

American Eagle Outfitters summer 2011  
advertising campaign photo shoot at Finca Bellavista

*JANUARY 19 - JANUARY 25, 2011*



*A photographic journey of finca, fashion & fun!*



April 11, 2011

**It's been a crazy couple of months for us here at FBV, and now that the American Eagle Outfitters campaign is LIVE we can finally talk openly about it!** First things first, we want to thank the American Eagle Outfitters team for choosing Finca Bellavista as the photo shoot location for its 2011 summer advertising campaign. **It's been an amazing journey and experience thus far, and we are pumped to see the campaign in its full glory—this has felt a lot like waiting for Christmas morning as a kid, only prolonged over the course of several months!**

**When I answered the initial email that came in on November 30, 2010 from AE's production company Stardust Visions, I had no idea what was really headed our way.** Though we'd started the initial processes involved with hosting photo shoots (one for a French cheese company, one for a large US retailer, one for a Costa Rican beer company) the timing has always seemed off and economic situations stymied the fruition of those opportunities. Luck is where preparation meets opportunity, and in this situation, that was the magic combo that led to a very rapid planning and implementation process for the AE shoot at Finca Bellavista this past January.

To say that being selected for this campaign has been an exciting and fun experience would be the understatement of the year! This has been the opportunity of a lifetime, and a highlight of bringing the Finca Bellavista village to the world. For me and Mateo, it has been amazing to watch our little community jump into the limelight following the steep and sometimes uncomfortable learning curves associated with bringing this community concept to life. **Since Finca Bellavista's inception less than 5 years ago, manifesting this special place has been a combination of many factors - certainly luck and serendipity. But as whimsical and magical as a treehouse community is to the outside world, there are a multitude of headaches, frustrations, and practical logistics associated that have tested us beyond our limitations. There have certainly been times when we've questioned our sanity, and whether or not this idea would ever work out!**

In the beginning stages (really just 3 years ago), we were camped out in the mud near the river with no running water, no electricity, no trails or buildings. It was a difficult and truly miserable existence living in such rudimentary surroundings in this challenging environment, always trying to collect energy and **enthusiasm to help people understand and 'visualize' what we hoped to create here. In many ways, Finca Bellavista was a figment of our imagination and it seemed an impossible dream most days.**

To come from such meager beginnings and then rise to the Times Square Jumbotron is a pretty surreal experience! **It's difficult to put into words how it feels to see the community progress like that in such a relatively short amount of time. To us, it proves that dreams can come true. We are so excited to share an inside glimpse of life at Finca Bellavista with the world through AE's advertising campaign, and hope that it brings a taste of 'treetop Pura Vida' to people all over the world.**



**Sending out good vibes and 'treetop Pura Vida' -**

Erica ( and Mateo) Hogan

*a.k.a. 'the treehouse girl' and 'the treehouse guy'*

*Founders of Finca Bellavista - a sustainable treehouse community*

[www.fincabellavista.net](http://www.fincabellavista.net)

As many of our visitors know, Finca Bellavista is a pretty modest place. Above all things, this is a private residential community, and in general, we try to keep things low-key. All of our structures are open-air, our community center has the capacity to feed a maximum of 24 people at tables, and we have 6 rentals currently available. While we have hosted large employee barbecues and festive occasions, our maximum capacity had only been tested to 35 people prior to the American Eagle Outfitters photo shoot.



When the opportunity to host **AE's photo shoot** came to us in December 2010, we questioned whether it was even possible to host their projected crew of 50 to 60 people. It was overwhelming at first to think of feeding an army that size from a kitchen with no refrigeration, very limited storage capacity, and only one cook! But where **there's a will there's a way**. If we were doing this, we wanted

**the AE crew to leave with a true taste of what the finca was like, and experience the 'down home' vibe** that we have become accustomed to providing guests from our daily lives here.

We had a little over a month to prepare for the AE crew, and it seemed unlikely that we would be able to pull it off in the beginning stages. We signed the photo shoot contract on Christmas Eve day, with no exact shoot dates set. The rough timeframe was sometime between mid and late January, 2011. For the production teams, a bevy of schedules (something like 48 people) had to coincide with the dates that **AE's summer wardrobe would be completed and could potentially be on site for a shoot, including all possible disasters involving Costa Rica customs and importing!** That date kept getting pushed back forth, and the shoot dates finally landed on January 23, 24, and 25, 2011.

Luckily for us, a little bit of planning and a lot of determination can go a long way! Though we were late to the party in preparing for such a large group, we miraculously threw things together relatively quickly. Savage Jungle Chef Jef prepared a **\*Finca Fresh\*** menu for the week, each meal showcasing an ingredient **from the finca's gardens**. From banana pancakes to spinach and basil lasagna, we were lucky that a specialized menu could be crafted from our growing availability of garden offerings. The most difficult aspects in doing any-



thing here in the Southern Zone is finding practical implements, so finding serving equipment for a group of 60 consumed quite a bit of time leading up to the event. I chuckle when I think about the fact that Happy Hours were, indeed, served out of lined metal buckets and nobody seemed to notice! (It must have been casual chic enough to serve the purpose.)

