

the mother to many of Crockett's unique crossbreeds. In addition to the squat, emerald-green vintage Afghani to one side and a truly old-school Skunk from the '80s growing nearby, these Hazes form the basis for the genetic treasure hunts that Crockett will often set off upon, wherein he'll grow small amounts of plants in search of a "diamond in the rough," as he calls it. From there, he'll log its crystal content, flowering time, bud density and other characteristics,

strain at a time in large grow spaces, he often stashes a unique outlier, such as a stubby Thai x Santa Marta Gold with massive buds, in the corner. "If you want to talk about F1 crosses with heirloom varieties, this is it right here," he gushes.

The next day, Crockett takes me to his own house further down the valley at a 1,000-foot elevation. In his outdoor garden, he is growing his current pride and joy, the citrus-scented Tanj. He urges me to rub the buds and then sniff my fingers.

between the *indica* and *sativa* highs. Crockett calls it "the most resin-producing, hash-producing plant I've ever seen."

And there's more. Stashed away in another room are 22 mother plants set aside for cloning and breeding purposes. In this particular room, he's got Ghost OG, Girl Scout Cookies, LA Confidential Shrom (a Santa Marta Gold x Romulan), Tanj and Kosher Kush—but if you throw in the holdings of his inner circle, Crockett has access to over 100 different strains. And despite numerous offers, Crockett stresses that his phenos ain't for sale. "We want to be the only people that have these," he says.

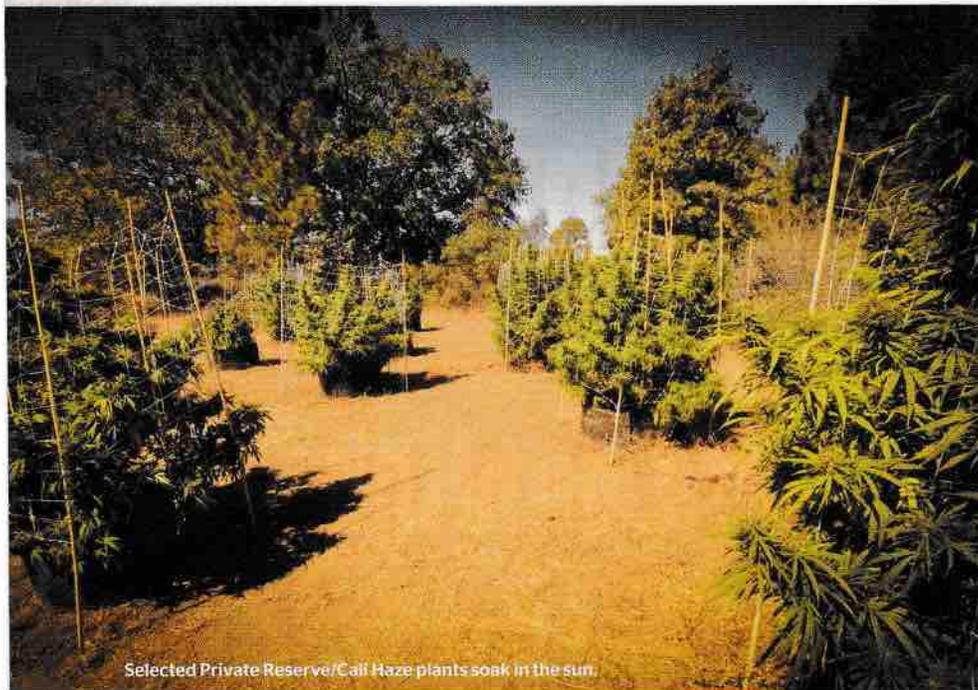
Wrong Side of the Fence

Right now we're driving in Crockett's pick-up truck, scouting the area for the Central Valley's most painfully obvious grow ops. Since the medical boom, growers from all over the country—let's call them "turkey-baggers"—have moved into the area to set up super-gardens that piss off the local community and infuriate law enforcement. These are the pests that Operation Mercury (named after the Roman messenger god) was meant to send a warning to. Apparently that message didn't get through, since even the grade-schoolers can see the cannabis plants from their school buses as they're being dropped off. Hell, they might even be tending their own gardens before homework, since these days, thanks to the horrible economy, *everybody* grows.

