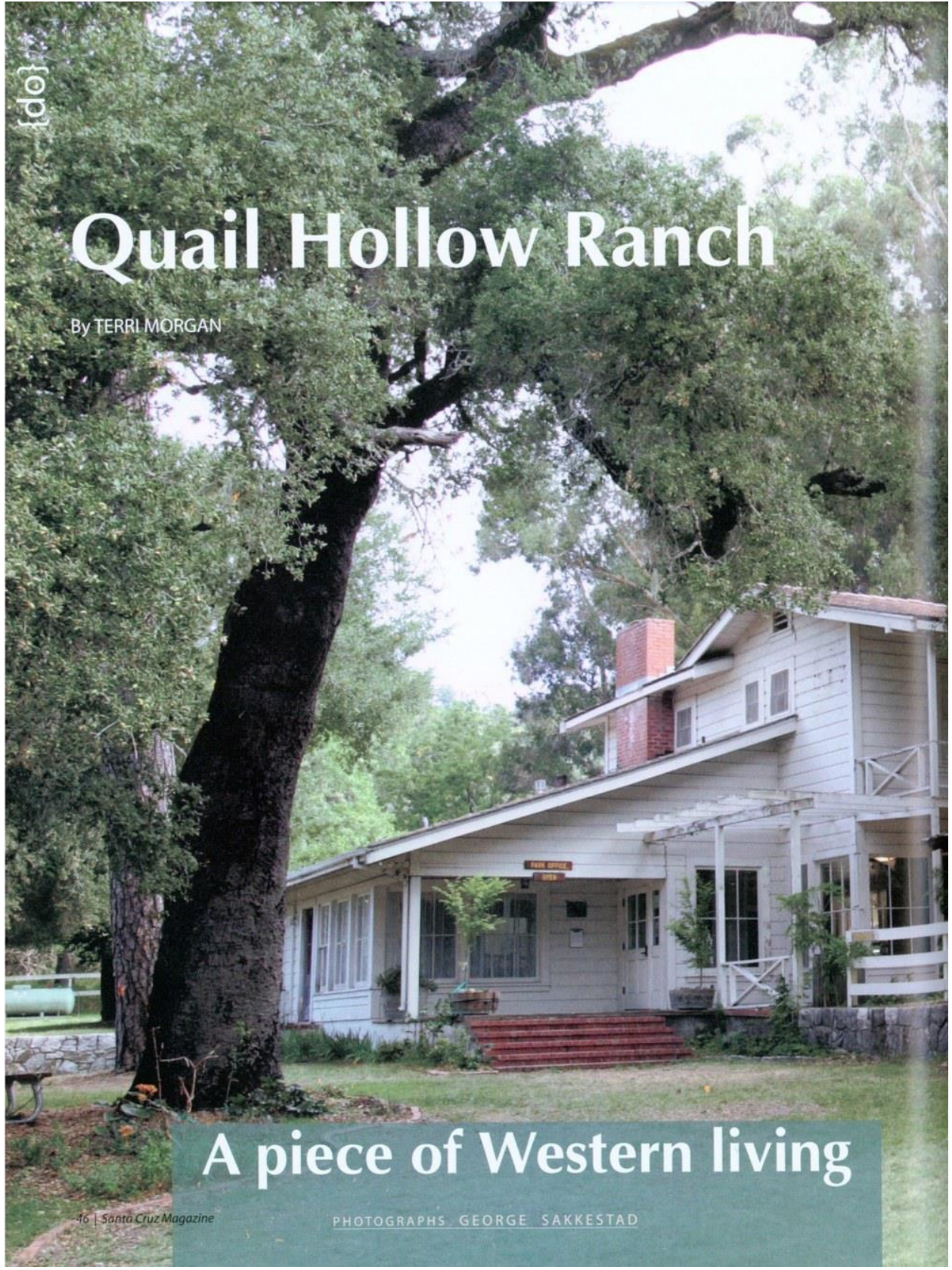


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Quail Hollow Ranch

By TERRI MORGAN

A piece of Western living



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It's a county park. It's a working horse ranch. It's a wedding chapel. It's a former Sunset Magazine office. Quail Hollow Ranch is all of those things and more.