Our garden and landscaping crews spent the weeks prior to the shoot cleaning off trails, cutting back bushes and plants, and beautifying the grounds. **We've found that it's pretty hard to improve upon what Mother Nature offers here at the finca, but there's always a fair amount of maintenance going on to keep the gardens picturesque and producing food.** We wanted to amplify the colors and textures around the trails and in the gardens in hopes that they would complement photo backgrounds. Our carpenters busied themselves with a list of treehome beautification projects as well. We had no idea **whether the top of our treehouse would be in AE's photos, but knew there was a chance.** The thought of an unsightly roof patch or tarp showing up in a magazine spread motivated everything on the 'what if' list to get done too!



I think it's safe to say that the majority of our crew likely had no idea what was headed our way on the shoot days. They knew to show up earlier than normal wearing their 'finca' t-shirts on their much-deserved days off. And while they knew that something was brewing that would bring a lot of people and attention to the finca, I don't think they had a clue how fun it would be and how widespread the

**coverage of American Eagle's campaign would be...** It was fun to watch their understanding and anticipation grow along with ours.

SCOUT DAY 1 - WEDNESDAY, January 19th

The first scout day, it poured down rain. Not just sprinkling rain, but pouring buckets of rain. January is historically the driest month of the year in our immediate area, and hence, the best time to schedule something like a weather-dependent photo shoot.





**Mentally, this didn't bode too well for those of us that were praying for sunshine and clear skies for the duration of the shoot!** The first scout day was primarily the production crew from Stardust Visions and several of the creative directors from AE. It seemed like everyone took the terrible weather in stride, yet the undertone seemed a bit grim on that first scout day.

Logistically speaking, Finca Bellavista can be a difficult place to properly explore, even with perfect weather. The scout days are especially important here, as there are a multitude of locations to choose from for photographs. Paring down the options can be difficult, and hitting all the highlights in a day with good weather is impossible. **When considering 'the best' shots and picturesque locations for photos, there are multiple things to consider in order to get that 'perfect shot'.**

#### #1 Light

Determining when the light might hit a certain location is difficult in a **river canyon, especially under the rainforest canopy!** There's usually a very short timeframe that the sun is good on a certain location.

Through years of exploring and working on site, the FBV crew has a pretty good idea of what areas might have the most favorable light at any given time of the day. For instance, the porch of a certain tree-house and its vistas may be best lit in the afternoon hours given the direction the porch faces. Trying to hit all of those areas at the appropriate times is matter of tight scheduling, and hoping the weather cooperates at that exact point in time to get the desired look and shot was certainly not in the cards on the first scout day.



#### #2 Dangers

It is the jungle after all. **Though the jungle and its inhabitants aren't inherently dangerous, a snake** that gets stepped on might be tempted to defend itself. Our visitors from Manhattan might not be hyper-aware of the fact that there are snakes nearby, or handle seeing them very well. So, we try to prepare everyone for some of the dangers present, and shield them from having to deal with



**them. One of my jobs as a guide was to 'chase out'** any potential dangers where models needed to be— i.e. stomping around in brush-covered areas to ensure there wasn't a pit viper where a beautiful model needed to be standing for that 'perfect shot'.

### #3 Travel time

The finca is large - over 300 acres in size, with trails and treehouses and hidden features all over the place. Getting from point A to point B to point C can take time, but with an entourage of up to 60 in tow, it takes a lot of planning and organizing as well.



The first scout day was meant to be a good example day for the photo and production crews to see what the possibilities were at specific times of the day and how

we might best schedule the shoot days ahead. But the weather showed no mercy in accommodating that goal. But, it was a day filled with touring and pointing, discussing logistics, and figuring out just how to get the majority of the crew accommodated properly at each site. Luckily, the creative and production crews could see through the weather and recognize the possibilities present.



January 20th, 21st - **These were 'off days' for the AE crew** because we had a previously scheduled press visit and photo shoot with Mother Earth News and Natural Home magazines... **the weather was only mildly cooperative both of those days for us, but we managed to get everything we needed in!** The AE production team had plenty of things to do on those days. Their base of operations was at a hotel in Golfito, and the majority of the crew arrived in those days for fittings, and to better organize prior to the shoot days.

