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BACKROADS ISSUE: WIN A BIG BEND GETAWAY!

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THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

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SEPTEMBER 2007

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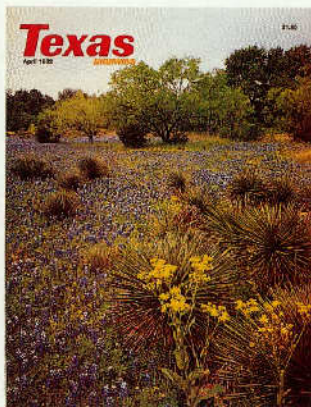


Lady Bird Johnson, photographed here at her beloved Wildflower Center, found inspiration in the state's natural beauty.

LADY BIRD JOHNSON influences my life virtually every day. The immediate reason is that my wife, Helen, and I live near Austin's Town Lake and I'm a regular on the hike-and-bike trail. As I'm running or walking around the lake, I often wonder if I (and thousands of others) would be enjoying the shade of towering cypress if she had not been such a diligent advocate for the park. Even though she refused most public recognition for her work to enliven that urban landscape, there's no question she encouraged, inspired, and cajoled an entire cast of characters to keep the project moving.

NOW that I'm writing this column for the first time, I'm even more acutely aware of Lady Bird Johnson's influence. Every April, *Texas Highways* produces a special feature devoted to wildflowers—another result of Mrs. Johnson's enthusiastic advocacy for

Texas' environment and the state's natural legacy. Even though we all look forward to wildflower season, it's as if we took the riotous seasonal beauty for granted before Lady



The first special wildflower feature in *Texas Highways* appeared in April 1982.

Bird brought wildflowers front-and-center for annual starring roles, first with her "highway beautification" program and then with the Wildflower Center that now bears her name.

LADY BIRD was both reader of and friend to this magazine. Publisher Kathy Murphy cherishes a framed thank-you letter from Lady Bird that's written on the distinctive LBJ Ranch stationery. In a few months, we'll start planning the April 2008 wildflower issue that will be a tribute to Mrs. Johnson. We'll miss having such a good friend, but we'll remember her often.

Charles J. Lohrmann

Charles J. Lohrmann, Editor

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IN MEMORIAM: JACK LOWRY (1951-2006)

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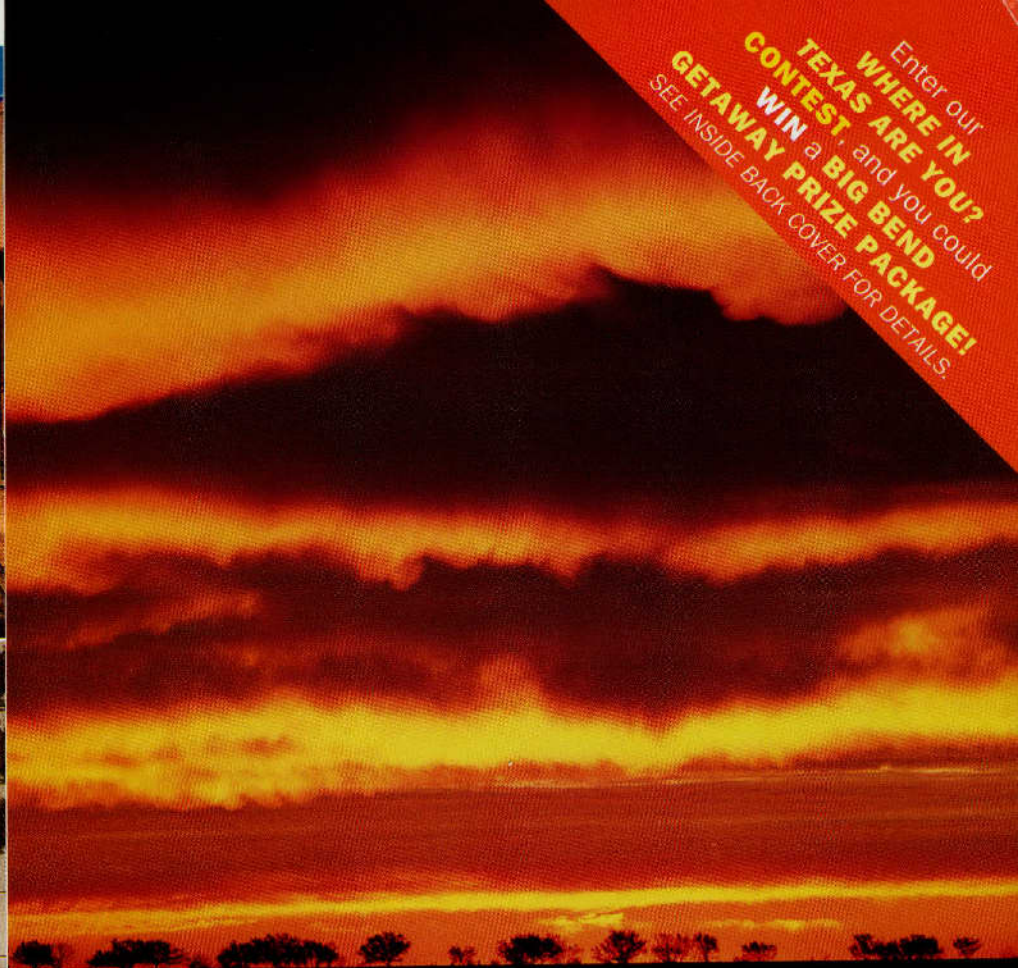
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SEPTEMBER 2007

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ABOUT OUR COVERS FRONT: One of a series of "river roads" between Concan and Leahey, CR 350 has several low-water crossings, like this one at Cherry Creek. Photo © Kathy Adams Clark BACK: Waves wash ashore at South Padre Island, a year-round playground at the tip of Texas. Photo by J. Griffis Smith

PHOTOS FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE:
© LAURENCE PARENT, © WYMAN MEINZER, KEVIN STILLMAN

SPECIAL BACKROADS ISSUE

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The Scoop on Blue Bell

I ENJOYED Lori Moffatt's article on Blue Bell ice cream [July], but I'm still in the dark as to where the name "Blue Bell" came from. Could you please enlighten those of us who enjoy the ice cream but are curious where the name came from?

DAVID M. SMITH
Palestine

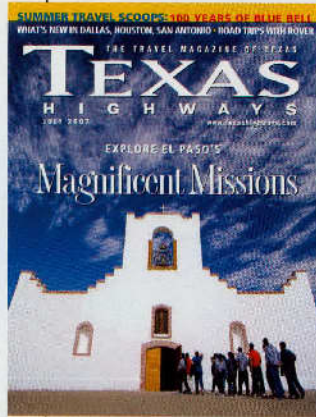
ED. NOTE: Good question, David. Established in 1907, the Brenham Creamery Company changed its name to Blue Bell Creameries in 1930, in honor of the Texas bluebell, a native wildflower that grows in abundance in the Brenham area and blooms in the summer. For more information about Blue Bell, check out the company's Web site at www.bluebell.com.

LORI Moffatt captured the spirit of Blue Bell in her story!

ALLEN COMMANDER
Brenham

Going Goth

REGARDING Lori Moffatt's article on the Tower of the Americas [July "Spotlight"] in San



Antonio: The Tower Life Building she mentioned, originally named the Smith-Young Tower, is most definitely Gothic Revival in style, rather than Art Deco.

Designed by the local firm of Ayres & Ayres,

the building was dedicated on June 1, 1929, and joined other Gothic-inspired downtown landmarks such as the 1926 Medical Arts Building (now the Emily Morgan Hotel) and the 1929 Nix Hospital. Aside from the Alamo, the Tower Life Building is probably the most photographed building in San Antonio due to the unusual stepped-back-octagon shape of its upper floors, dramatic nighttime lighting, and architectural embellishments.

KEN ERFURTH

Gone With (And to) the Dogs

KUDOS TO Melissa Gaskill for her article on Texas' Fido-friendly venues [July]. I travel exclusively with my hounds in tow, and I am constantly on the prowl for new and exciting locations. Thanks to Melissa, I have a few more spots to check out. Also, for dog-lovers visiting San Antonio, check out the Fairmount Hotel and meet Luke, the four-footed Director of Pet Relations. If you are traveling sans pets, Luke can stay overnight in your room or give you some "Luke tips" for touring the Alamo City.

SHELLEY BUECHE
Austin

ED. NOTE: We hope you enjoyed Lori Moffatt's story on the Fairmount, and canine concierge Luke, in the August issue.

I DIDN'T like your dog article. I don't like dogs, and I do not like articles that encourage people to travel with their dogs. 1) I won't stay anywhere that accommodates dogs in the rooms. 2) I won't tolerate their barking if they are in an adjacent kennel. 3) If a dog is "seated" in the same dining room that I am in, I just get up and leave.

