

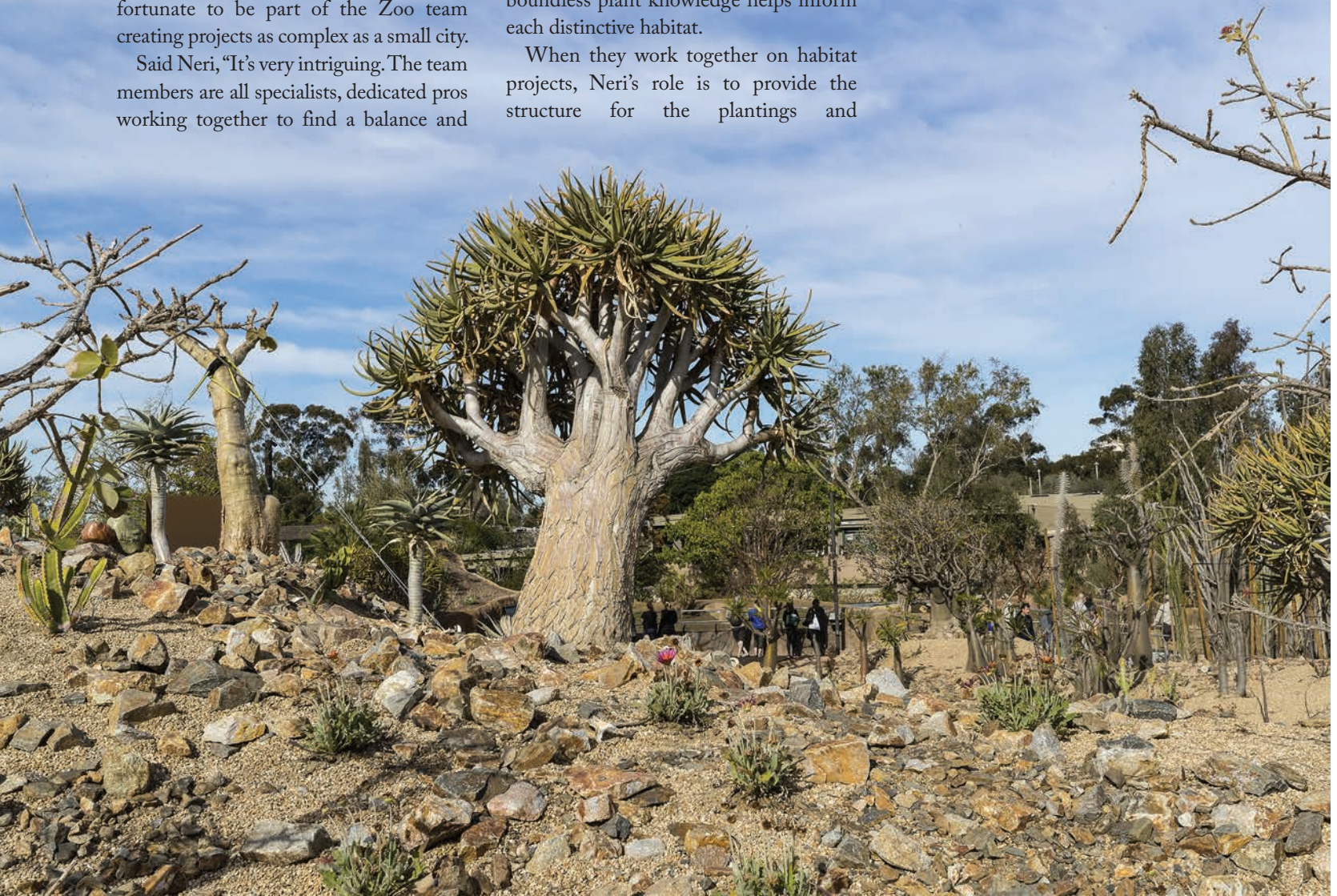
When they work together on habitat projects, Neri’s role is to provide the structure for the plantings and

Horticulture’s to flesh it out with accessioned species of plants they wish to showcase to fulfill the promise of a Zoological Garden.

“The joke is the plants are ‘on wheels’ at the Zoo and the Park because we are constantly moving them to new locations as new habitats are being created.

