



Connoisseurs on Wheels

WINE, CHEESE, AND A VINTAGE PORSCHE

BY | AMY KUNDRAT

WITH SUCCESSFUL businesses under their belt and eager to discover new sources of inspiration, Todd and Monica Brown found themselves asking a question: Could we chuck it all for a few months and hit the open road? If you're two vintage car-loving entrepreneurs who own a cheese and wine shop, the answer is an unequivocal yes.

The Browns are the husband and wife team behind No. 109 Cheese & Wine

in Ridgefield and Garage and Cellar, an automotive and wine consulting business. They split their time between their home and their two-year-old shop in Ridgefield.

Their demanding schedules give them limitless access to vintage cars and fine food but little time to enjoy them. Todd and Monica decided to challenge this great irony of their lives by taking a month off from their businesses to head out west to

spend a couple of months driving, exploring, and eating their way through the countryside. Their plan was fairly simple. Ship the car to Los Angeles, drive north through California, Oregon, Washington, cross the border to Victoria, then head back east. Throw in a few planned stops along the way to enjoy vineyards, meet-up with friends, and sample a few James Beard award-winning restaurants, and there you have it.

The central character of this trip is a restored 1963 Porsche 356 Super 90 coupe that has been in the Brown family for years. Todd's mother purchased it for his father one Valentine's Day. Todd has spent the past several years restoring the car and recent months stocking up on spare parts and upgrading the car's technology (without drilling a single hole) to escort them seamlessly on the two-month journey. Beginning in sunny Los

Angeles, the Browns took the wheel for the first few weeks and hundreds of miles following the twisty roads of Route 1, taking them from the bright and dry highways of southern California. “We followed the coastline and over the rainy mountains, to the back country roads of the valleys, such as Santa Ynez, Napa, and Willamette,” says Todd, the thrill of the open-air drive still with him. “There is a connection that occurs when driving a vintage car—a pure throwback that allows you to think clearly and appreciate the things in your life. Road trips reaffirm this.”

What seem like dozens of farm stands, wine-tasting rooms, and hidden gems make for many enjoyable and serendipitous sidetrips. On one such afternoon, a detour took them to the Classic Organics Farm Stand just off 101 on the Old Coast Highway for an afternoon snack of just-picked strawberries, which led to the Dierberg Tasting Room where they took home a 2007 Chardonnay and later a few miles away led them to a farm-to-table dinner at Root 246, a restaurant by celebrity chef Bradley Ogden. “All these new foods are opening our eyes to lots of great things that we can bring back to share with our friends and customers in Connecticut,” says Monica. Later in that week they visited San Francisco, including the iconic Ferry Building chock-full of artisanal products and then just north of the city tasting cheeses at Cowgirl Creamery in Petaluma.

These moments, both planned and unplanned, are reaffirming for the Browns as they find inspiration and taste the cheese and wine purveyors they sell on the shelves of their shop. ■

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