ROBERT L. GOODMAN

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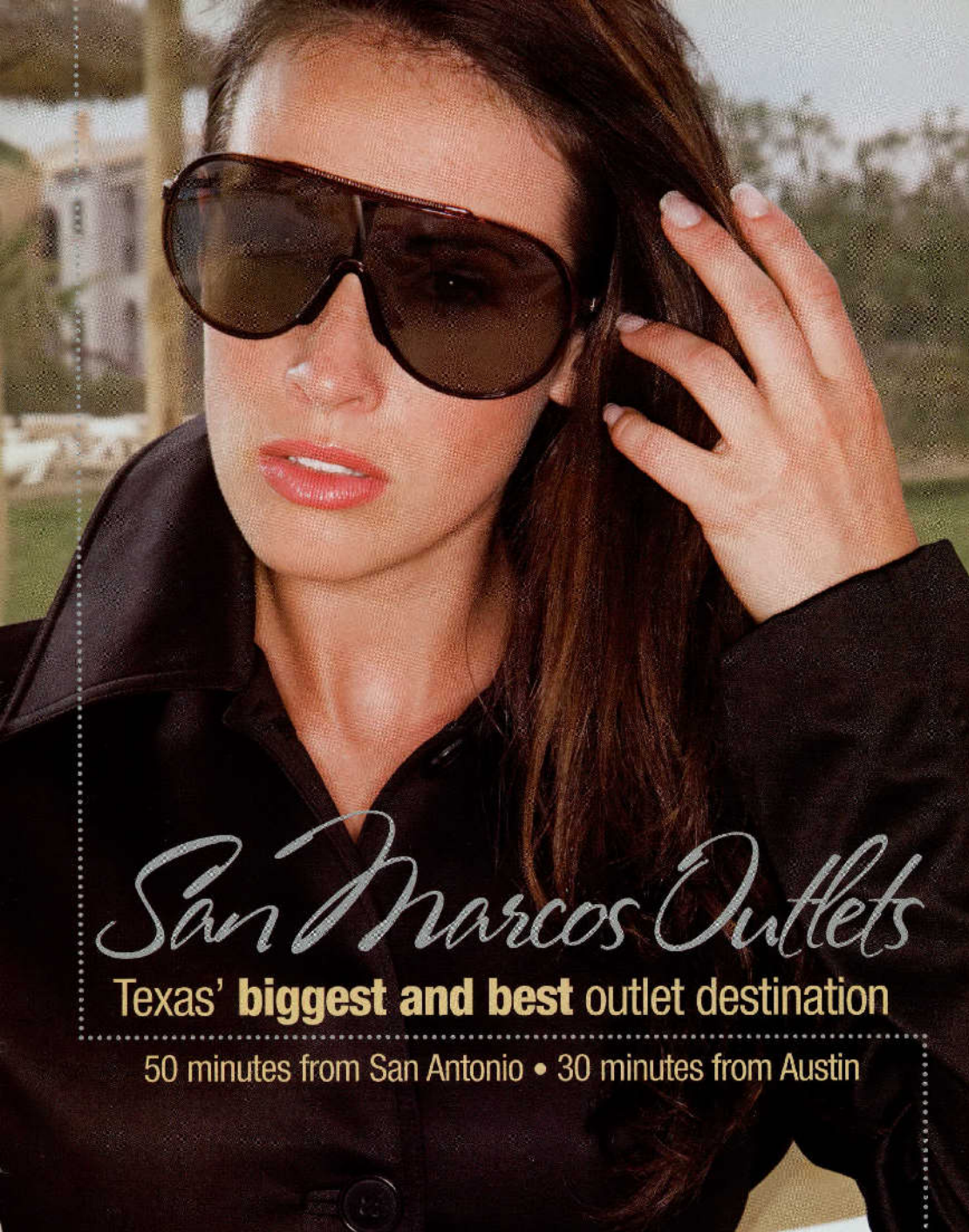
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Matagorda Memories

I CAME across Melissa Gaskill's interesting piece about Matagorda Island in her "10 Great Places to (Really) Get Away From It All" [June]. It brought back great ol' memories of the time I was a buck sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Corps, detached there in early 1941 as a noncom with a group from Kelly Field in

San Antonio. Our job was to transform Matagorda Island from the civilian cattle ranch it was then into the military USAAC aerial gunnery and bombing range that it became during World War II.

BILL L. STRATTON
San Antonio

Marcia on My Mind

JUST A LINE to say I enjoyed the *Texas Highways* Moment with Marcia Ball [June]. She has always been a favorite of mine. The article brought back great memories of

Austin in the early '70s. I also enjoyed her list of Texas favorites.

ROY CONNER
Fort Worth

Angry and Anonymous

WITH ALL the great scenery in Texas and the highly skilled photographers at your service, you give us a full-page back cover [July] with a close-up of a mutt. I spent 12 happy years with an English pointer named W.A. who had more personality and intelligence than most people, and I like dogs. However, I subscribe to *TH* for the purpose of reading about the people and places of Texas, not to see pictures of people's dogs.

Also, too many articles are becoming "I slept here and ate there" pieces. Travelers want to know more about what to see and do along the road. Most Texans stay in a local motel and do not care about the "cute" bed and breakfast for \$200 a night. Likewise, we want to know about restaurants where a family can eat a meal without having to sell a child to pay the tab.

Oh yes, one other comment. Get out of Dallas/Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston more. Show us the rest of the state—places like Spearman, Salt Flat, San Carlos, and Sacul.

ANONYMOUS

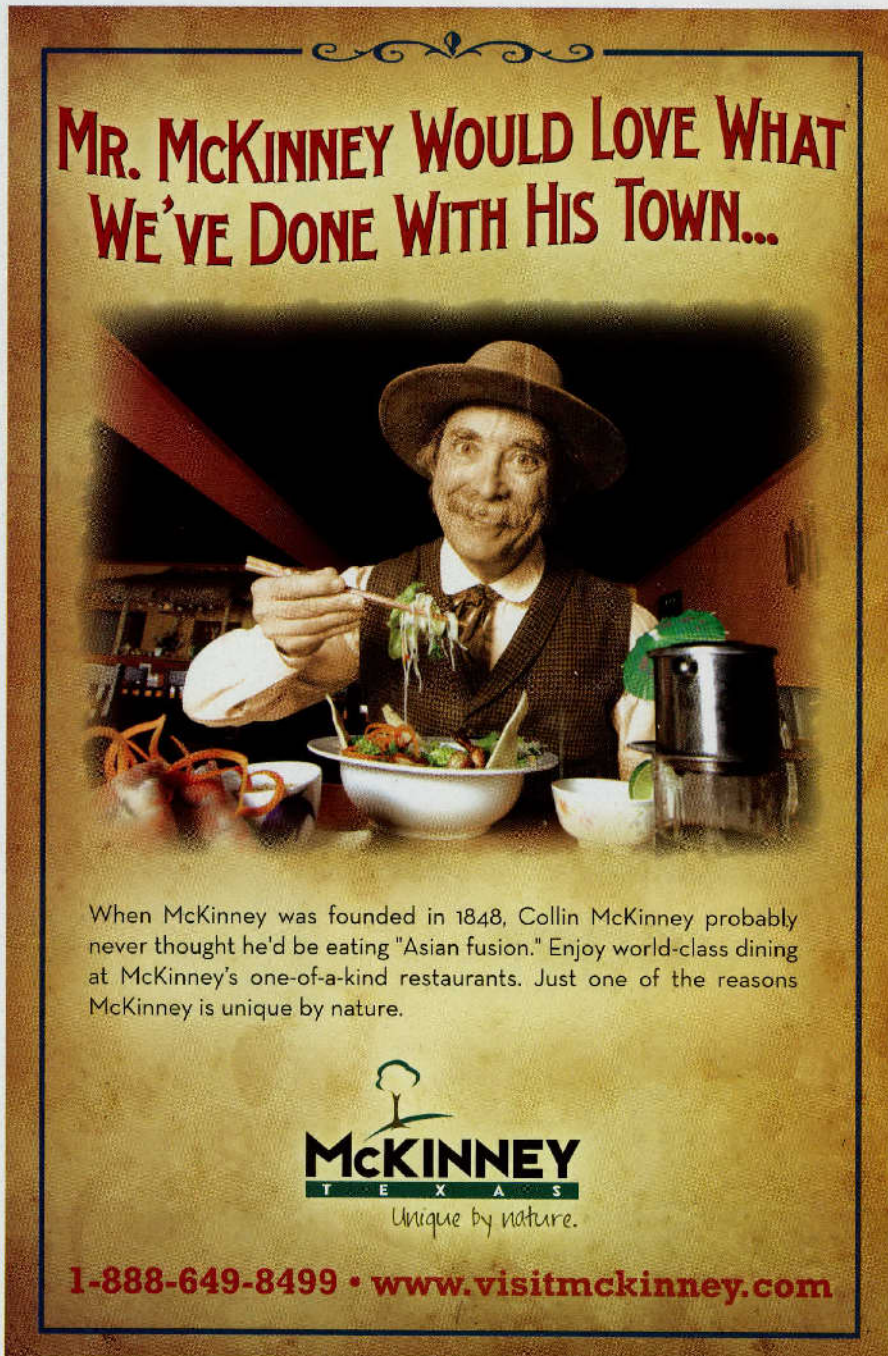
ED. NOTE: *Dear Anonymous: You're in luck: It just so happens that the Off-the-Beaten-Path special issue you're holding has no dogs (okay, there are a couple) and few interstates. We hope you find something you like.*

Greetings from Germany

A GOOD friend who once worked in Houston has been sending me copies of *TH* for a long time. A while ago, my wife and I had the chance to travel with him through Texas. We started in Houston, went through the Hill Country, and then drove to Big Bend. We saw many impressive cities and areas. Now, *TH* brings us a lot of good memories, as well as information about the state. When we finish reading our copies, we give them to a teacher who likes to use them in his lessons.