### SCOUT DAY 2, FRI DAY, January 22nd

**The weather didn't let up entirely until the afternoon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> scout day. John and Ray of 'Photo Team A' joined the fun and we at least had an opportunity to get John out on the ziplines to show him the bird's eye perspective of the Mis Ojos treehouse, the waterfall out front, and the Rio Bellavista corridor. He was visibly stoked about the angles and photo opps he knew he was going to get in the following days. And we were too!** Though we've worked quite a bit with publications, the majority of them have focused on the architectural or natural aspects of the finca. This would be our first run at providing a backdrop for a fashion photo shoot, so we were interested to see how the whole process would differ, which ended up being an entirely different world!

### PHOTO SHOOT DAY 1 - SATURDAY, January 23

Our work days always start early here at the finca. The birds start **their symphonies between 4:30 and 5 a.m., and it's tough to sleep** through such songs. Our employee meeting is normally at 5:45 a.m. each morning, and our employees drive their motorcycles in from neighboring villages. Some of them wake at 4 a.m. to get to work on time, and they are NEVER late to work. On the first day of the photo shoot, the AE





crew started filtering in to the finca 'base camp' at 4:30 a.m., so I can only imagine how early they had to wake up at the hotel in Golfito in order to get here!

The production crew showed up at 4:30 to start setting up hair, make-up, and wardrobe in the rancho at base camp. While we never envisioned such a use in our modest rancho (an occasional yoga session or movie night is about the max), it worked out perfectly to serve as the base of operations for the wardrobe (and accompanying seamstresses, stylists, and merchandisers), the glam crew (hair and make-up) and the creative crew. The creative guys wanted

to make jewelry and accessories from some of the natural elements here (I call it 'Jungle Bling'). It was nice that there was finally a chance to use all of the jungle 'junk' I've been collecting over the years - seeds, nuts, feathers, rocks, fossils, shells - and make cool things out of them.



Base camp is usually pretty 'tranquilo' or calm, save for timeframes when infrastructure work is being performed. Three-ring circus might be the most appropriate term to describe base camp throughout the whole AE shoot week. Our parking lot was full for the first time ever, Jef and Frances were cranking non-stop in the kitchen, wardrobe and glam were continuously spitting out well-dressed models from the rancho, and the FBV office was turned into ground zero for the crews to communicate



with one another via radio. On a regular ole' day, it's really difficult to imagine that a huge crew of nearly 60 people was here for almost a week! We learned that for large-scale productions like this one that insurance would naturally be involved. In this case, the insurance company sent a meteorologist—a guy that basically sat in the shade with a measuring cup waiting for it to rain. (If it rained a certain amount, the insurance would kick in to cover the production costs and pay for an additional shoot day).





It seemed like Team FBV took their newfound responsibilities in stride and with pride. These are guys (all certifiably country boys!) that make no fuss on a **'normal' work day**. **'Normal' for them** is hauling gravel on their backs to build trails, hanging from harnesses building treehouses in the pouring down rain, or building drainage ditches in the searing tropical sun. They are salt-of-the-Earth, humble, happy fellows that we have been lucky to find and watch grow in their duties here at FBV. It was a treat to

watch them gingerly guide the beautiful ladies up and down the river corridor in lieu of their typical **daily duties!** (It's a tough job, but somebody's gotta do it, right?)

Mateo and I both acted as the points of contact between the FBV crew and the production crew, so we each had 2 radios going non-stop almost 20 hours per day. The best word to describe the all-day scenario **for us was 'nonstop'**.

We polished off shoot day one with a Happy Hour, and a handful of the AE crew stayed for dinner. Several opted to stay overnight and experience an evening in the treehouses. We made a late-night renegade run to drop folks off safely at their treehouses, which was pretty fun. A side note here: while we are used to having guests all the time at FBV, most of them make a conscious decision to vacation here. The entire AE crew was here for work, not play, which we thought **might contribute to the 'freak out factor' we get from**



many city dwellers. Instead, it seemed like the AE crew really enjoyed their time here and were grateful to experience the jungle first-hand. Some of the girls had a slumber party in one of the treehouses, and I sat up chatting with Austin and got to see his face light up at the sight of his first lightning bug. (Note to self from then on out, going to sleep at midnight and waking at 4 a.m. is not conducive to operating efficiently during a 20-hour work day!)



PHOTO SHOOT DAY 2, SUNDAY, January 24

Regardless of the sleep-deprivation factor, the entire crew seemed to take it in stride the following day. Though most of the crew seemed a little slow to wake in the morning, the photo teams were chomping at the bit to make the best of the second shoot day and fill it to the

brim. It was mesmerizing to watch the photographers work their magic. John and Ray are animals - **sun up to sun down, I don't think either one** of them stopped for a minute. Trying to get a grasp on what must be going through their brains, calculating every angle, the light refractions, the backdrop to each shot, getting the models 'just right' seems to be an underappreciated art form generally speaking. These guys cranked up the energy to a tangible level and kept the crew pumped up.



