

# artful EDOM

Forty years of artisanship turned this East Texas hamlet into a destination for arts, eats, and garden treats.

*Text and photographs by* **Randy Mallory**

**A**s I stroll into Potters Brown Gallery, I'm glad to see that the humble 1920s wood-frame building still bulges with usefulness *and* artfulness.

The gallery's hand-fired stoneware embodies practicality—from large platters to small cups. But the pottery's bold earth-tone designs—swirls of cobalt and cerulean blues, pinwheels of yellow ochre and chromed black, strokes and splashes of umber, maroon, and opalescent pearl—make each piece a work of art.

“We buy dirt and sell art,” pottery founder, Doug Brown, reminds me with a grin. “We are painters who make the canvas *and* the paint.” I've followed Doug's work for years. He and his potter wife, Beth, create their useful art in a studio-gallery in the heart of Edom, where Farm Roads 279 and 314 intersect between Tyler and Canton.

Doug moved to Edom in 1971 to make pottery. Never mind his short hair and 12-hour workdays, some locals still pegged the California transplant as a hippie. Suspicions subsided when he attracted other artists to town and helped start a wildly popular craft festival (now called Festival of the Arts, held each October). Galleries cropped up, and visitor dollars poured in. Edom became a magnet for art lovers, like myself, who found the place an authentic gem tucked in the East Texas woods.

Last fall, I returned to Edom with my wife, Sallie Evans, to retake the creative pulse of a craft community entering its fifth decade.

**W**e begin our day with a rousing breakfast of eggs, sausage, and fresh-baked biscuits at The Shed Cafe. The Shed began serving homestyle cooking in 1966 in a small building next door, where Peggy and Johnny Lamb now sell Limoge porcelain and fine glassware at Lamb Antiques.

After art put Edom on the map, The Shed grew into a spacious dining destination for chicken fried steaks and fresh pies. The Shed recently added black angus steaks and lighter fare such as grilled fish and chicken wraps, manager Matt Malone tells us. Matt's mother and cafe owner, Mary Ellen Malone, put her clothing and gift shop in the eatery's lobby. (The Malones also run a new lodging just down the road, called Trinity Pines Retreat, which boasts five themed cottages on a small lake.)

Despite its artistic tendencies, Edom remains a real town, we're happy to find, as we slide into lime-green rolling office chairs (ca. 1976) under the metal awning at Edom Service Station. In between changing tires and chatting with locals, lifelong Edomites Dwayne Nipp and son Brandon show off Dwayne's white-over-blue 1955 Chevy sedan. They invite us to their monthly cruise night (March to October) which fills downtown with classic cars.

From his catbird's seat beside Edom's only traffic light, Dwayne has watched the arts change his hometown. "Some people didn't know what to think about the artists at first," he recalls. "But everybody learned how to work together. It all just happened."

We wonder what's happening across the road at Potters Brown Studio. We find the Browns inspecting colorful bowls and cups, fresh from the kiln. Both potters make their wares, but Doug formulates glazes and handles the kiln. "I still experiment with new clays and glazes," he says, toting a shelf of glistening pottery into the gallery. "I believe we have the best colors you'll see anywhere."

Potters Brown are known for bold serving plates and bowls up to 24 inches across. "We love to cook and entertain, so it's fun to make pottery for people who do the same," says Beth, who shares ideas with customers. In fact, the gallery displays kitchenware born from patron suggestions—

including berry bowls (with drain holes in the bottom), butter keepers (with water chilling chambers), and sugar shakers (like a salt shaker but for sugar).

From the start, Doug Brown envisioned a craft community in Edom. Helping his dream come true was the studio of two college-trained artists from West Texas who go by first names only, Zeke and Marty. When they arrived in 1976 the couple worked in leather. A decade ago Zeke and Marty sought a creative challenge, so they switched to metal crafts, and their devoted customers switched too.

We stroll from Potters Brown to where soft jazz music pulls us into the cozy gallery of Zeke & Marty Studio. We peruse cases of what could only be called wearable art—sophisticated rings, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. Daring designs pair sterling silver and gold-filled wire with precious stones, pearls, and, surprisingly, found objects such as oxidized scrap-iron and shell. I'm amazed at the classical beauty of rings made with old bone fragments that are toasted, carved, and polished, then mounted in silver settings. There's also stylish coral-studded cufflinks and Lone Star money clips, items that Zeke calls his "cool guy stuff."

"Howdy," Marty calls from a worktable barely hidden behind a narrow wall. She invites us into the studio to check out a custom piece she's fabricating. The wide silver bracelet shows off cherished gems re-purposed from a customer's heirloom jewelry. "It's a challenge," she says, "but it's fun!"