HARALD & HILDEGARD SULGER
Konstanz, Germany

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Spotlight

on THE BENINI SCULPTURE RANCH

COURTESY LORRAINE BENINI

SUN. SKY. SCULPTURE.

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I WAS DRIVING THAT SCENIC STRETCH OF US 290 between Johnson City and Fredericksburg when I noticed a flash of something sparkly and metallic on the south side of the road. I blinked, then eased my foot off the gas and craned my head over my left shoulder. What was that? It appeared to be a giant metal Longhorn, a Harley-Davidson reborn as a noble, gleaming steer. Was it an artist's roadside calling card? A creative ranch-owner's salute to that most iconographic of Texas bovines? Or maybe I was just seeing things in the harsh, high-noon sun?

I vowed to investigate next time I found myself passing through. And if you enjoy beautiful scenery, thought-provoking artwork, and eccentric characters, you should, too.

And no, I wasn't hallucinating. *Marathon*, West Texas artist Bettye Hamblen Turner's massive steel Longhorn, turned out to be the first example of a whole herd of sculptures I'd find

here in the Pedernales River Valley. You wouldn't know it from the highway, but if you turn south at the *Marathon* landmark and drive five zigzaggy, sporadically paved miles into the heart of what most Texans know as LBJ Country, you'll wind up at a surprising congress of creativity known as the **Benini Foundation Galleries & Sculpture Ranch**. As I crossed the final cattle guard and



Sculptor Pete Deise welds steel to "beat the heat." See his *Ascension* series at the Benini Sculpture Ranch near Johnson City.

approached the gate, artwork began to appear everywhere: a red swirl of steel, an orange tumbleweed of wagon wheels, a cedar obelisk with angles like a puzzle piece, multicolored cubist fantasies suspended from tree limbs.

The 140-acre ranch, which spreads across gentle hills dotted with live oaks and native grasses and flowers, once did in fact belong to Lyndon Baines Johnson, who hunted deer here when the idea of an arts community would have raised eyebrows. But in 1999, a charismatic Italian artist named Benini, who goes by one name like Madonna and Prince, bought the land with his wife, Lorraine. At the time, the two were living in Hot Springs, Arkansas, where Benini had unwittingly led an arts renaissance. "We hadn't planned to move," Lorraine says, "but the land here reminded Benini of the Mediterranean."

Soon, the couple moved into a home at the top of the ranch's Rattlesnake Mountain and converted a cavernous metal hangar in the valley below into gallery and studio space. This is where Benini works (at night, alone) and where you can see examples of pieces from throughout his career, as well as paintings and sculptures by friends.

Benini doesn't strive for his work to be immediately accessible. He painted roses exclusively for two decades, for example, proclaiming them the perfect models with which to study design, line, and color. But as he explored the rose and began to abandon rectangular canvases for those he created with curved, irregular edges, he developed a technique that made his subjects appear to be three-dimensional. Viewed from across the galleries, Benini's roses and recent ribbon-like tangles appear to leap from the walls.

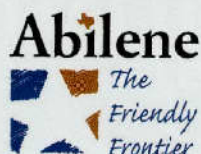
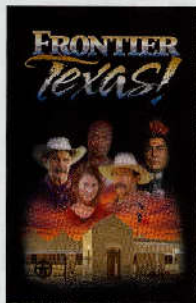
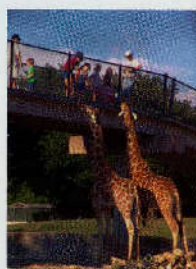
Benini's latest work reflects his fascination with



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- ★ Review WWII at the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum



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science and chaos theory. As my eyes created a blurry order from the random splatters and dots, I felt as though I were falling into vast, light-infused spheres of orange, purple, red, and blue.

Despite Benini's solitary work habits, he and Lorraine thrive on collective creative energy. But they never intended to create a public cultural facility; they simply installed some of the sculptures they owned on the land, and soon, their artist friends saw the ranch as an ideal backdrop to display their own works. Today, more than 65 sculptures by national and international artists surprise the eye at every turn. Most are for sale, but the artists agree to leave them at the Benini ranch for at least two years. That's why you might see a bird's nest in the crook of an abstract swoosh, elegant spider webs anchored to a steel pompom of brass-and-steel angles, or curled bits of green lichen clinging to the base of a chiseled limestone figure.

Two miles of trails wind past the sculptures, and visitors are welcome to take the self-guided tour by car, or, for a more contemplative experience, walk or bicycle through the property. Wander around the pieces and notice how nature interacts with the artworks. (Some of sculptor Marshall Cunningham's pieces are painted with a special material that changes color depending on the angle of the light, which is especially fascinating to witness.) Even the wind plays a role: When it was mild, the ropes swaying gently from Robert McConaughy's 150-foot-long *Phantom Hill* reminded me of the carefully groomed mane of a horse.

Arizona sculptor Pete Deise, whose welded steel pieces recall sea creatures, or seed pods bursting into life, brought a series of 11 sculptures to the ranch after Lorraine and Benini saw his work. "I focus on themes of nature, of movement, of roots moving toward water," he says. "And it's amazing to witness the juxtaposition of blue sky and rugged landscape with all this sculpture."

—LORI MOFFATT

TO REACH the Benini Foundation Galleries & Sculpture Ranch from Johnson City, take US 290 west to CR 204 (Flat Creek Rd.). Turn left, and drive for 5.2 miles to Shiloh Rd., then turn right. Drive over the cattle guard, then take a sharp left. Hours: Daily 10-6. Admission: Free. Call ahead: 830/868-5244; www.SculptureRanch.com and www.Benini.com.

On September 29-30, the Sculpture Ranch hosts its fall **Arts Encounters** open house, featuring artists' lectures, live music, guided tours of the sculpture, and more. See www.ArtsEncountersatBeninis.com for details.

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THIS MONTH'S TOP PICKS AND PLACES

Compiled by Lori Moffatt

A Girl Called Lucy

WHEN JOHN LENNON WROTE THE LYRICS TO "LUCY IN the Sky with Diamonds" in 1967, he probably never imagined they would be the inspiration for naming a three-million-year-old girl. But that's just what happened.

In 1974, in the ravines of the southern Afar region of Ethiopia, anthropologist Donald Johanson uncovered a partial skeleton of a three-foot female hominid. During a celebration of the discovery, the Beatles song played, giving archeologists the idea

for a name: Lucy. Lucy is the oldest, most complete skeleton of an erect-walking hominid, with 40 percent of her skeleton intact. This find also sparked discussion among scientists over whether Lucy had both human and ape-like qualities, drawing more attention to the topic of evolution.

Through April 20, 2008, the **Houston Museum of Natural Science** will display the skeleton as part of the exhibit *Lucy's Legacy: The Hidden Treasures of Ethiopia*. Previously, it was stored in a specially constructed safe at the National Museum in Ethiopia, and only replicas were shown to the public.



This residence lies inside the 17th-Century fortress city of Fasil Ghebbi in Gondar, Ethiopia. In 1979, the compound was listed as a World Heritage Site. *Lucy's Legacy: The Hidden Treasures of Ethiopia* appears in Houston through spring 2008.

The museum will also present a panoramic timeline of the changing landscape and plant and animal life of Ethiopia from 6 million years ago through today. Included will be an array of crosses from various churches in the region dating back roughly 500 years—some standing taller than 5 feet and others no longer than 20 inches. You can also view religious manuscripts, including vibrantly illustrated Bible passages and several Korans; coins dating to 700 A.D.; wooden gravesite markers; and modern musical instruments.

After wrapping up in April, *Lucy's Legacy* will travel across the United States. Call 713/639-4629; www.hmns.org. —ARIANNA RAMOS

PARCHMENT PATRONAGE

SOMETIMES THE DEFT HANDS AND FRESH perspective of an artist can be enough to inspire new appreciation for things we ordinarily take for granted. Case in point: *Paper Cuts: The Art of Contemporary Paper*, the new exhibit from the Michelson Museum of Art in Marshall, succeeds in giving new stock to the most disposable of all media.

Starting September 4, the museum will feature 38 works of art created with a variety of papers and mixed media by 26 American artists. Each work approaches the logistics of loose-leaf in innovative ways, expanding on traditional techniques like folding, collage, and papier-mâché, or reaching outside the margins to incorporate wood, metal, and other materials.

You'll never look at another unassuming sheet the same again once you've witnessed the delicate realism of Nancy Loo Bjorge's *White Flow-*

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ers, or the intricate basket weaving of Patti Quinn Hill's *Fire on the Mountains*.

The Michelson was established in 1985 to house and preserve the collected works of Leo Michelson (1887-1978), a Russian-American artist known for experimenting with different media and styles. Today, the Michelson offers an eclectic assembly of art from season to season with exhibits that have ranged from *The World of William Joyce* to *African Masks and Artifacts*. *Paper Cuts* runs through October 6. Admission is free. Call 903/935-9480; www.michelsonmuseum.org.
—REGGIE UGWU

TRIBUTE TO TEXAS

ON SEPTEMBER 28, THE TEXAS HERITAGE Music Foundation, as part of its 20th-anniversary celebration, will pay tribute to Texas musicians and traditions on **Texas Heritage Living History Day**. Held at Schreiner University in Kerrville, the event started in 1982 as a tribute to country-music legend Jimmie Rodgers and has since broadened its focus to include Texas music and folklore.