Most of the gardens visible from the car are huge, towering entities, but they're not the turkey-baggers', and they're definitely not the cartels', who opt for a far more austere aesthetic. In keeping with the quasi-Third World provenance of their operations, the cartel growers will wall off multi-acre parcels of land with anything they can get their hands on—corrugated tin, abandoned plywood, cloth—then spray-paint it a forbidding black color. These makeshift walls are erected right against the property line of their neighbors; this way, the Americans on the other side can get a taste of what it's like to live near a big, vicious fence with tons of armed, hostile xenophobes protecting it.

Crockett points to some white dots scattered along the mountains in the background. "They've got lookout trailers all over the back of the mountains," he says.

I ask the obvious question: "If it's so obvious where the cartels are, then why are they still in business after Operation Mercury?"



Selected Private Reserve/Cali Haze plants soak in the sun.

then mate it with other plants to see what develops. Not all of these experiments pan out: Inside the cabin is one so-so result destined for the hash/dabs pile once it's trimmed. But this garden is filled with many testaments to his overall effectiveness.

"Nowadays, for me, what's important is taste and smell, even over potency," Crockett confesses as he shows me some of the other unique crosses on this territory. There are two varieties of Blueberry, one crossed with the Afghani and the other with the OG Skunk, and there's also a Purple Wreck x Cannalope Haze, a crazy quilt of Granddaddy Purple, Trainwreck and Cannalope Haze from DNA Genetics that Crockett is testing for the outdoors. A roofless cinderblock enclosure houses a few dozen Tropicali plants (Cali Haze x Monterey Haze), and outside the enclosure, Crockett is breeding an experimental Tropicali x Afghani F1. While Crockett prefers to harvest one

"Smells like oranges," he says with understated pride. This particular variety is a perfect example of Crockett's "diamond in the rough" strategy. Initially growing out 200 Orange Velvet seeds from the Pacific Northwest, he selected 50 females and crossbred them with Candy Jack, winnowing the offspring down to five; then, after two years of narrowing them down even further, his crew came up with a plant that yields three to five pounds. Crockett has big plans for this one: He'll start growing an indoor batch for his next harvest and also intends to enter a wax in next year's *High Times* Medical Cannabis Cup in LA, alongside a Blackberry and an as-yet-unnamed Purple OG strain.

In the meantime, Crockett's indoor grow is occupied by Private Reserve. Essentially a mix between a seven-year Ghost OG strain and a Skunk Haze at least two generations its senior, Private Reserve hits that sweet spot located

"Operation Mercury was a joke," Crockett replies. "They made it all up to scare most people to pull their crops at the beginning of the year. That's why they held it in April and May. But it was all a big lie."

He looks into the valley past his dirt-speckled windshield and a sky that was once flooded with DEA helicopters, and we soon pass a gardening store that arranges Fiskars tools and turkey bags into showy in-store displays come harvest time. The poverty in this area is as real as it is in the city, Crockett insists, and the War on Drugs is fought mercilessly against those born on the wrong side of the fence, no matter where they live. Yet they manage to survive all the same, thanks to cannabis.

"It's one of the biggest economic boosts in this area as long as I've been alive," he says. "There's nothing else that's come up here and gave so many people jobs and money—not even the Parks Service. Law enforcement forgets that before we put all that medical marijuana out on the stage, we were still fucking doing it. They couldn't stop us before."

A Puff of Smoke

"That's the guy from *High Times* over there," the cashier motions. I've kept my ID on the DL for the most part, but safe areas like this can be found all over the Sierras.

"No kidding!" Cormac rasps as he saunters over to my stool. He's a doughy, aging hippie with a receding hairline and ponytail. "Did you know there was a shootout over in front of the church at Miramonte?"

