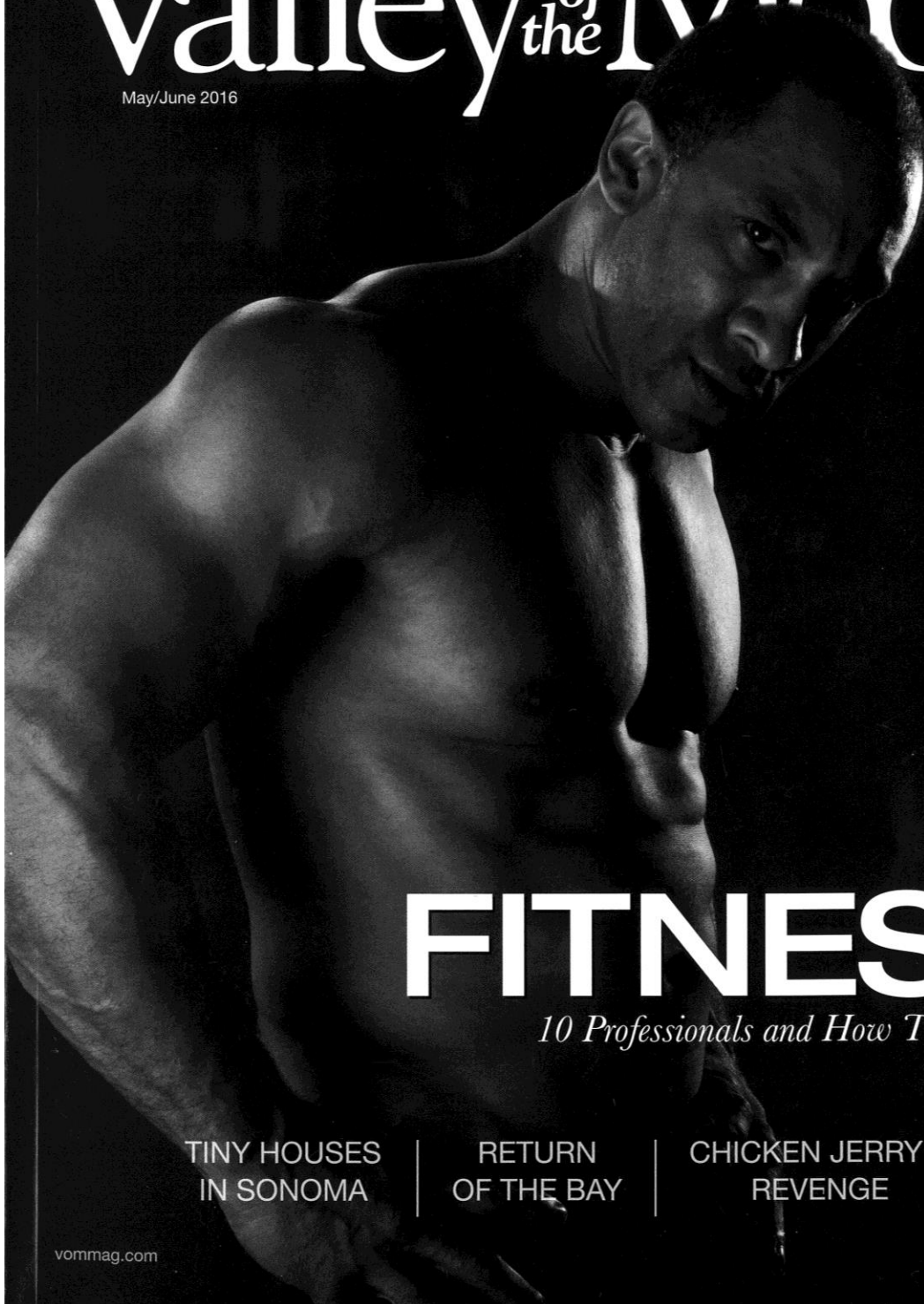


Valley *of the* Moon

May/June 2016

Sonoma Valley



FITNESS

10 Professionals and How They Do It

TINY HOUSES
IN SONOMA

RETURN
OF THE BAY

CHICKEN JERRY'S
REVENGE

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Wineries on Board for Gay Wine Weekend

Out in the Vineyard event keeps growing.

A year ago this June, the U.S. Supreme Court declared in a 5-4 majority decision on same-sex marriage, “No longer may this liberty be denied.”

Writing the majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote, “No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were.” For same-sex partners, Justice Kennedy said, the freedom to marry is an effort to achieve “equal dignity in the eyes of the law.”

Straight citizens of liberal California,

a fair number of whom may now consider the question closed and have moved on to other concerns, can be excused for thinking, “There, that’s taken care of.”

But not so fast, says Gary Saperstein, co-founder of Out in the Vineyard, a LGBT-focused event and travel company that produces the annual Gay Wine Weekend, set to unfold in Sonoma Valley June 17–19.

“We get it all the time—why do you need us?” he says. “Well, we don’t have the equality you think we have. To us, it really still is about community. We need community. We need to gather strength and support as a community. Whether it’s political or just

having fun—like Gay Wine Weekend.”

The need for that sense of community became readily apparent when Saperstein and his business partner Mark Vogler launched their first Twilight Tea Dance seven years ago at Beringer Vineyards in St. Helena.

“The first year was so successful—we had 350 people attending—we knew we had something,” says Saperstein. “So we asked ourselves, what do we do with this?” It didn’t take long to figure that out.

Saperstein had a long management tenure at Sonoma’s girl & the fig restaurant, and Vogler worked at the wine conglomerate Treasury Estates. “I was seeing the influx



of gay tourists and people moving up here,” explains Saperstein. “Mark was always getting questions about where to stay, where to go. We thought, why not marry the two together.” And so was born Out in the Vineyard.

But despite the success of that first Tea Dance, the wine industry itself was a little slow to grasp the opportunity Out in the Vineyard was offering.

“The wine industry didn’t have us on their radar. When the economy tanked, the smart businesses asked, who can we target and market to?” Apparently it took a while for the wine market to answer that question, even though, says Saperstein, “The beer and spirits industry figured us out decades ago.”

But then, he adds, “We had some gay winemakers hear about us. Mark Lyon (of Sebastiani Vineyards) was on board from the beginning.”

But the word began to spread beyond the gay winemaking community. “Michael Muscardini was one of the first vintners who approached us,” says Saperstein. “He asked, what do you need? We will support you.”

And they discovered that La Crema, a Jackson Family Wines label, decided to target the gay community with their brand. “The Jackson Family has been a huge supporter from the beginning,” says Saperstein.

And now, he says, “It has actually turned into an industry that now actively seeks an LGBT audience.”

That’s a smart bet since Gay Wine Weekend is developing serious traction and last year attracted 600 people over the three-day weekend, which combines winery tours, winemaker lunches, pool parties, after parties, entertainment and that now famous Twilight Tea Dance.

Mixed with the fun and games is a serious agenda to raise money for Face to Face/Ending HIV in Sonoma County. Since the events began, Gay Wine Weekend has raised more than \$130,000 for the nonprofit agency.

This year’s event will utilize the campus of Chateau St. Jean winery in Kenwood, where the Saturday Twilight Tea Dance will be held, while MacArthur Park in Sonoma will be the host hotel and party central for the weekend.

Saperstein says he and Vogler expect the event to continue its rapid growth, and last year Gay Wine Weekend was declared LGBT “Event of the Year” and Editor’s Choice as the best travel destination by the LGBT online travel magazine, ManAboutWorld.