Along with performances by Native American storytellers and dancers, be sure to catch a show by some of the best trick ropers in the state, get up-close-and-personal with camels from the Texas Camel Corps, take in displays of authentic chuckwagons and teepees, participate in a noon tribute to Jimmie Rodgers, and join a music-themed discussion panel hosted by the Texas Folklore Society. In a special kids' area, children can enjoy storytime with Houston poet Lawrence Clark or get spooked with ghost tales from storyteller Doc Moore. The celebration wraps up with a concert by Duke Davis and The Buckshot Band, during which you can enjoy a catered barbecue dinner (\$5).

For information about Texas Heritage Living History Day, call 830/792-1945; www.texasheritagemusic.org.
—ARIANNA RAMOS

A GRAND OLE OPRY

NESTLED ALONG THE TRINITY RIVER SOME 42 miles northeast of Houston, the town of Liberty maintains close ties to its nearly 200-year-old history. Not only does it display an exact replica of Philadelphia's Liberty Bell, cast in 1976 as part of the nation's Bicentennial Celebration, but it also salutes musical tradition with the 14-year-old **Liberty Opry**. Led by an eight-piece house band, the Opry presents family-friendly musical revues every Saturday night in the restored 1938 Park Theater. "Our fiddle-player and steel guitarist are members of the Western Swing Hall of Fame," says owner Bruce Boehner,

Grapevine Vintage Texas.

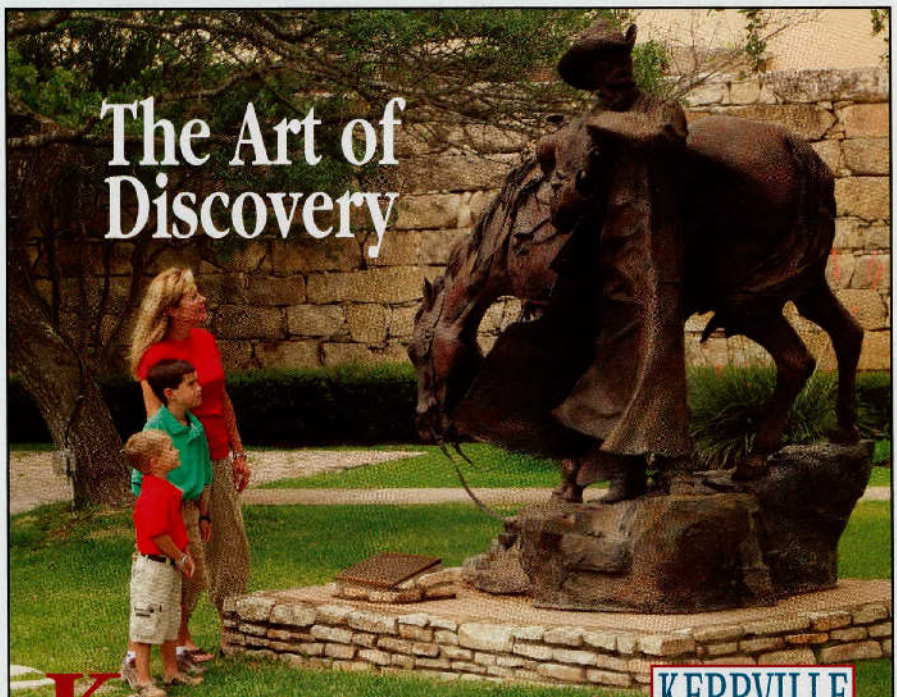
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Photo: © Robert G. Johnson

For THE ROAD

who has run the Opry with his wife, Brenda, since 2006. "And every show is different."

September's performances include "Rock Around the Clock," the "All-Gospel Show," the "Fantastic '50s Show," "Great Ladies of Country," and the "Country Western Show." Reservations are encouraged, as the shows sometimes sell out. Admission: \$10; \$5 age 12 and younger. Call 877/729-9103; www.libertyopry.com.

OPEN YOUR EYES

"GO ORANGE, BE STRONG!" PROCLAIMED postman-turned-artist Jeff McKissack in the 1970s as he built Houston's Orange Show, a whirligig-festooned architectural shrine to oranges. Jeff's fanciful structure now serves as headquarters for the city's Orange Show Foundation for Visionary Art, the organization responsible for Houston's famous Art Car Parade, along with year-round art workshops, Eyeopener Tours of folk art environments, and other programs. Every August, the Orange Show closes for repairs and cleaning, then reopens in September with a big bash.

This year, there's a special cause for celebration: the return of *Atomic Dog*, the grand prize-winner of the 2006 Art Car Parade. Created by kids from Houston's Waltrip High School, the car—a wildly embellished Volvo—went on to win raves at the Essen Motor Show, then got stranded in a German parking lot when the kids couldn't afford to bring it back. Now, thanks to a generous donation by philanthropist Brady Caruth, it's back in Texas. **Atomic Dog Day**, held September 29, will feature live music, art workshops for kids, tours of the Orange Show, and an army of art cars on display.

On September 23, the Orange Show leads an **Eyeopener Tour** to nearby **Beaumont**, where participants will explore treasures like the historic Jefferson Theatre, St. Anthony's Cathedral, and the art of Felix Harris at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas. Other Eyeopener Tours in 2007 include a tour of Houston's West End (Oct. 21) and a Christmas Lights tour on December 12. Call 713/926-6368; www.orangeshow.org.

AN ADMIRABLE MUSEUM

FREDERICKSBURG'S MAIN STREET BUSTLES on weekends with shoppers and sightseers, many of them toting (continued on page 17)

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WHAT'S THE MATADOR(A)?

I do not consider bullfighting a sport," wrote Patricia McCormick in her 1954 autobiography, *Lady Bullfighter*. "It is an art, a science, a ritual... a mystery...more spiritual than physical...."

Patricia first experienced that spiritual mystery at age seven, when her parents took her to a *corrida de toros* (bullfight) in Mexico City. Back home, she dreamt of becoming a *matadora*. While other girls played with dolls, Patricia crafted matadors out of pipe cleaners and played bullfighting games. Her fascination continued in high school when her family moved to Big Spring in West Texas, and it grew into a consuming passion when she attended Texas Western College (now the University of Texas at El Paso) in 1950.

Pursuing that passion, she often crossed the Rio Grande to Ciudad Juárez, where, after much study and practice, she became a full-fledged *matadora*. She fought her first bull in early 1951, and joined the Matadors' Union that December. The following January, she made her debut as the first American female professional bullfighter. Over the next decade, she fought in 300 *corridas* throughout Mexico and Venezuela. Six times bulls gored her, once so seriously that a priest administered last rites.

Though she entered the ring wearing Andalusian pants with chaps, a stylized short jacket with filigree ornamentation, and a flat, broad-brimmed Cordovan hat, she often envied her male counterparts in their glittering *trajes de luces* (suits of lights). During those times, she wrote, she would "remember that, except for the human animal, it is the male who wears colorful plumage, and that it is primarily a man's world in which I will perform...."

Like Patricia, San Angelo native Patricia Hayes also found inspiration in the world of bullfighting. She saw her first *corrida* in Mexico in 1953



No bull: Despite fighting 600 bulls throughout her career, lady bullfighter Patricia McCormick was gored only six times.

while studying at North Texas State University. When she informed her family of her new career goal, they tried to dissuade her from the dangerous profession. Undeterred, Hayes eventually fought bulls throughout Mexico, Ecuador, and Portugal. She too envied the matadors with their glamorous costumes, but performed with a style that earned her the nickname "the Grace Kelly of the bullring."

—Gene Fowler, *Austin*

QUEEN OF TEXAS CUISINE

It took a determined Yankee to teach Texans that they could eat—and enjoy—something besides their beloved barbecue and chicken-fried steak.

Born in 1906 in upstate New York, Helen Corbitt graduated from Skidmore College with a degree in home economics. After working as a dietitian in New Jersey and New York, Helen accepted

a position at the University of Texas at Austin teaching catering and restaurant management in 1940.

Two years later, Helen left for a job at the Houston Country Club. Initially dubious about remaining in Texas, she finally decided to stay. In her first cookbook, *Helen Corbitt's Cookbook* (1957), she singled out her time in Texas as the "most happy days of my food career."

She later returned to Austin in the early 1950s to manage the Driskill Hotel's dining room and catering business. Politicians who ate there appreciated food that looked as good as it tasted. During Lyndon Baines Johnson's presidency, Helen's recipes frequently appeared on White House menus.

In 1955, her culinary talent caught the eye of high-end retailer Stanley Marcus, and he brought her to Dallas to direct Neiman Marcus' food-services department. Businesspeople and shoppers alike flocked to the flagship store's Zodiac Room (now called The Zodiac) to enjoy lunch, beginning their meals with Helen's signature dish: chicken consommé served in tiny cups.

Among her most famous innovations were Texas Caviar (using black-eyed peas), Snowballs (frosted cake cubes rolled in coconut), Flowerpots (yellow cake, ice cream, and meringue served in clay pots), and Poppysed Dressing. (Corbitt denied creating the dressing, stating that she only popularized it.)