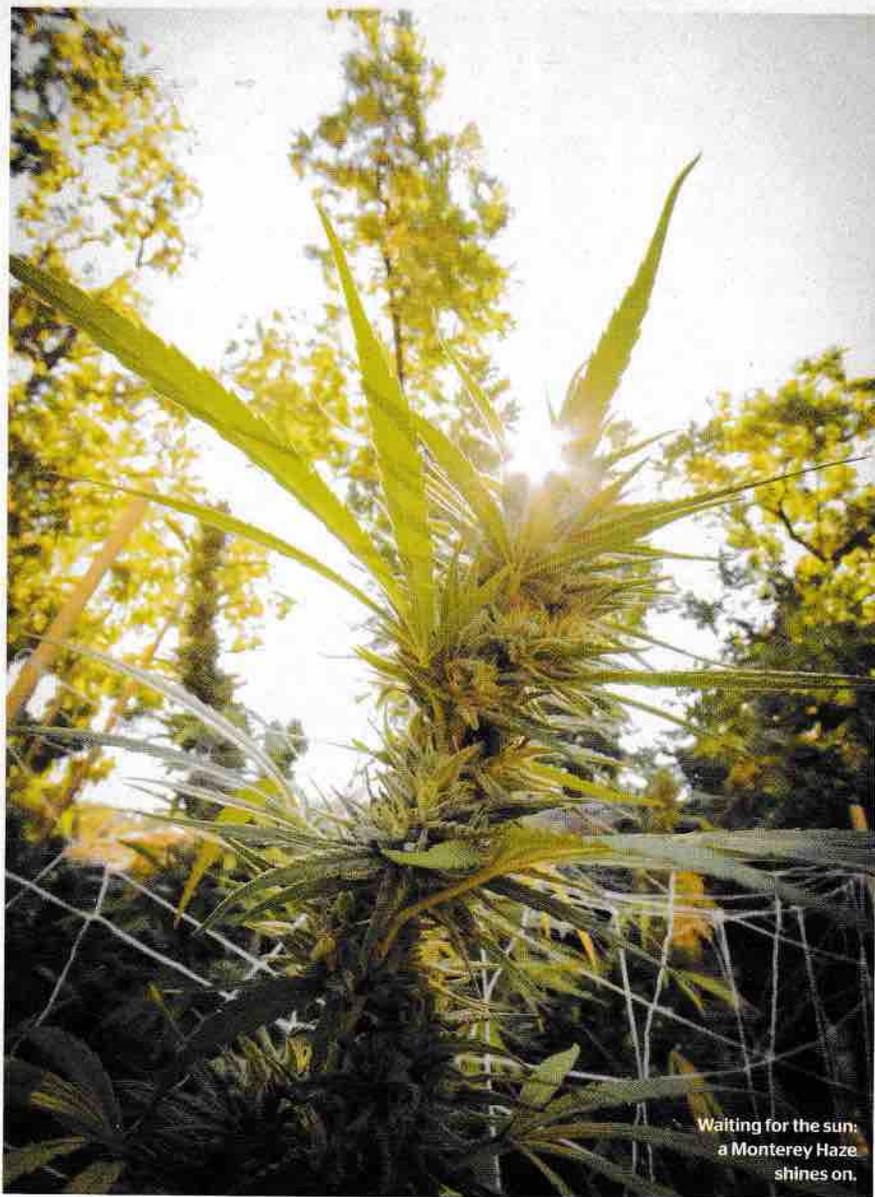
"No," I gasp.

"Yeah, it was cartels—some sort of rip-off. Took five females, but they had at least 500 plants growing there." He shakes his head, hands me a filtered joint and launches into a classic get-off-my-lawn tirade about the new jacks in the game. "Of course, you wanted to make your money back then, but it was about more in those days. Nowadays, these kids have no respect for what we built up here."

The door opens and a much younger visitor joins Cormac. He's a good-natured, working-class, skateboard-and-tats type of bro from San Diego who's checking out another harvest in the area. He's convinced that he's hit the mother lode with the buds he's accessed through Cormac. There's just one problem, though: "Wouldn't you like to see some girls around here?"

"Yeah, sure!" Cormac agrees.

"Well, I know these strippers—totally



Waiting for the sun,
a Monterey Haze
shines on.

business, but they'll come up, trim your weed, party with us. There's this one Puerto Rican I know, I always call her up. For a few hundred and a few pounds, she'll bring her friends over, they'll go down on each other ... it'll be a blast." He later talks about a trip he's arranging to Machu Picchu to research whether aliens helped the Incas construct the ancient compound. It all sounds like an old *In Search of ...* TV show narrated by Larry Flynt instead of Leonard Nimoy.