It seemed easier to pump up the energy since there was a Bose Boombbox in tow at each shoot location! It was a finca first to have an entourage of 20-30 people walking the trails to the latest tunes blaring from a radio. It occurred to me how comical it must be to the jungle critters to watch a herd of humans tromp through the forest like that. **We've always called the happenings here 'The Extended Finca Family Traveling Junk Show Extravaganza' because you never know who or what you're going to get, but it always seems to work out.** This put a new spin on it, certainly.



**It was full day, followed by another fun Happy Hour. Because AE's corporate headquarters are based in Pittsburgh, there were (of course) a handful of dedicated Steelers fans on hand. That night was the AFC Championship game between the Steelers and the NY Jets. You can imagine why the die-hard fans were on the first shuttle back to the hotel in Golfito! The evenings proved to be a great time for me and the rest of the FBV crew to get to know some of the people that came in for the shoot. It was fun hearing everyone's stories and feeding on the fresh energy of a youthful, successful, well-traveled and fun crew. Those that were left behind to enjoy that evening included the three male models, Jae, Henry and Austin. They were such sweethearts. It was surprising to find that all three were 'accidental' models as they all looked custom-built for male modeling careers. Apparently, Henry walked right off the Armani runway in Paris before visiting the jungle here, where he seemed totally comfortable. I don't believe that any of them were acting when they were playing in the rivers and on the**



ziplines, they were so naturally in their element while at the finca (Just boys having fun, really). When Austin met Kimbo, our English bulldog, he was thrilled because he has one at home. I about died when Kimbo almost (playfully) bit his face when they were playing the first night. (It would be **just our luck that Kimbo would maim one of the model's faces, right?**)



The ladies were gems too. Jessica, a native Costa Rican, gave our employees an interesting perspective on the whole shoot - they loved the fact that she was Tica! (a native Costa Rican) It seemed like she really enjoyed being back at home in Costa Rica. A couple of months later, it was cool to pick up a Sports Illustrated Swimsuit edition and see her smiling face. And Jarah, **while beautiful in any picture she's in, looks just as amazing at 5 o'clock in the morning, pre-makeup, pre-coffee.** She has an inner glow that shines bright (she could wear a burlap sack and still be stunning) and a soul to match.

#### PHOTO SHOOT DAY 3, Tuesday, JANUARY 25

The final day was reserved to capture the video portions of the campaign. It was a fast-moving day that revisited all of the favorite spots from the previous two days. While it was the wrap-up day for the AE crew, it seemed to be the most physically demanding day for the FBV crew.



In general, the elements involved with facilitating a video shoot versus a photo shoot are much more complicated for us. A good example is not only providing a safe experience for the videographer on the ziplines getting footage of Mis Ojos, but making sure the gigantic 50-lb video camera is steady and acquiring smooth footage. In that regard, several days of watching Mateo in his aerial element **was pretty cool. He's a natural charmer, and seeing him act as the braking and drive-train mechanism for John while filming from the ziplines** was impressive. His small frame pulled John (and that \$150,000 RED camera!) back and forth across the Mis Ojos treehouse cable dozens of times to get the video coverage on the final day.



There was a pig roast and a 'Happy 3 Hours' to send the crew off after the final day of shooting. It was a successful week altogether - the crew got the footage they needed for the campaign, there were no injuries or accidents, and everyone had a good time.

**It's safe to say that our crew** was beyond exhaustion. Several of our employees lingered after

the AE crew left to savor the relative amounts of silence, share a few cocktails and some stories, and bask in knowing that we had pulled off a huge accomplishment in facilitating the shoot. Not bad for a bunch of country mice!

#### WAITING IN ANTICIPATION

**It's been an exciting experience to be involved in not only the** photo shoot, but in anticipating and preparing for the exposure involved with such a massive advertising campaign. Though FBV has had its fair share of exposure in magazines, newspapers, television shows, and in online media, everything pales in comparison to being featured on a Times Square Jumbotron for an extended period of **time! AE's rollout of its campaign in various mediums**—internet, television, print advertising, in-store advertising, sweepstakes, direct email, and social networking—have a combined daily exposure that reaches millions of people. For Team FBV, we get to experience whatever lies ahead... without knowing 100% sure what to expect.



**In speaking with the creative directors and crew at AE, the feedback we've received on the quality and message created within the campaign has been very positive.** They are anticipating that it will hit a sweet spot across the board with their clientele, and they seem just as eager as we do to see what happens in terms of gauging its success. Regardless, the journey has been the adventure for us, and we have memories and an experience to last our lifetimes.





At a minimum, this campaign will give thousands of people across the world an inside glimpse of what being at the finca is like, and hopefully **they can feel the joy of being in a treehouse vicariously through AE's models.** If the sight of an FBV treehouse brings a smile to someone's face at a mall in Minnesota or a street corner in Hong Kong, it will certainly be worth every ounce of effort invested thus far!