As a landscape architect, Neri brings many skills to the team that include planning, design, management, and nurturing of the built and natural environments in all communities including campuses, streetscapes, trails, plazas, residences, and other projects that strengthen communities.

Neri is proud of the work they’ve done at







Africa Rocks pathway

the “Heart of Africa” at the Safari Park. It is Neri’s favorite project because the barriers are hidden, visitors feel immersed, and the animals have an improved quality of life. Even though they are captive on the 32-acres they are a lot better off than they were before, he explained.

In a redo of the “Elephant Odyssey,” the elephants gained five times more space, and much more enrichment. At “Monkey Trails” there are layers of primates, and at “Africa Rocks,” eight acres are divided into six habitat zones to spotlight the amazing biodiversity found on the African continent, ranging from savanna to shore.

The Zoo’s latest addition is “Wildlife Explorers Basecamp” (formerly the Children’s Zoo), three acres of wildlife adventure that encourage young Wildlife Explorers to learn about nature, actively play, encounter new species, and develop an empathy for wildlife.

David Rice, former director of architecture and planning for the Zoo, was on the leading edge of current zoo design, which has evolved from animals in cages to world-class, award-winning habitat creations that inspire people to empathize with nature.



Landscape architect  
Jim Neri

“For better or for worse, zoos have become gene banks and as a result are receiving more funds worldwide to support their conservation efforts because so many animals are losing their habitats and their lives,” says Neri.

“If we are ever going to repopulate these endangered animals in the wild world, if we ever wake up, it gives me peace of mind that in the long term the animals could be reintroduced. In the meantime, we are providing a better environment for their individual lives than they had before.”

Neri Landscape Architecture’s office is in Pacific Beach, just a short distance from La Jolla’s Windansea Beach. Raised in La Jolla from age 6, Neri went to La Jolla Elementary and La Jolla High. He grew up on Windansea beach where he says he connected with nature. He still spends a lot of time volunteering with Friends of WindanSea, and on the beach with family

and friends.

The American Society of Landscape Architects, San Diego chapter, thanks the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Safari Park for use of their photos. ([www.sdzwa.org](http://www.sdzwa.org))



Penguin habitat



# Dusty Passport Sees Daylight in Baja

By Marlise Kast-Myers | Photos by Benjamin Myers

It had been 18 months since my passport had seen daylight. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and frankly, some level of complacency were to blame for my silenced exploration. My husband Benjamin and I had traded in airline tickets and carry-ons for tents and fishing poles to take our pack of pooches into the wild.

Four trips to the Sequoias had us on repeat, where we settled our tribe at the base of the river. It was there that we read books aloud, smoked fresh trout, counted falling stars, and bathed under cascading waterfalls. Days would pass without seeing a soul, to the point that our return to a still isolated-and-masked society was slightly depressing.

Being alone — and together — felt

right. I suppose we had the pandemic to thank for that. Pre-Covid era, we were constantly on the go, traveling internationally at least once a month for both work and play. Our assignments took us to destinations as near as Costa Rica and as far as Turkey. To date, I had shaken hands with over 85 countries, but now I was pushing my suitcase into dusty rafters instead of an overhead compartment.

Friends and family knew us as “explorers,” and many asked how we were “holding up” in the midst of global change. Ironically, we were doing just fine.

Together, we spent more time cooking, camping, and enjoying life on our farm. Benjamin invested in passion projects like leather work and motorbiking, while I returned to my first love of surfing.

Peppered throughout our travel hiatus were house renovations, property upgrades, and research on how to better live off the land. This new normal had us soaking in the present rather than clinging to the fantasy of tomorrow.

Then, on month 18, it hit. That little itch that makes you want to cross a border. Flying . . . eh, not so much. The thought of lines, masks, protocols, paperwork, and possibly quarantine had sent us checking weather conditions and surf reports closer to home. We didn't need to go far, but we did crave culture — a place where we could hear another language, taste exotic foods, and maybe even stand six-feet-together with strangers.

And there it was . . . Mexico.

Vineyards in Valle de Guadalupe







Vineyards in Valle de Guadalupe



Locally-sourced seafood from Ensenada makes its way into paella in Valle de Guadalupe.

### Crossing the Border

The neighboring country was nothing new to us, and in fact, we'd probably visited Mexico over 30 times. But this trip would be different. It would be our great resurgence, an awakening that had the potential to reignite our desire to explore.

