

Santa Barbara

MAGAZINE

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TO EARTH
ON BUTTERBEAN FARM

SHIP SHAPE
Nautical Fashions

SUZY PARKER'S
LEGACY
Model & Mother

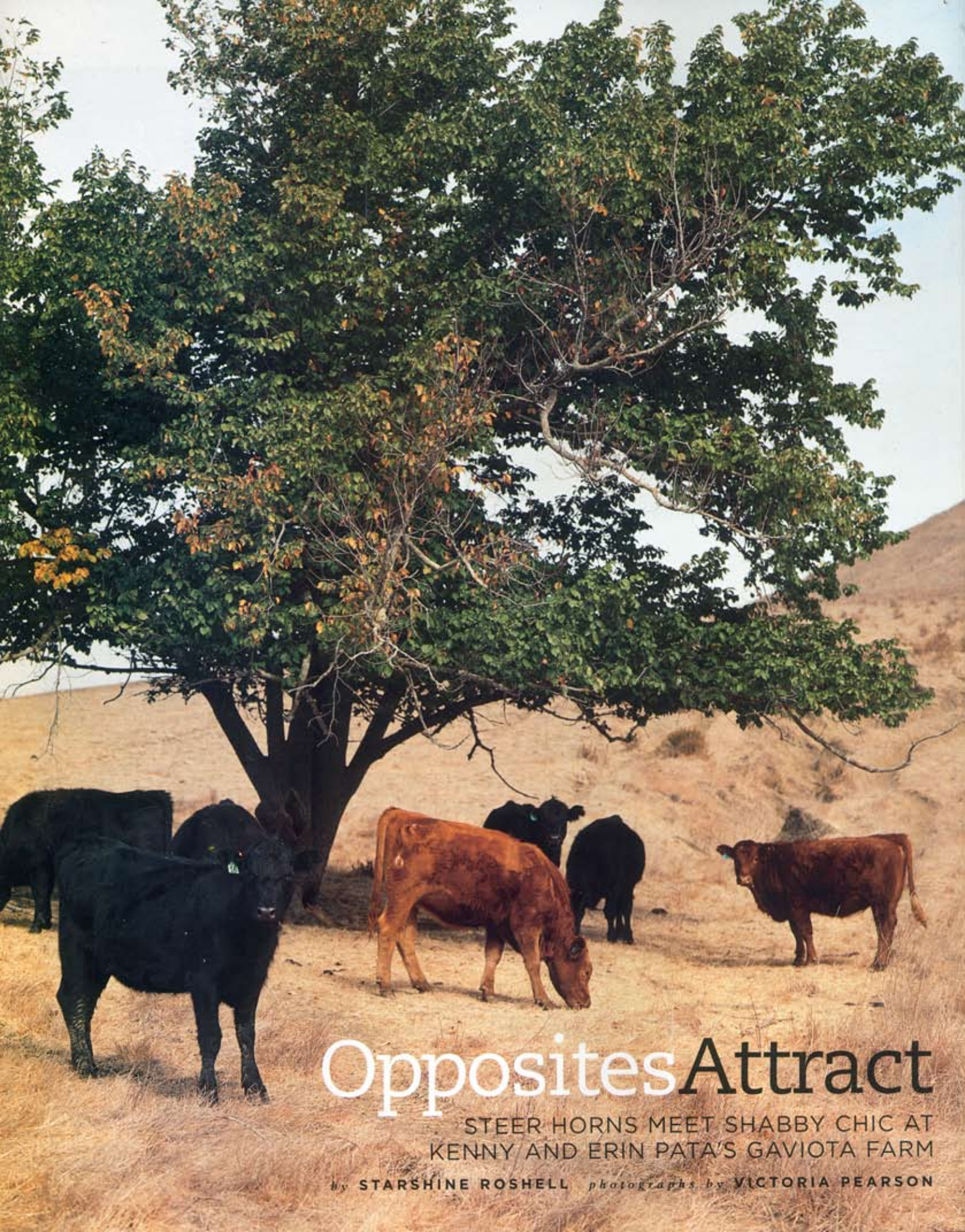
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Goleta's Claim to Fame



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Erin and Adam Pata on
their Gaviota farm



Opposites Attract

STEER HORNS MEET SHABBY CHIC AT
KENNY AND ERIN PATA'S GAVIOTA FARM

by STARSHINE ROSHELL photographs by VICTORIA PEARSON

Modern farmer's wife Erin Pata spends her days making one-of-a-kind creations in her cozy studio. OPPOSITE: Husband Kenny's cattle hold court on the family compound's 225 acres.





Garden-grown roses and glass curios adorn a bureau. OPPOSITE: Eclectic decor defines the Pata style, a light-hearted blend of found objects, cheerful prints and hand-me-down furniture.





Chandeliers and lace dress up the guest room. OPPOSITE: In daughter Anna's room, wall decor makes a playful statement while home-sewn stuffed animals cuddle on the brass bed.



T

here's something inherently funny about a place that sells both free-range cows and frilly purses. That's why, when Erin Pata opened her design business from an old dairy shed on her husband's beef and butter bean farm, she built a wink into the name and slogan—Butterbean Studios: Where Art and Farming Collide.