Helen died on January 16, 1978, but her culinary prowess influenced folks for years to come, including Stanley Marcus, who compared her to the famous fashion designer Cristóbal Balenciaga, calling her the "Balenciaga of Food." The Duke of Windsor pronounced her dishes "fit for a king!"

Responsible for spearheading a food revolution in her adopted state, Helen Corbitt once said, "Life, and especially Texas, has been good to this Yankee girl."

—Lori Grossman, *Dallas*

Eat. Boot-scoot. Sleep. Repeat.

THE BARBECUE production timeline is as uncompromising as a high-noon shootout. Brisket slow-cooks over mesquite for a full 14 hours, so it hits the grill at 10 p.m. Ribs and chicken join the party a little after noon the next day, followed by sausage at 3. By 5:30, when the Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall throws open its doors, the 'cue patrons will be waiting.

This quintessential Texas barbecue joint and dance hall is the center of the action in tiny Coupland (30 miles east of Austin). In 1906, the building opened as the Coupland Mercantile Company, and it later housed a pharmacy called the Albers Drug Company. One of the side dining rooms once housed Coupland Feed and Grain, and the half-dozen bed-and-breakfast rooms upstairs originally were offices for the Coupland Telephone Company as well as various doctors and dentists. During Prohibition, so the story goes, the place was a bordello.

With its welded-pipe railings and cedar posts supporting the tin roof of the front

porch, the Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall has drawn filmmakers looking to lend authenticity to movies such as *Lonesome Dove* and *Varsity Blues*. This is a living example of a Saturday-night dance palace, complete with colorful concert announcement flyers stapled to the porch bulletin board. The good news is that now, you can eat and sleep where you boot-scoot.

New owner Rick Smitherman is the boss man and chief ringmaster of the rustic establishment. He and his brother Ronnie purchased the place in June, and have been diligently tweaking and improving the restaurant's menu ever since. "I fell in love with the



BOTH PHOTOS BY KEVIN STILLMAN

Barbecue-lovers, prepare for blissful dining: The Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall's four-meat plate (sausage, brisket, ribs, and chicken) also comes with your choice of sides, including a toothsome potato salad.

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history of the place and its potential," Rick says. "The Coupland Inn had lost its luster in recent years, but we're bringing it back."

The restaurant is a meat-lover's paradise, featuring the popular barbecue, steaks, burgers, and seafood like fried shrimp, mesquite-grilled salmon, and catfish prepared to order. There are plenty of sides, including Cowboy Potatoes (garlicky, crunchy wedges of red potatoes), homemade crispy onion rings, and green beans simmered with onions and plenty of bacon. Save room for a heaping dish of blackberry (or peach or apple) cobbler, served warm, with ice cream melting on top.

The three dining rooms, painted red and decorated with rustic antiques, have tables to accommodate crowds both large and small. A typical evening will find couples tucked into corners, while chattering groups serve themselves family-style as old-fashioned fans, suspended from the pressed-tin ceiling, twirl overhead. You might see the older gents wearing crisp white shirts and carefully polished shoes; others sport cowboy hats and scuffed

Whether you're an accomplished dancer or a beginner, there's plenty of room on this old wooden dance floor.



With sleeping quarters upstairs, you can dance 'til you drop on Friday and Saturday nights. Some of Texas' most popular stars play here.

boots that weren't just bought for show. No Western *poseurs* here....

On one side of the main dining room, to the left of the still-operable potbellied wood stove, a heavy purple curtain, trimmed and swagged to within an inch of its velvet life, defines the dance hall.

Beyond that thin barrier, you'll find honky-tonk angels and good times. Enter, and take a look around: It's like opening up a

roadhouse hope chest.

You'll see springy wooden floors, a wagon-wheel chandelier, pool tables, neon beer signs, and a checkered oilcloth on each table. There's a wooden 1886 bar brought from Schulenburg that's peppered with shotgun blasts from some long-ago altercation.

You might recognize the bar from a scene in the TV miniseries *Lonesome Dove*, when Texas

Ranger Gus McCrae smacks the surly bartender. Today, you'll find only friendly staff behind the bar, serving up chilled long-necks from a horse trough filled with ice.

A long and distinguished list of (mostly) country musicians have played at the Coupland Dancehall: Willie Nelson, Kevin Fowler, Pat Green, Gary P. Nunn, the Bellamy Brothers, Ray Price, Canned Heat, Asleep at the Wheel, and Tracy Lawrence. The night that I took my family, the featured artist was Jason Allen, who launched into that great Charlie Robison song with "Bar light, bar bright, first bar I see tonight."

Dancers of all ages and abilities hit the floor for a counterclockwise spin. At one point, someone took the mike and announced "It's Bobbie Jean's birthday, so everybody wish her a happy birthday. She's only 30!" Bobbie Jean herself, obviously not a day over, well, 60, smiled and waved at the appreciative crowd.

A posse of teenagers—many of whom sported pressed shirts, Wrangler jeans with rodeo wallets, and Roper boots—got into the spirit. Some of them showed off a practiced, confident two-step. Birthday girl Bobbie Jean's husband put everyone to shame, though: He stormed the dance floor with some swinging moves during a rockabilly number, and the other dancers scattered to the tables, leaving the floor to the master.

THE OLD COUPLAND INN AND DANCE-

HALL is at 101-103 Hoxie (at the corner of Hoxie and North Commerce streets, next to the railroad tracks) in Coupland. Follow the signs on Texas 95. Call 512/856-2226; www.couplanddancehall.com.

Restaurant hours: Thu 5:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. (with an all-you-can-eat sirloin-steak special), Fri 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m. (with a catfish special), and Sat 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m. (with an all-you-can-eat barbecue special). A kid's menu is available, and some entrées are free to kids age 10 and younger with the purchase of an adult entrée.

The restaurant is in a dry precinct of Williamson County. To purchase beer, wine, or mixed drinks, patrons need to join the (free) Coupland Private Club.

Dance hall Hours: Fri 7-midnight, Sat 7-1 a.m. Live music usually starts around 9 p.m., and concert admission varies.

Rooms at the **Bed and Breakfast** (Fri-Sat only) cost \$80 per night, including a Continental breakfast.



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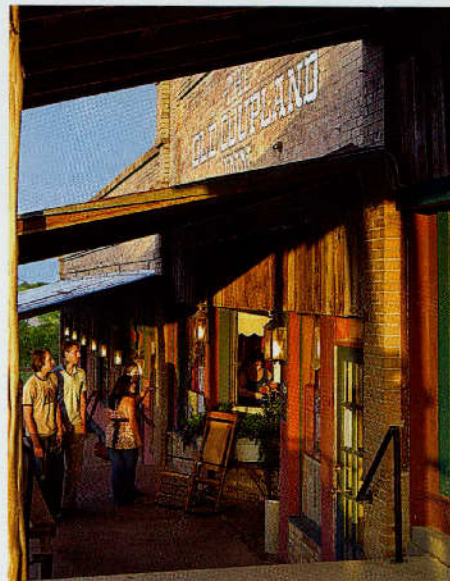
Nov. 16-18
Weihnachtsmarkt

Dec. 6
Wassailfest

TOP Tables

"It's a place for everybody," says Rick. "Whether you're an accomplished dancer or a beginner, there's plenty of room on this old dance floor!"

If you'd like to stay overnight, the Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall offers lodging above the restaurant on Fridays and Saturdays. Entire families sometimes rent



On Friday and Saturday nights, folks queue up for live music at the Coupland Dancehall.

out the bedrooms, and there's a large sitting room/parlor as well. It looks out onto a M.K. & T. (Katy railroad) depot and caboose, plus you can see artist Jim Huntington's outdoor sculpture garden (see page 17) across the street. The rooms are decorated in a tongue-in-cheek "nouveau bordello" style—stained glass, swag lamps, and rich brocade curtains—inspired by one of the parlor's paintings.

What better way to two-step back in time on a weekend night than with dinner, dancin', and snoozing after a pleasant drive through rolling hills and cornfields out to Coupland? Just look for the typically Texan grain silos standing as lonely prairie sentinels next to the railroad tracks, smell the barbecue, see the lights flooding out into the street, and hear the sounds of a toe-tapping good time.

Check out SHEILA SCARBOROUGH'S web site at www.sheilascarborough.com.

For THE ROAD

(continued from page 12)

bags and cameras and negotiating their next stop. Should they shop for country antiques or an ultra-mod sofa? Stay in a 1940s-style hotel or century-old cottage? Enjoy weissenbock and weiner schnitzel or sake and sushi? It has gotten tougher to decide what to do in this once-sleepy town.

Here's one thing you won't want to miss: the historic **Admiral Nimitz Museum**, which reopened this year after more than two years of renovation. The museum, which is housed in a hotel once operated by Nimitz's grandfather, tells the story of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the Fredericksburg native who commanded more than two million men and women in the Central Pacific Theater after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

The Admiral Nimitz Museum is part of the six-acre National Museum of the Pacific War complex, the only institution in the continental United States that exclusively tells the story of the Pacific War battles of World War II. Call 830/997-4379; www.nimitz-museum.org. For general information about Fredericksburg, call 888/997-3600; www.fredericksburg-texas.com.