We decided on a two-part vacation that would take us to the Baja Peninsula for a total of eight days. In between would be a weekend back home in San Diego. Part one would focus on surfing and relaxation near Puerto Nuevo, and part two on culture and cuisine in Valle de Guadalupe's wine country. Both could be easily reached by car, taking us door-to-door in less than two hours.

To avoid crowds, higher prices, and border waits, we would travel mid-week and capitalize on one of the greatest benefits of being self-employed . . . freedom. Literally days before our trip, we booked a beachfront property in the gated community of Primo Tapia. For just \$110 a night, our little casita had two bedrooms, a courtyard, and a rooftop deck. It was here where we drank margaritas and

watched the ocean swallow the sun.

It really was a magical property. Newly renovated, it had a vibrant Santa Fe-style decor with everything from artwork and cookbooks giving a proper nod to Mexican culture. Within minutes of our arrival, we were greeted by "Bill," a friendly American expat who asked us if we had come from "the dark side."

Even before we had toured our own place, he had invited us into his, expounding on the benefits of living in Mexico where beachfront property was shockingly affordable, and above all, where life was good.

We soon discovered both his claims were remarkably true. We started each morning with a surf session just out front, where waves pitched well overhead. A swell came in days before, and so, we paddled our little hearts out, committing to go big or go home.

Benjamin and I took turns surfing, one catching waves while the other patrolled our pack of pups chasing seagulls, flinging kelp, and biting whitewash. All four of our rescue dogs had originally come from

Tijuana, but this was another side of Mexico they had never experienced. It was one of triumph over adversity, where full bellies were topped with morsels of carne asada.

### Lazy Days of Naps and Surfing

Between lazy days of naps and double surf sessions, the time passed as it should — without a care in the world. The Internet was down, meaning we couldn't stream Netflix or even text for that matter. Instead, we watched the one DVD that was in the casita, Disney's "Ice Age." Generally, I'm not a fan of children's films, or even Disney for that matter, but there we were "mom and dad" next to our furbabies sprawled out with their spindly legs, pattering tails, and doggie snores.

Our routine was surf, eat, sleep, repeat. Other than a rogue surf session at famed K-38 — followed by a sushi lunch — we didn't venture far from our compound. All our meals were cooked in-house, except for that single stop at *Collectivo Surf Tasting Room*. We started with ceviche, and moved onto fish tacos, poke bowls,

and ocean-to-table sushi. The best part was that our dogs were right there, living their best lives.

Over dinner that night I asked Benjamin the question that our neighbor “Bill” probably had once asked his wife: “What do you think it would take to move here?” Obviously, we had no idea. So, we went straight to Bill.

When he told us a price range of \$80,000–\$100,000 for something comparable to our beach lodging, I couldn’t believe it. To pour sugar on the sweet deal, he told us that property tax was nonexistent.

The next day during the drive across the border, I couldn’t take my mind off Mexico.

“What if we visited once a month? . . . What if we bought a place and then rented it out in between? . . . What if we sold our home and just moved here?”

The “what if’s” hit Benjamin left and right. Back home, we opened our computers and started house hunting “just for the fun of it.” One click after another intrigued us with the idea of starting over. What we had paid for our property in San Diego, would get us a 10-bedroom coastal palace, with swimming pools and a cinema to boot.

I was consumed with moving across the border . . . that is, until I plucked figs from our tree, collected eggs from our chickens, and opened the door to our 120-year-old

antique barn that blesses thousands of people each month with community events.

We had it good, a life —within a land — that people on the other side of the fence would risk their lives for. And while I never stopped thinking about that beachfront property, I settled into the idea of what it might look like if we visited our “neighbor” a little more often.

**On to Valle de Guadalupe**

So, back into the car we went, this time to Valle de Guadalupe, 30 minutes northeast of Ensenada. From San Diego, we took the main artery of the Baja Peninsula: Highway 1. This legendary coastal road winds down from Tijuana to Los Cabos through deserts and bluffs. A faster, less scenic alternative is Highway 1D connecting Tijuana to Ensenada, and then cutting inland on Carretera 3 to Valle de Guadalupe.