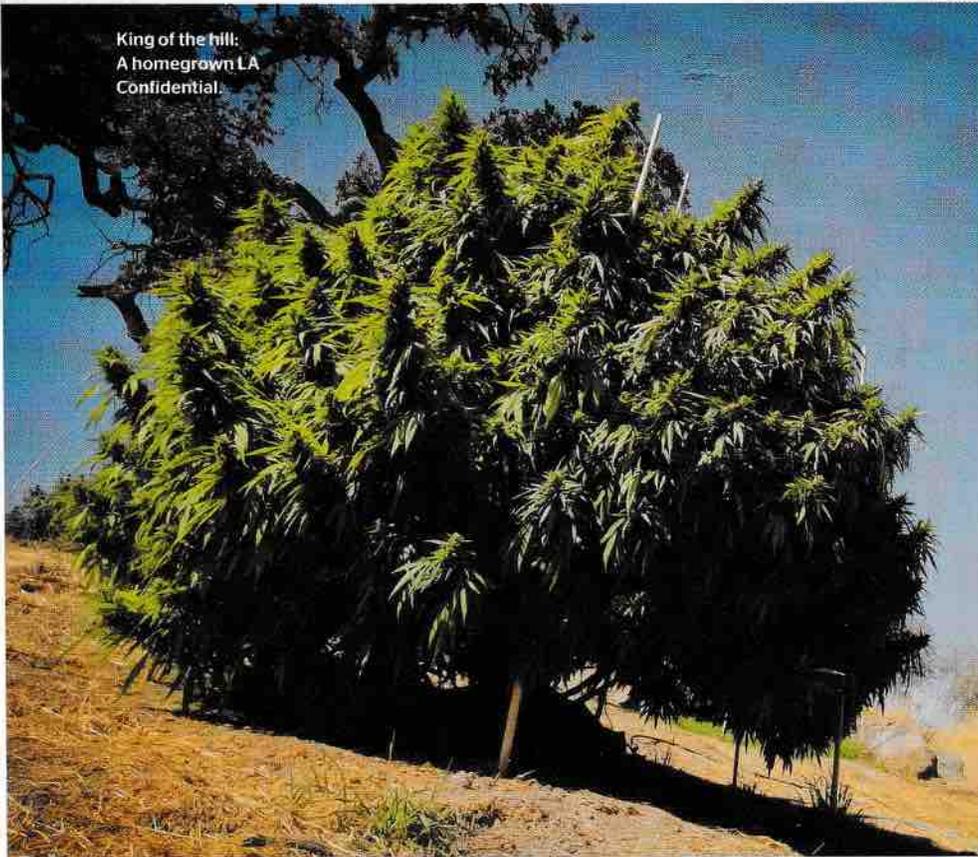
Later that day, I run into Crockett and tell him about my encounter with Cormac. He chuckles to himself. "I guess you ran into some of the local color after all," he says. Apparently Cormac has been known to part ways with the truth at times, since no shootout ever took place in front of the church at Miramonte.

"Word travels fast in the mountains," Crockett assures me. I mention the joint he gave me and, after inspecting it a bit, Crockett rewards Cormac's product with a noncommittal shrug.

These mountains have no shortage of characters, and their history goes largely untold. Heading out to Crockett's first-ever growroom in the mountains, which he still operates alongside his high-school buddy Tubbs, my knowledgeable host shows me Polaroids of some foundational outdoor grows from the '70s. In the faded shots, a spectral hippie earth mother poses in front of mammoth pot stalks almost twice her size—which was about five-foot-eight, I'm told. "That was back in the days before helicopters," Crockett observes.

One can't look at these photographs

King of the hill.
A homegrown LA
Confidential.



without feeling wistful. Back in the days when Polaroid film wasn't some über-expensive hipster fetish, *only* hippies grew this crop in this territory, and it's easy to understand Cormac's sorrow for what was lost. "Back in the day, the growers and even the smokers here were elite. They all knew each other," Crockett recalls. "Now there's just so many people growing and smoking, you can't keep track of everything—you just know either the real big guys or the people you've known forever."

Still, the sort of genetic tinkering coming out of Crockett's gardens and growrooms in the Sierras would have been unthinkable even 10 years ago, back when plants were grown under suboptimal lighting beneath thick arboreal canopies in the parks. "It's kind of nice to be able to just do your dream, like, 'Okay, I'm gonna bring a tractor in and I'm gonna dig a hole, and I'm gonna build a raised garden ... and I'm gonna grow a five-foot plant and veg in May,'" Crockett says. "You can take them to their potential instead of having to harvest them early because some emergency came up."