URBAN OUTFITTER

THE PANHANDLE-PLAINS HISTORICAL Museum in Canyon brims with exhibits that shed light on Western art, history, and culture. If you haven't visited the museum or nearby Palo Duro Canyon, you'll find that fall—with its cooler temperatures and earlier sunsets—is a great time to go. Budget at least a day to explore Palo Duro, and at least a half-day for the museum, which has one of the largest collections in the state.

Beginning September 29, the museum will present approximately 70 artworks in the exhibition called *Urban Texas: Changing Images of an Evolving State*. In the latter part of the 19th-Century, artists such as Hermann Lungkwitz, Julius Stockfleth, Theodore Gentilz, Jerry Bywaters, and others began to paint images of Texas' industrialization. These early cityscapes and depictions of workers in Texas oilfields and factories present intriguing snapshots of Texas' growth. Call 806/651-2244; www.panhandleplains.org.

VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT www.texashighways.com

Space, Stone, and Steel

SCULPTOR JIM HUNTINGTON carved out a career in California and on the East Coast before sinking new roots in the tiny town of **Coupland** in 1994. Jim's sculptures range from abstract tabletop works to elegant monoliths made of granite and curved steel, copper, and bronze, with titles such as *Buttah* and *Twisty Ichi*.



Sculptor Jim Huntington invites you to explore his life's work at his one-acre sculpture garden in Coupland.

"I choose to combine stone and metal because they have distinctly different characteristics," says Jim. "The stone is natural; God made it. The metal is formed in all of its stages by man. But space is as important to me as the materials." Luckily for Jim, there's plenty of space in Coupland.

Jim lives and works in his studio behind the Old Coupland Inn and Dancehall (see page 14), and his one-acre sculpture garden opens to visitors 365 days a year. Take some time to wander through Jim's secret garden, where more than 65 pieces await. Jim advises visitors to stroll the grounds and enter the interior spaces of the artworks. "Kids understand the sculptures right away," says Jim. "But lots of adults have lost that natural impulse to investigate, so they need encouragement."

Call 512/856-2334; www.huntingtonsculpture.org.

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BIG BEND

BY JUNE NAYLOR

PHOTOGRAPHS

BY J. GRIFFIS SMITH

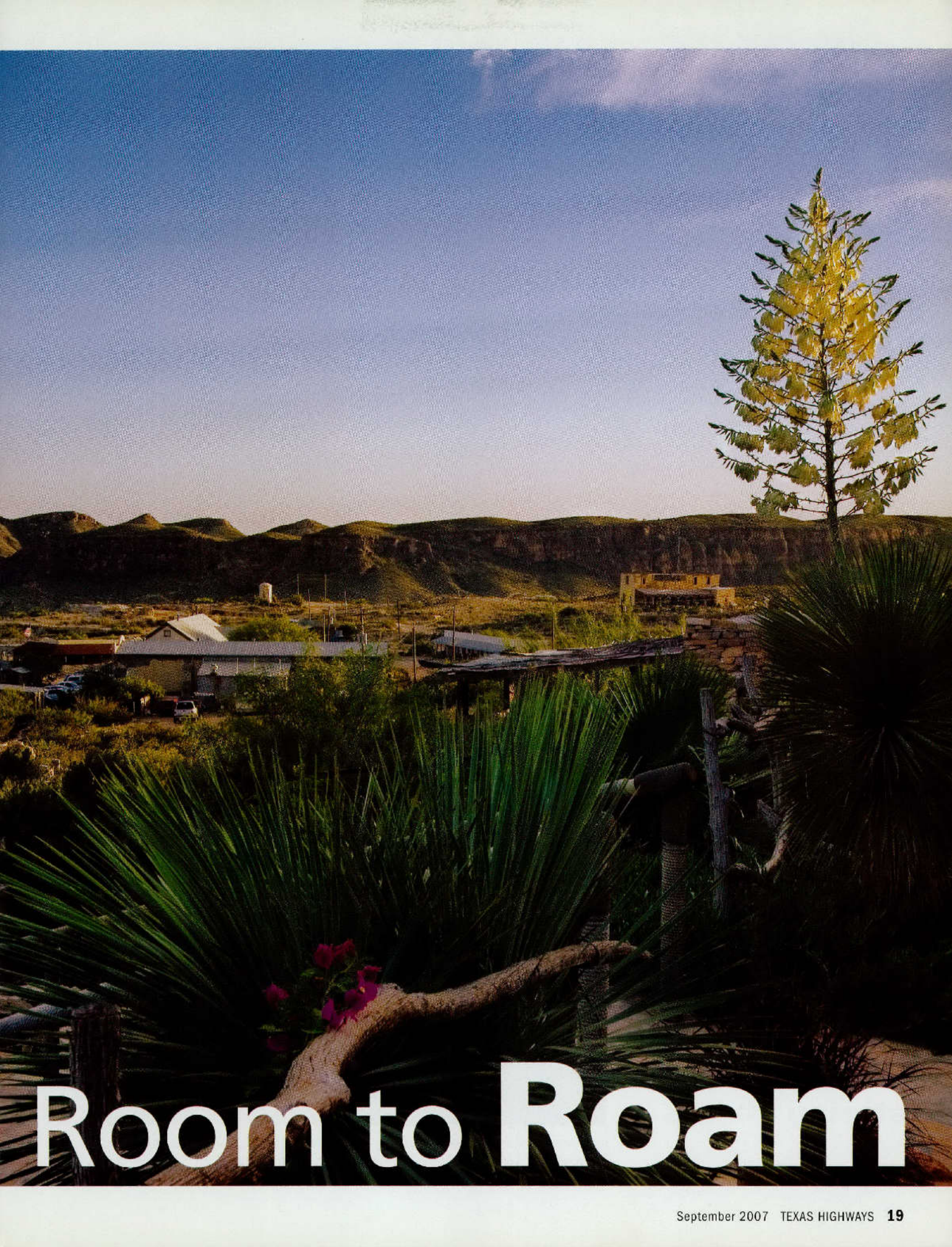
BY VIRTUE of its remoteness, the Big Bend region serves as the ultimate definition of *off the beaten path*. Every square inch of this wide, lonely reach of the Trans-Pecos might as well be the other side of the moon for its utter isolation. It's hard to resist the call of far-flung ribbons of small roads, where you can drive for seemingly endless stretches without seeing another soul. Think of it as extreme escapism, which we all need now and again. Hang on, and I'll take you on a tour of my recent offbeat discoveries and reacquaintances in a meandering tour of Big Bend.

About 25 miles west of Big Bend National Park headquarters (but barely five minutes by car from the park's western entrance), **Terlingua Ghosttown** couldn't possibly be more removed—spiritually or physically—from urban life. A long-abandoned quicksilver mining camp, it's not really a ghost town anymore, but the name stuck. This is where musicians and artists like Butch Hancock (one of the Flatlanders trio, of Lubbock fame) and myriad other creative types have retreated for peace and quiet. Sure, it's anything but quiet the first weekend in November, when thousands of beer-soaked revelers turn out for the two world-championship chili competitions, but Terlingua is, nevertheless, the quintessential jumping-off place in Texas.

My favorite spot remains the Terlingua Trading Co., recently expanded from seven to 10 rooms. Inside you can buy cookbooks featuring recipes from Texas and the Southwest, as well as the goofy Hostess Twinkie cookbook, and you can find whimsical Day of the Dead accoutrements, such as a T-shirt showing skeletons playing poker or skiing. There's handmade Native American



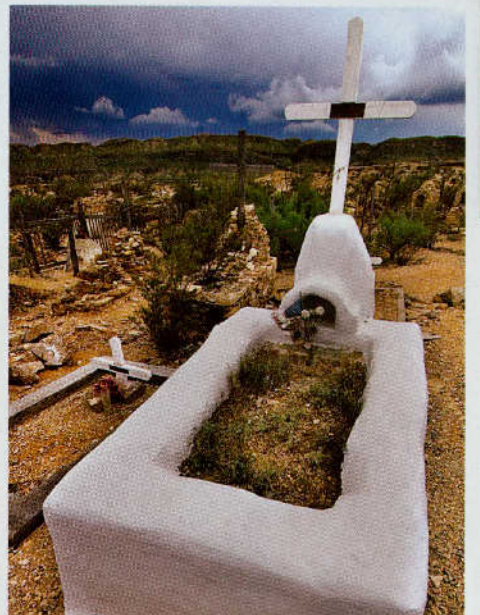
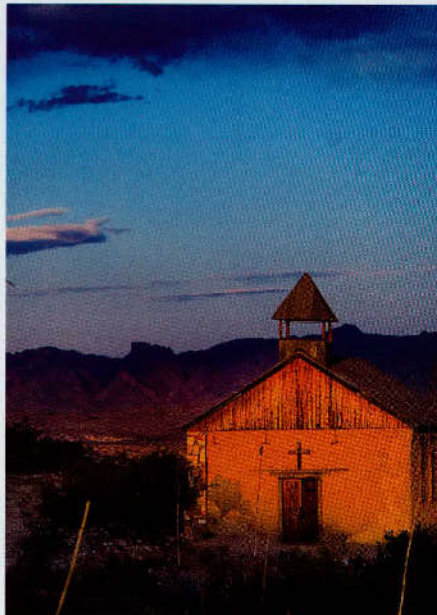
Take in the view of the Chisos Mountains from a room at La Posada Milagro, a new guesthouse in Terlingua Ghosttown.