But the disparate passions don't seem at odds on the Pata Bros. ranch, 225 acres of rolling hills, leafy fields and oak trees between Gaviota and Lompoc. Here, where Erin stitches up chic one-of-a-kind handbags and collects eggs from the chicken coop, and where husband Kenny rounds up Black Angus steers and hand forges elegant iron hat racks, art and farming fit snugly together like the hand-hewn notches on a split rail fence.

Erin Apacki was a hotshot graphic designer in a fast-track job and Kenny Pata (pronounced pa-TAY) was a third-generation cattle rancher when they met at a barbecue on Paradise Road. He was shy with a subtle country drawl and a tendency to hide beneath his trucker cap. She was a charismatic beauty with upturned blue eyes and high cheekbones, a recent graduate of Parsons School of Design in New York City.

The furniture comes from treasure hunts to the barns,
where generations of Patas have stored their cast-offs.

Crayons litter the kitchen table, as often as not the setting for cinnamon crumb cake served straight from the oven. OPPOSITE The kitchen does double duty as the kids' drawing room.







Erin's studio reflects her passion for fabrics. OPPOSITE: For her Schmanzy women's bags and children's wear, she likes to mix new and vintage prints with colorful ribbons and whimsical trim.

He took her dancing: swing, salsa, cha-cha. "It's kind of an old-fashioned way to get to know someone," says Erin. And though she knew nothing about farming and he knew nothing about art, they fell in love, married in 1999 and spent their honeymoon on Hawaiian beaches—she in a bikini, he in jeans and steel-toed boots. Kenny, 39, has never once been on a surfboard despite his farm's proximity to the beach. "As an artist I love contrasts," says Erin, 36, who often pairs a dress with Wellingtons. "It makes it easier to appreciate something when you put it next to its opposite."

That philosophy comes to life inside the cozy, century-old farmhouse the couple now shares with their children Anna, 4, and Adam, 2. Surrounded by farmland that Kenny's father and grandfather before him tended, the home's decor is an unlikely but inviting marriage of steer horns and crystal chandeliers.

Nearly all of the furniture comes from treasure hunts to the property's cavernous barns, where generations of Patas have stored their cast-off rockers, mirrors and antique headboards. "If I ever get the shopping bug, I just go to the barn and search through stuff," Erin says, noting that she once found a collectible 1950s Charles Eames chair. "I can decorate in any time period I want to." Where her design sense struts its stuff—where history, in fact, meets ingenuity—is in her talent for "repurposing" possessions for new use.

Vintage cowboy prints appoint Adam's room, which contains a rocking horse that belonged to Kenny when he was a boy. "Adam rides it every morning, naked, with his cowboy hat on," she says. In Anna's room, the letters from old signs found at flea markets adorn the walls, and an old cupboard door has been fashioned into a child-size wardrobe. Erin transformed a silk Betsey Johnson frock into a sweet living room lampshade. The meat hook once used in Kenny's grandfather's butcher shop was reinvented as a hat rack for the kitchen, where the Patas eat three square meals a day together off of

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Following in Kenny's footsteps, young Adam hauls hay with a pint-size tractor. Opposite, Anhea and Erin check out spring arrivals in the chicken coop behind the sewing studio.



pretty, mismatched china. The frilly dishes, like the rest of the house, are used without fuss or fear. The kids are welcome to play Nerf football indoors and set weary feet and wet drinks on the coffee table, made out of a weathered old door.

Kenny, who studied agricultural engineering technology at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, chuckles when he hears Erin describe their home's look as "urban prairie." "She's done a lot of redecorating," says Kenny, who lived in the house as a child. "I think it's a comfortable style—even though everything's white. I have to change my clothes when I come in at the end of the day because I'm dirty from work." The curtains and couches may have varied over the years, but the lifestyle hasn't. "I can't see much of a difference between the way my kids are growing up and the way I grew up," adds Kenny, whose boyhood handprint is embedded in the patio cement. Anna's is right beside it.

The family eats beef stew for dinner and spends summers visiting county fairs. They pick chanterelle mushrooms in the hills and hunt for tadpoles in the nearby creek. Out in the yard, Adam rides on a toy tractor or swings on a rope that dangles from an elm. Anna grows tomatoes, pumpkins and watermelons in a small garden plot near the old dairy shed. Erin converted the shed into a cheerful art studio where she stitches up her vintage-look Schmancy line of handbags and children's backpacks while the kids take their afternoon naps. In addition to the bags, which she sells online for \$75 to \$150, she designs logos, brochures and stationery for discerning clients. "The farm completely influenced my style," she says. "Time spent rifling through old scrapbooks, boxes of notes and dusty barns awakened my love of old typefaces, vintage papers and weathered surfaces."

But if rural life inspires creativity and celebrates history, it can also ignite envy. "The only downside to the farm is trying to keep a frickin' lawn growing out here," says Erin, who pines for the verdant, manicured grass you find in suburban housing tracts. "One day, I'll just bust out and run barefoot across a lush lawn in a homeowner association. Just to get it out of my system." ■



Kenny works the land, content on his tractor. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Adam and Anna; wheelbarrows suited to young and old hands alike; the hay-bale hangout in the barn; in the shade of an old oak tree.