Seven years earlier, we fell madly in love with “Valle,” wooed by her endless vineyards, olive groves, and architectural masterpieces along the Ruta del Vino. It instantly replaced the Tijuana grit with Mexico’s finest wines, alongside country inns, luxurious haciendas, container hotels, glamping tents, and romantic B&Bs. Setting down roots in the fertile land are prodigy chefs who transform old world charm into a rebellious vision gone right, with table-to-farm menus plunked right

in the middle of dreamy ranches.

Balancing the mixed blessings that accompany such discoveries, many locals are fighting to keep this area from becoming the next Napa Valley. Nearly 90 percent of the country’s wine production comes straight from the Valle, meaning numbers are still on the rise. In 2004, there were five wineries in production, and today there are more than 120.

Those clinging to the top of the vine are Monte Xanic, L.A. Cetto, Vena Cava, Bruma, Hacienda Guadalupe, and El Cielo. While Valle is producing some remarkable wines, it’s not easy to find them this side of the border. Some of the bigger wineries like L.A. Cetto have managed to work their bottles into BevMo, Whole Foods, and the Wine Bank in San Diego.

Designers, architects, and hoteliers are getting in on the Guadalupe action with eco-properties built beside lavender and bougainvillea hillsides that add a splash of color to patchwork lands.

Despite these perks, it’s the impressive blends that keep visitor-count high, and that kept us coming back for more. This time, we traveled sans-dogs, passing world-class boutique wineries to celebrate the eight-year anniversary of our favorite property, El Cielo (meaning “heaven”). Considered a giant among the region’s vineyards, this winery produces 15,000 cases of wine and 24 labels annually.



Boulders fronting chapel in El Cielo



Villas in El Cielo





Every villa has a fire pit overlooking the vineyards at El Cielo.

### Sampling El Cielo's Blends

Most visitors pause for the day to sample El Cielo's blends named after constellations. Behind the barrel is winemaker Jesus Rivera, responsible for much of the success of neighboring wineries where he previously consulted.

During our first visit to El Cielo, we were charmed by the elegant Chardonnay, Capricornius, and the Italian grape blend of Nebbiolo and Sangiovese. The Perseus, aged 24 months in French oak barrels, and the Orion — their most popular reds — are both worth emptying your luggage for.

And we did. Bottles were destined to clank all the way back to San Diego. We blame (and thank) the wine revelation on Latitude 32, El Cielo's restaurant named for its location on the map. This upscale eatery specializes in grilled cuts like pork belly tacos and cast-iron octopus — both of which we devoured on day one with a few glasses of wine.

That evening, we settled into our villa,

at 473-square-foot suite overlooking El Cielo's vineyards. Luxury doesn't come cheap however, with rates starting at \$400 a night for a slice of "Heaven." It truly is the closest thing to a Riviera Maya resort experience without all the traffic or the all-inclusive magnitude. In their place are 33 two-story villas framing two lakes that feed a 74-acre vineyard.

By Valle standards, rooms are enormous, with rich woods, slate floors, granite bathrooms, and décor in muted greys and beige. In addition to a private terrace, we had our own Jacuzzi, kitchen, lounge, and fireplace. Unlike many hotels in this area, El Cielo offered a shuttle, wedding chapel, concierge, 24-hour room service, and personal butlers to schedule wine tastings, bike tours, and beyond.

If the five-star digs weren't enough, the heart and vision behind it all certainly was. El Cielo is pedaling toward becoming the first carbon-neutral hotel in Valle, setting up an infrastructure for solar, grey water,

and organic certification. In the works are a spa, gym, new pool, and additional culinary services.

Until then, we would drink wine.

Oh, and pluck grapes, and hold a falcon, and stomp grapes, and join a cooking class, and then drink wine again. It was all part of our afternoon tour that was buttoned up with a visit to the wine cellar where we made our own blend.

We still have the bottle to prove it, a dark Malbec-Sangiovese named after our fur-born, "Chucho Loco" (Spanish for "crazy mutt"). While we have yet to pop the cork, it holds a place of prominence on our wine rack as a symbol of deliverance.

For 18 months, we had blissfully confined ourselves to the complacency of our private dwelling. Somehow, two destinations just across the border had broken that paradigm within a matter of eight days, reminding us of the freedom that can only come with leaving home.



El Cielo Villas



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