Most fun of all, Sallie and I decide, are rings that Marty notes are for "folks unafraid to make a statement." One ring flaunts an inch-high block of polished cow bone set in silver with gems of jade, sapphire, and garnet.

Edom is a park and stroll kind of place, with shops and eateries clustered along a two-block stretch of Farm Road 279. So we spend the rest of the morning meandering in and out of other galleries.

At Ken Carpenter Jewelry, the proprietor tidies up a case of silver and turquoise necklaces and bracelets. Another case sports rings, pendants, and bracelets grouped by color—blues of

aquamarine, topaz and lapis lazuli rest beside pinks of rhodochrosite, rose quartz, and pink opal. A self-taught artist, Carpenter grew up in New Mexico impressed by Native American jewelers. He has been an Edom regular going on 22 years.

Next door we squeeze into the showroom of Arbor Castle Birdhouses. Hanging from the ceiling is what looks like a miniature movie set from *Lord of the Rings*, except that doors are round and residents must fly. Artist Joe Hopps has crafted avian fairy castles in Edom since 1999. “These birdhouses reach out and grab you as if they’re from some lost world,” he says.

Joe and son Bobby start with hollowed-out East Texas logs, mostly cedar. They turn them into castles by adding pointy copper or ceramic roofs and metal vines, turrets, and staircases. “Most of our birdhouses never see a bird,” Bobby admits. “Customers display them as artworks.” Arbor Castle also offers the works of other crafters—from hand-carved bird figurines and wind chimes to houses for toads, bats, and owls.

After a morning of art browsing, we break for lunch at Edom Bakery & Grill, where chef Jackson York calls his menu “country gourmet.” Sallie selects a turkey panini on homemade bread, along with savory corn chowder. I pick quiche Lorraine with salad greens topped by strawberries, pecans, and mozzarella. We share a massive wedge of moist carrot cake covered in a rich cream cheese frosting.

From first bite, we realize why the Texas Chefs Association named Chef York as 2010 Chef of the Year. We vow to come back (Thursday through Saturday) for his dinner menu—which includes upscale dishes such as roasted beet salad, quail-and-lamb mixed grill, and slow-cooked prime rib with Yorkshire pudding.

After lunch we drive a scenic 4.5 miles east on Farm Road 279 to Blue Moon Gardens. Owners Mary Wilhite and Sharon Lee Smith have grown herbs in Edom for 30 years. In 1993 they went retail on these six acres and now offer everything from cottage flowers and fruit trees to

succulents and seasonal vegetable plants. The place is a horticultural Mecca for serious gardeners and wannabes like us.

Sallie and I stroll the park-like grounds past pots of yellow mums and crimson snapdragons, past blooming banks of roses, and stop where monarch butterflies flit between purple flowers on a Butterfly Bush. Near the Blue Moon gift shop, we check out yard art, including a mosaic tile dog that resembles our daughter's cairn terrier, Rascal.

Today is Blue Moon's annual Fall Festival, so garden experts gather under a large tent to show visitors how to turn yards into well-designed "outdoor rooms." Nearby, a chef demonstrates fireplace grilling at the nursery's outdoor kitchen. (Blue Moon hosts year-round workshops and events, including a Spring Open House, April 28, 2012, and its own garden club.)

Edom proffers more garden treats one-half mile south of town on Farm Road 314 at Blueberry Hill Farms. Unfortunately, blueberry season is months away (typically June and July), but Chuck Arena, who owns the farm with wife, Sherri, opens their shop to give us a preview. Once blueberries are ripe, he says, as many as 400 cars a day arrive with eager pickers who pick berries on ten acres of blueberries and one acre of thornless blackberries. You can buy the berries already picked, as well as vegetables the Arenas produce. During berry season (and during Edom's Festival of the Arts) the farm store sells a range of berry jams along with fresh-baked berry muffins and pies, plus frozen blueberry yogurt and blueberry lemonade.

Edom's arts and eats bring folks to town. New music venues and lodgings encourage them to stay a while.

Once a month (October through May), Jeff and Judy Gottesman bring audiences and singer-songwriters together in Edom's former firestation. (Last season, Sallie and I enjoyed an inspired performance by Minnesota performer L.J. Booth.) The Gottesmans renovated the old firestation in 2009 and opened the Old Firehouse Gallery. In the front, Jeff displays his landscape photographs

and photo collages of colleges across the country. In the back Judy runs her therapeutic massage studio. The gallery also sells other artists' offbeat works, such as fused-glass picture frames, planters made from textile shuttles, and clocks fashioned from computer parts.