Room to Roam



Against a deep blue sky, the rusting metal crosses make for stirring images.



[CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP] A view of the night sky from La Posada Milagro. On a guided tour of Terlingua Ghosttown, you'll see the Terlingua Cemetery and the St. Agnes Church, an old miners' church still used today for weddings and funerals.

with sunbaked ruins and fixed-up Air-stream trailers. When the sun drops in the sky somewhat, I'll leave my perch only to photograph the fascinating cemetery in the center of town, each grave a mini-shrine with candles and trinkets amidst a yard of rocks. Against a deep blue sky, the rusting metal crosses make for stirring images.

Next door to the Trading Co., evenings

rock at the Starlight Theatre, a one-time movie house dating to 1931. It's where you load up on suppers of tofu with lentils, soy-seared yellowfin tuna, and green chile enchiladas (the menu varies throughout the year), while listening to live music, or where you can get two-for-one burgers on Monday nights. Bring your laptop, as there's Wi-Fi access, too.



© LAURENCE PARENT

jewelry, casual clothing, and carved burlwood figurines, but I'm really fond of the little museum tucked off in a corner. Inside are old photos and artifacts from the early settlement days in the region, when wagon trains coming from Marathon brought supplies, soldiers, and merchants.

By mid-afternoon, you can count on finding some old character sitting on the porch, sipping a longneck beer, probably with his dog nearby. I usually pull up a chair here, too, as this is a great place to watch the foot traffic coming and going, and to study the rocky hillsides dotted

A wood-carved snake numbers among the many objects on display in Terlingua Trading Co.'s main store. Once a movie house frequented by Terlingua miners in the 1930s, the Starlight Theatre was renovated in 1991 and remains open today as a restaurant and bar.

The main reason you'd ever want to leave the ghost town is to take a hike in the national park.

Best among new developments in the old ghost town, La Posada Milagro is a terrific, four-room guesthouse created from the ruins of three restored dry-stack rock buildings on a scenic hillside. Rustic but lavished with luxurious appointments and well-chosen decor, the inn has fireplaces, sun decks, and an outdoor kitchen—and spectacular views of the Chisos Mountains.

The main reason you'd ever want to leave the ghost town is to take a hike in Big Bend National Park. Each trail has its own rewards, but only one takes

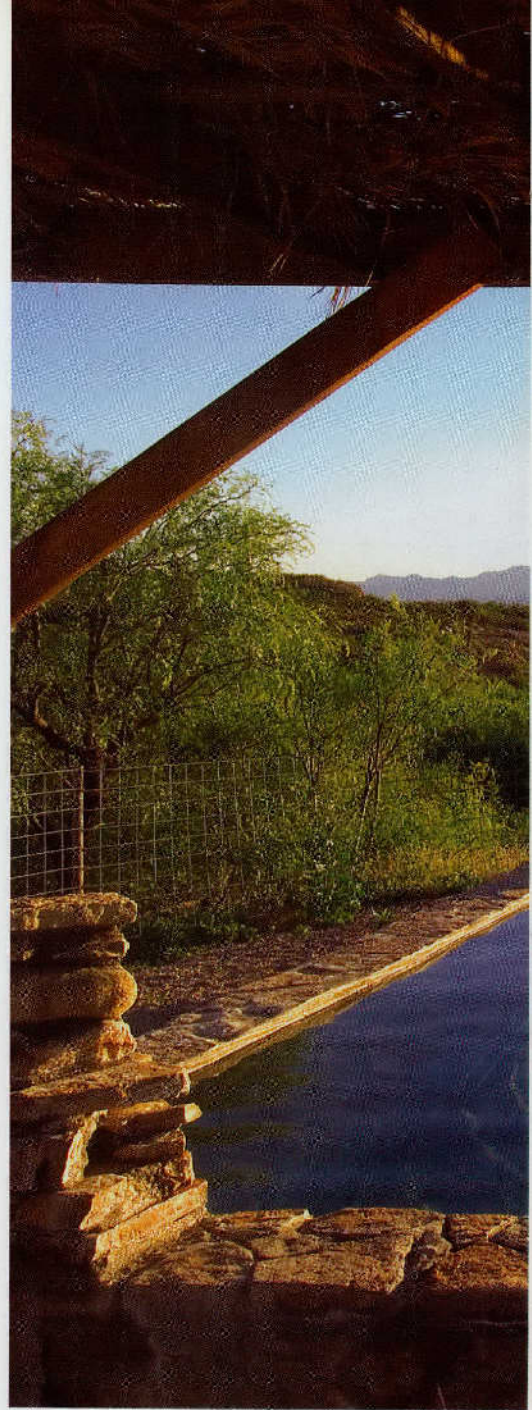
© AL BRADEN



© LAURENCE PARENT



A roadrunner perches atop ruins in Terlingua Ghosttown. In Davis Mountains State Park, recently renovated Indian Lodge has 39 guest rooms, a restaurant, meeting space, and a pool.



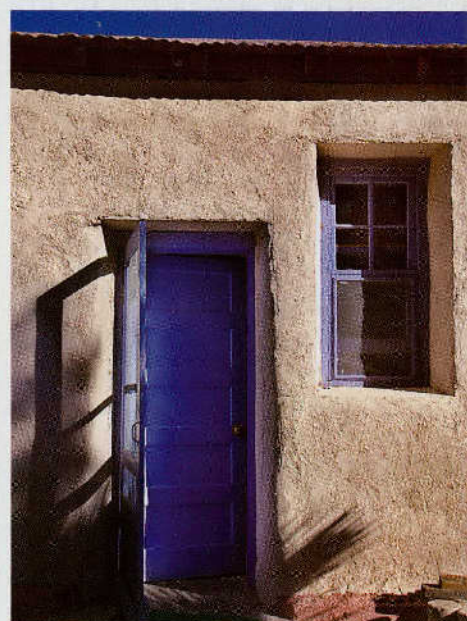
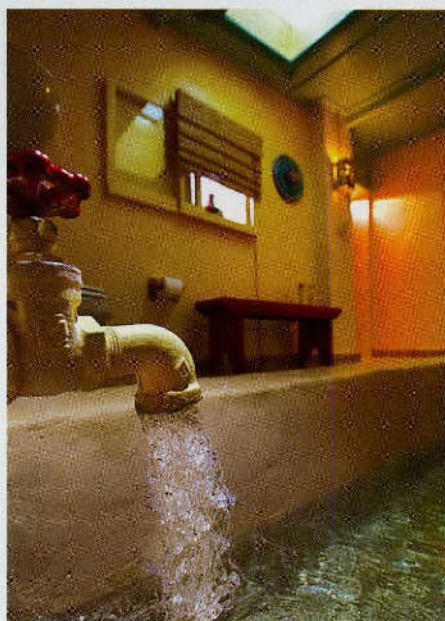
you to a spot where you can soak your weary bones in natural springs bubbling from the ground at 105 degrees. Once a popular bathhouse destination, today the springs are but a ruin alongside the river—but one you can appreciate, body and soul.

In the southeastern corner of the park, the Hot Springs sits just west of Rio Grande Village. Following a gravel road a couple of miles, I find the trailhead and then walk to the old Hot Springs Village, where the post office and hotel buildings have been partially restored in the shade



of old palm trees. Down a narrow, hilly trail lined with more than a dozen varieties of cactus, I find the springs at the edge of the river, where the remnants of an old brick wall of the bathhouse can be seen. Just as a century ago, the water feels mighty good.

That said, the water feels even better over at Chinati Hot Springs, a funky little resort that sits at the absolute end of the road. Found 98 miles west of Terlingua along Ranch Road 170—the last seven miles a teeth-rattling journey over a rocky path—this, friends, is the outback. Resi-



Allison Manners enjoys a beautiful sunset at Chinati Hot Springs. At the resort, you can run a hot bath in the El Presidente cabin (left), or stay in the smaller El Dorado cabin, which is easy to identify with its bright blue door.



Marfa-grown grapes contribute to the wide selection of wines offered at the Luz de Estrella Winery.