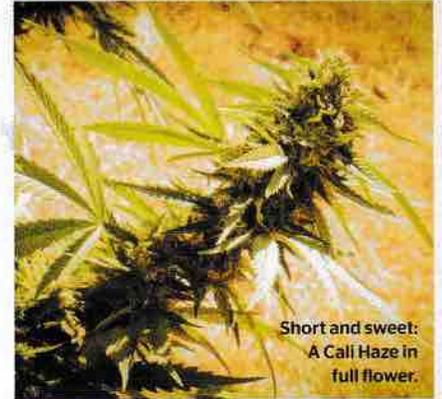
Majestic

A throng of European tourists and American retirees snaps photos of the General Sherman tree in Sequoia National Park. This tree, along with the nearby General

Grant tree in the Kings County section of the park, lord it over their sequoia brothers as the biggest, baddest and oldest of their kind. One of the signs along the way remarks on the time-honored reason that some sequoias reach this stature, while others die after a century having grown very little: "Location! Location! Location!"

The same could be said for Crockett's plants. His Cali Haze, which used to flower dangerously close to December, now comes in around November, thirty years after its introduction to the mountains. "Somehow the plant has known to come in earlier to survive," Crockett marvels. Over time, they've even learned how to thrive, just like the Generals.

John Muir, the Scottish-born American naturalist whose ghost is said to walk the trails of the park, once wrote of this region: "Here I could stay tethered forever, with just bread and water, nor would I be lonely. Loved friends and neighbors, as love for everything increased, would seem all the nearer, however many the miles and mountains between us." For his part, Crockett's had numerous offers to move to other medical states and operate grow sites there, but he always turns them down. The plants, one senses, wouldn't stand for it, and no matter who you are in the Sierras, they'll always have the final say. ✨



Short and sweet:
A Cali Haze in
full flower.

GROWING MASSIF BUDS

While Crockett and his partner, Tubbs, utilize much of the natural terrain for their gardening, from the sun to the water, which naturally comes out of their artesian wells hovering around 250 ppm, with a 6.0 to 6.5 pH level, it's misleading to consider their plants a full expression of Central Valley terroir. For starters, they don't grow them in the ground, but in 200-gallon Smart Pots using a medium familiar to most growers. For outdoors, Crockett uses a mixture of bat guano, earthworm castings, seabird guano, oyster shells and green sand, along with a blend of forest products and perlite sourced locally in the Sierras. Crockett will "tease" out the plants early in their development with simple fertilizers and then bring liquid fertilizers into the mix as they grow, favoring organic products such as Earth Juice and Roots Organic. Cartel growers in the parks, on the other hand, routinely use nitrate- and phosphate-laden mineral fertilizers in bulk quantities, leaving the unused bags to leach into the soil and seep into the creeks; the ensuing environmental damage from these practices is well documented. Crockett refuses to use such products, and so should you.

For air circulation in their growrooms, Crockett and Tubbs have developed an airflow filtration system specially tailored to the hazards of growing in the mountains. Vents from outside move the air from an initial antechamber into a "lung room" where the temperature is regulated and pollen, pests and other impurities can be screened out before it enters the veg and flowering chambers. "In the summertime, I'll bring my air in through the bottom [of the wall] and then, in the winter, vice versa. It gives me about a three- or four-degree swing when I flower during the days," Tubbs points out. "It's forced through the room, where it comes out on the top through a 10-inch max fan to kind of get a vortex working across the room, and then it pulls the air up and out."

Crockett steers clear of LEDs, since he finds them unsuitable for larger grows. Instead, he favors Galaxy 1,000-watt digital ballasts with metal halide (MH) lighting for the veg room and high-pressure sodium (HPS) lights for flowering. For pre-veg, Tubbs nurtures his fledgling buds in a small cabinet within his lung room. There, they sit on heating pads and feast on the light from a 400-watt MH lamp until the vegetative phase.

As for watering, Crockett's outdoor mountain buds are hand-watered with 10 to 15 gallons per plant. (He'd love to give them 25, but water's at a premium in the area.) On his own property, he uses two to three bubbler emitters on his plants, while Tubbs waters his indoors by hand using the lift method, checking the ppm in his runoff and then fertilizing accordingly.