The Gottesmans tell me that bringing music and art together in their gallery has been a dream come true.

Sallie and I end our Edom visit a few miles east on Farm Road 279 at Wood Haven Cabins, where more dreams come true.

After Greg and Tammy Wood married, he confided that he'd always wanted to own a sawmill. When the couple bought Greg's ancestral farm in 1995, Tammy agreed to a small portable mill. Greg thinned their woods turning cedars and pines into boards and beams, and the couple began erecting buildings. Travelers, church groups, and family reunions now enjoy the fruits of their labors when they overnight in five rustic cabins around a spring-fed pond.

"This smells just like a cedar closet," Sallie remarks as the Woods show us the smallest cabin, a one-room, cedar-lined affair perched above a slow-moving creek. Then Tammy takes us to her dream come true, an 80-seat pavilion and stage situated among the cabins. Each Thursday night, Tammy, a lifelong musician, invites other musicians and onlookers for a free night of pickin' and grinnin' in the pavilion. "You never know who's coming or what kind of music they'll play," she says, "but everyone seems to have a good time." (Musicians also gather each Tuesday at The Shed Cafe for open mic night.)

As Sallie and I sit in the pavilion tapping our toes to bluegrass music, it's apparent that, 40 years after art changed Edom, the eclectic community remains a place where creativity—and dreams—still come to life.

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## Land of Edom

EDOM IS LOCATED halfway between Canton and Tyler where Farm Roads 279 and 314 intersect ([www.visitedom.com](http://www.visitedom.com)).

**Potters Brown Studio and Gallery**, 903/852-6473; [www.pottersbrown.com](http://www.pottersbrown.com)

**Zeke & Marty Studio**, 903/852-3311; [www.zekeandmarty.com](http://www.zekeandmarty.com)

**Arbor Castle Birdhouses**, 903/852-7893; [www.arborcastlebirdhouses.com](http://www.arborcastlebirdhouses.com)

**Ken Carpenter Jewelry**, 903/852-5232; [www.kencarpenterjewelry.net](http://www.kencarpenterjewelry.net)

**The Old Firehouse Gallery**, 903/852-2781; [www.theoldfirehouse.net](http://www.theoldfirehouse.net)

**The Shed Cafe**, 903/852-7791; [www.theshedcafe.com](http://www.theshedcafe.com)

**Edom Bakery & Grill**, 903/852-5552; [www.edombakery.com](http://www.edombakery.com)<sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

**Blueberry Hill Farms**, 903/852-6175; [www.blueberryhillfarms.com](http://www.blueberryhillfarms.com)

**Blue Moon Gardens**, 903/852-3897; [www.bluemoongardens.com](http://www.bluemoongardens.com)

**Trinity Pines Retreat**, 214/478-8999; [www.trinitypinesedom.com](http://www.trinitypinesedom.com)

**Wood Haven Cabins**, 903/852-7798; [www.woodhavencabins.com](http://www.woodhavencabins.com)

Edom's top annual event, the **Edom Festival of the Arts**, is the third full weekend of October (Oct. 20-21, 2012); call 903/852.3897 ([www.edomfestivalofthearts.com](http://www.edomfestivalofthearts.com)). Each second Saturday, Edom and nearby Ben Wheeler host an **Art Jam**. (see the sidebar on page XXX). **The Old Firehouse Acoustic Folk Music Concerts** features Austin singer-songwriter Karen Mal on Feb. 4, 2012; call 903/852-2781 ([www.theoldfirehouse.net](http://www.theoldfirehouse.net)). **April in Edom** is a street carnival held the third weekend of April (Apr. 21-22, 2012); call 903-852-443 ([www.aprilinedom.net](http://www.aprilinedom.net)). **Edom Rod Cruise Night** is held at **Edom Service Station** each third Saturday, Mar-Oct; call 903/852-7625.

**RESOURCES:** [all area code 903](#)

--Potters Brown, Doug/Beth Brown

--Zeke & Marty

- Arbor Castle Birdhouses, Joe Hopps
- Ken Carpenter Jewelry; Ken Carpenter, 852-5232
- Shed Café and Trinity Pines B&B, Matt Malone
- Edom Bakery & Grill, Jackson York
- Blueberry Hill farms, Chuck Arena
- Blue Moon Gardens, Mary Wilhite, Sharon Lee Smith
- Old Firehouse Gallery, Jeff/Judy Gottesman
- Wood Haven Cabins: Greg/Tammy Wood
- Edom Festival of the Arts
- Dwayne Nipp, service station owner, cruise night