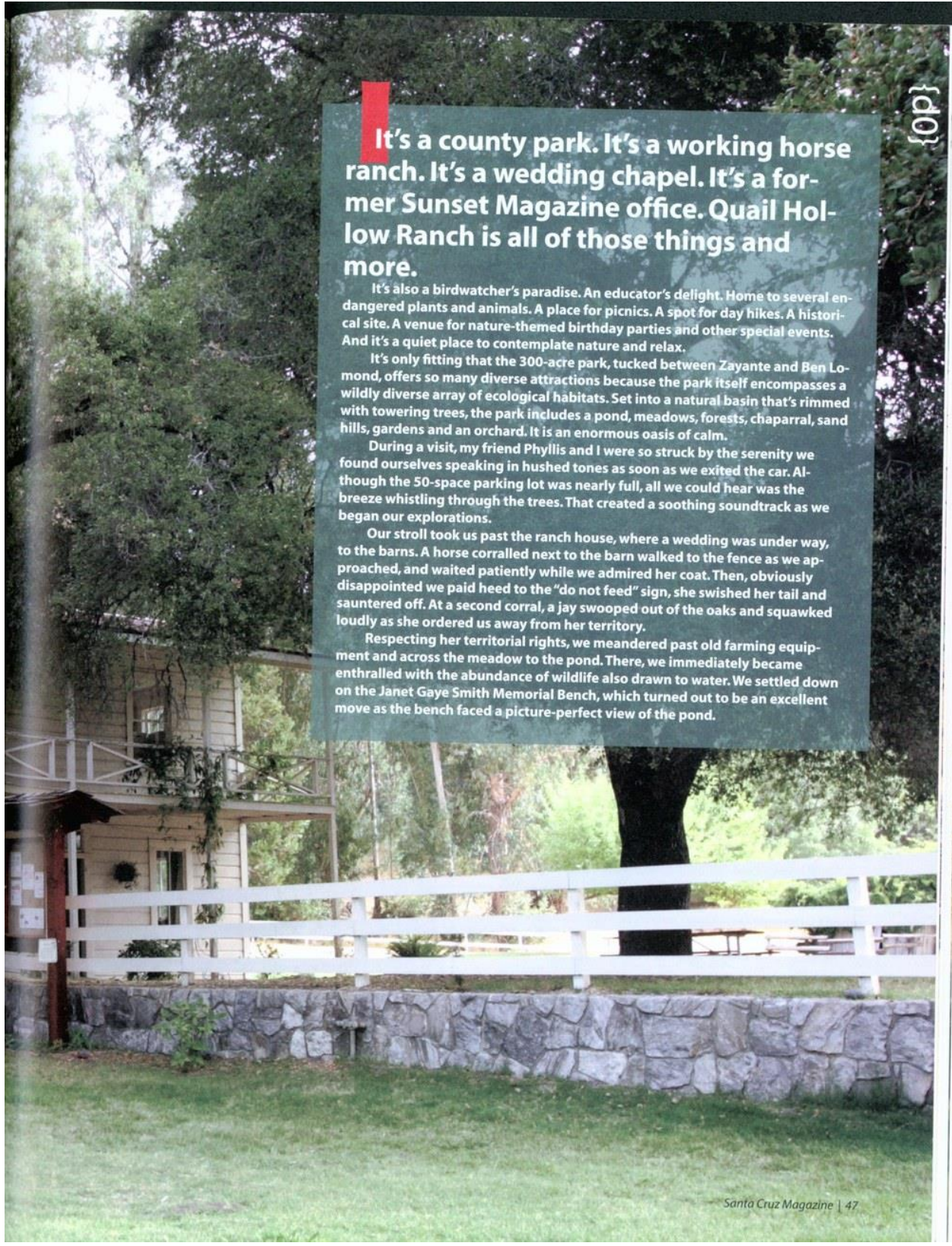
It's also a birdwatcher's paradise. An educator's delight. Home to several endangered plants and animals. A place for picnics. A spot for day hikes. A historical site. A venue for nature-themed birthday parties and other special events. And it's a quiet place to contemplate nature and relax.

It's only fitting that the 300-acre park, tucked between Zayante and Ben Lomond, offers so many diverse attractions because the park itself encompasses a wildly diverse array of ecological habitats. Set into a natural basin that's rimmed with towering trees, the park includes a pond, meadows, forests, chaparral, sand hills, gardens and an orchard. It is an enormous oasis of calm.

During a visit, my friend Phyllis and I were so struck by the serenity we found ourselves speaking in hushed tones as soon as we exited the car. Although the 50-space parking lot was nearly full, all we could hear was the breeze whistling through the trees. That created a soothing soundtrack as we began our explorations.

Our stroll took us past the ranch house, where a wedding was under way, to the barns. A horse corralled next to the barn walked to the fence as we approached, and waited patiently while we admired her coat. Then, obviously disappointed we paid heed to the "do not feed" sign, she swished her tail and sauntered off. At a second corral, a jay swooped out of the oaks and squawked loudly as she ordered us away from her territory.

Respecting her territorial rights, we meandered past old farming equipment and across the meadow to the pond. There, we immediately became enthralled with the abundance of wildlife also drawn to water. We settled down on the Janet Gaye Smith Memorial Bench, which turned out to be an excellent move as the bench faced a picture-perfect view of the pond.



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We watched lily pads slowly drift across the water with the breeze while huge dragonflies with iridescent green bodies danced overhead. A trio of orange butterflies chased each other in and out of the rushes on the banks and a snowy white egret fished for a meal. Soaking in the scene, I could feel the stress of a difficult week fade away.

Quail Hollow Ranch County Park is as rich in history as it is in nature. The Ohlone Indians lived on the site of the former Spanish Zayante Rancho. More recently, the property was owned by the Lane family, who published *Sunset Magazine*. The Lanes bought the site in 1951, after a fire damaged their Palo Alto home. The ranch house doubled as the magazine's country office. Recipes were tested in the home's oversized kitchen, and numerous editorial and business meetings for "the magazine of Western living" were conducted on the site. The gardens also served as test sites for the publication, and staff picnics were held on the grounds.

A large shaded picnic area remains adjacent to the ranch house, which has been converted into the park's visitor center. Nature exhibits are on display in the Lane's former living room, and presentations and classes are held inside a converted classroom where students of all ages can learn about snakes, bats, bees and dozens of other topics taught by naturalists, docents and rangers. 🐾



If you're going ...

What: Quail Hollow Ranch County Park.

Where: 800 Quail Hollow Road.

Hours: Sunrise to sunset.

Details: www.scparks.com/parkfac/quail.shtml.