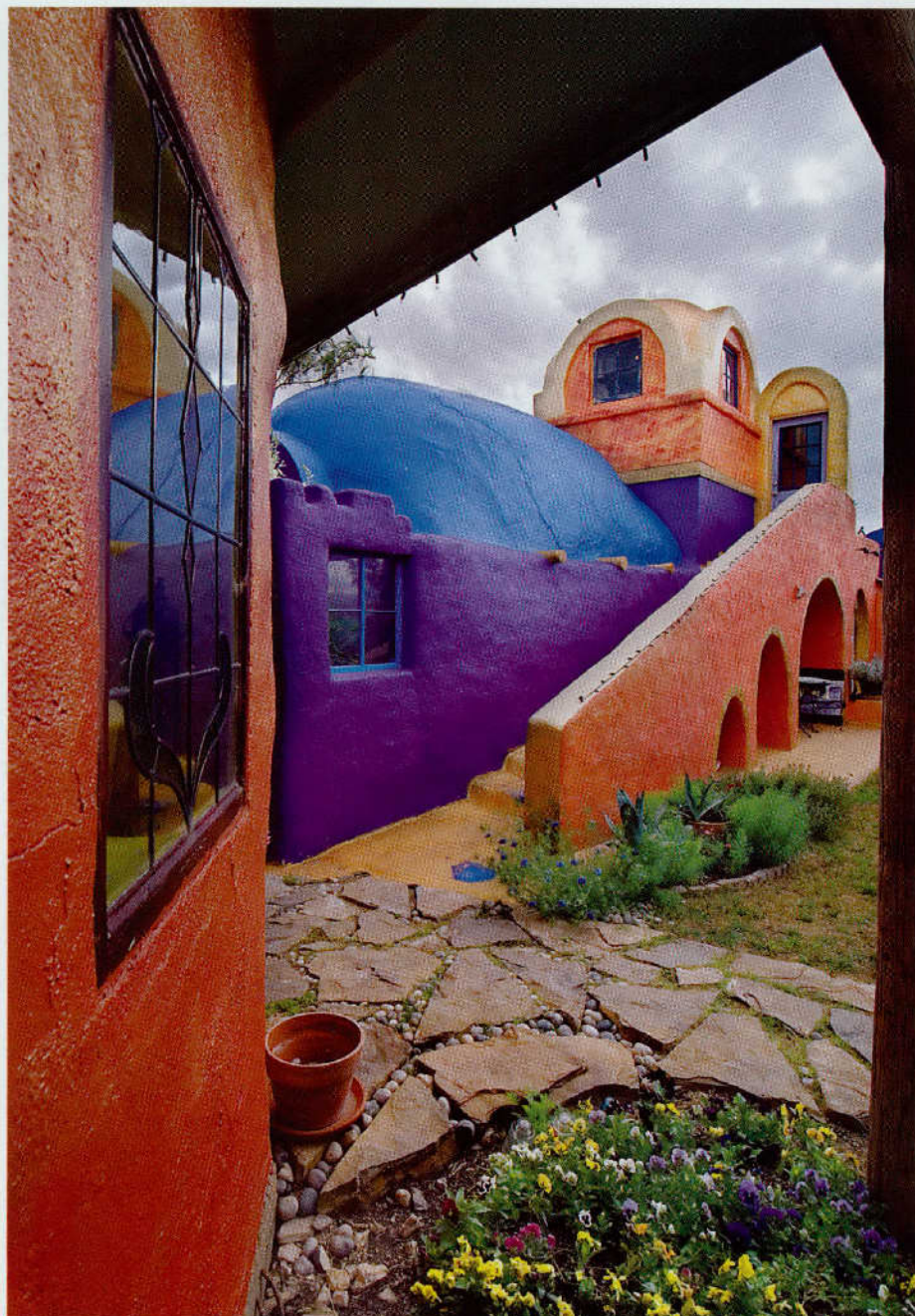
dent dogs Hominy and Bully greet me on my arrival (the latest canine addition is young bloodhound Waylon Peter Jennings). The cabins are full, but it's quiet; people don't come here to party, although everyone seems to have brought a cooler of beer or several bottles of wine for their stay. Some folks are grilling steaks outside the community kitchen, which is surrounded by cactus and bougainvillea, while others are inside heating up stew (bring your own food—the nearest grocer is 50 miles away in Presidio). There's a group sipping a few cold ones while they soak in an outdoor rock tub, steam and gentle laughter rising from the water under the towering cottonwoods. My adobe hut, the charming little El Patron, has a private toilet and sink, plus a mini-fridge and comfy queen-size bed, but it's my tiny patio with a deep tub, fashioned from an old trough, that I love. I light candles and soak under the stars and listen to...nothing.

Ready for a little more civilization, I head up the road to **Fort Davis**, about 100 miles northeast. I'm smitten with the recently renovated Indian Lodge inside Davis Mountains State Park. The \$4.3 million update put a new polish on the

adobe complex, designed to resemble a Native American pueblo. Now the beautiful red cedar furniture and pine vigas and latillas, crafted in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, really stand out, as do the beautiful casement windows. After a day of hiking, just before sunset, I gaze out at the buttes rising behind the lodge and spot a massive aoudad, standing on an outcropping. I think he admires the stillness and scenery as much as I do.

It's just a 24-mile drive to Luz de Estrella Winery, a new venture a few miles east of Marfa. Taking over the inventory of the de-

**Roaming
through the inn,
I feel like I've
gone through
the looking glass
with Alice...**



In Marathon, Eve's Garden, a B&B and ecology resource center, features five suites and a lap pool.

funct Blue Mountain Winery, winemaker Patrick Johnson offers a tasting room that I reach on a short drive past roaming Texas Longhorns and antelope. Cabernet sauvignon, riesling, chenin blanc, and Rojo, a red table wine, number among the wines I try. Patrick plans to add viognier, port, and shiraz to his collection. The wines have a pretty label that incorporates a star and bluebonnets, making a great gift for people at home.

Wandering on to **Alpine**, only a 26-mile drive from Marfa, I happen upon 6th St. Coffeeshop and Icehouse, a three-



Xander Cross, manager and cook at 6th St. Coffeeshop and Icehouse in Alpine, serves up a bowl of tomato-basil soup.

year-old hangout opened by local Connie Cornett. Wanting to offer something for diners maxed-out on Tex-Mex and barbecue, Connie serves corn chowder and wild mushroom focaccia that are among the best things I've ever tasted. She bakes lovely rhubarb-strawberry pie, as well, which I nibble while perusing Connie's bookshelves, crammed with volumes on Southern culture, Western music, American paintings, and flora and fauna of the Big Bend. In the evening, Connie's place becomes a wine bar, with a cool patio out back that welcomes vegetarian and vegan diners, as well as meat-eaters. She does an Italian night on Tuesday, Middle Eastern food and live music on Wednes-

day, and Asian nibbles with live music on Thursday.

Daytime hours in Alpine can be spent exploring the Museum of the Big Bend, recently relocated to its original and now meticulously refurbished WPA building, circa 1936. Found on the campus at Sul Ross State University, the museum is a repository of all things cultural, historical, and natural from the region. The exhibit through early September is the *U.S.-Mexican Boundary Survey*, offering a collection of maps, drawings, reports, and mapmaking tools that covered Texas and today's New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado, after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Next on the schedule is a photographic exhibit on the Terlingua chili cookoffs.

If you're looking for a place with an eye toward the future, stay at Eve's Garden. Situated in **Marathon**, about 30 miles east of Alpine, this bed and breakfast and ecology resource center might serve as a microcosm of what our world would be like if it were to function in a purely green manner. Adding onto a pretty, 100-year-old home, owners Clyde T. Curry and Kate

Thayer have expanded their holistic hostelry to include five guest suites, a lap pool, a wondrous greenhouse, and a coffee-break/Wi-Fi room—all from papercrete blocks, astonishingly lightweight bricks composed of recycled paper and mortar, which they've finished with layers of stucco and paint. Roaming through the inn, I feel like I've gone through the looking glass with Alice, wandering in a fairy tale through rooms with curved shapes and lines, all cozy and colorful and rich with texture. The suites, decorated with fabrics from India and appointments like glass chess sets, surround the greenhouse, where Kate grows all kinds of flowers, and squash, tomatoes, chard, sweet potatoes, bok choy, and peas with purple pods. Eve's Garden is complete with a papier-mâché snake, festooned with colorful pieces of broken glass.

Certainly, that's not something you'd find on most well-worn roads. ★

JUNE NAYLOR is the author of *Texas: Off the Beaten Path* (7th ed.; Globe Pequot Press, 2007). Check out her *Texas Highways* Travel Blog at www.texashighways.com.

J. GRIFFIS SMITH says the Big Bend is his "favorite place in the world, period."

essentials BIG BEND BACKROADS SITES

FOLLOWING is contact information for sites in the story. For more details on the Big Bend area, go to www.visitbigbend.com. The area code for all phone numbers is 432.

TERLINGUA GHOSTTOWN

Terlingua Trading Co., 100 Ivey St., 371-2234; www.historic-terlingua.com.

Starlight Theatre, 100 Ivey St., 371-2326; www.starlighttheatre.com.

La Posada Milagro guest house, 371-3044 or 386-6496; www.laposadamilagro.com.

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK

Big Bend Natl. Park (including Hot Springs, at US 385 at Maverick Dr.), 477-2251; www.nps.gov/bibe/.

RUIDOSA

Chinati Hot Springs, Hot Springs Rd., 229-4165; www.chinatihotsprings.com.

FORT DAVIS

Davis Mountains State Park, 426-3337 (Indian Lodge at Davis Mountains State Park, 426-3254); www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

MARFA

Luz de Estrella, 100 Starlight Way, 729-3434; www.luzdeestrella.com.

ALPINE

6th St. Coffeeshop and Icehouse, 114 N. Sixth St., 837-2253.

Museum of the Big Bend,

at Sul Ross State University, 837-8143; www.sulross.edu/~museum/.

MARATHON

Eve's Garden, Ave. C and N. Third St., 386-4165; www.evesgarden.org.



A hiker strides a path beneath tall pines, magnolias, and beeches. A sightseer drives a backroad past rolling hay meadows. An angler trolls a brushy shore. A waitress serves blue-plate specials with a Southern drawl. A dominoes player lays down double-five in a cuss-and-spit game on the courthouse lawn.

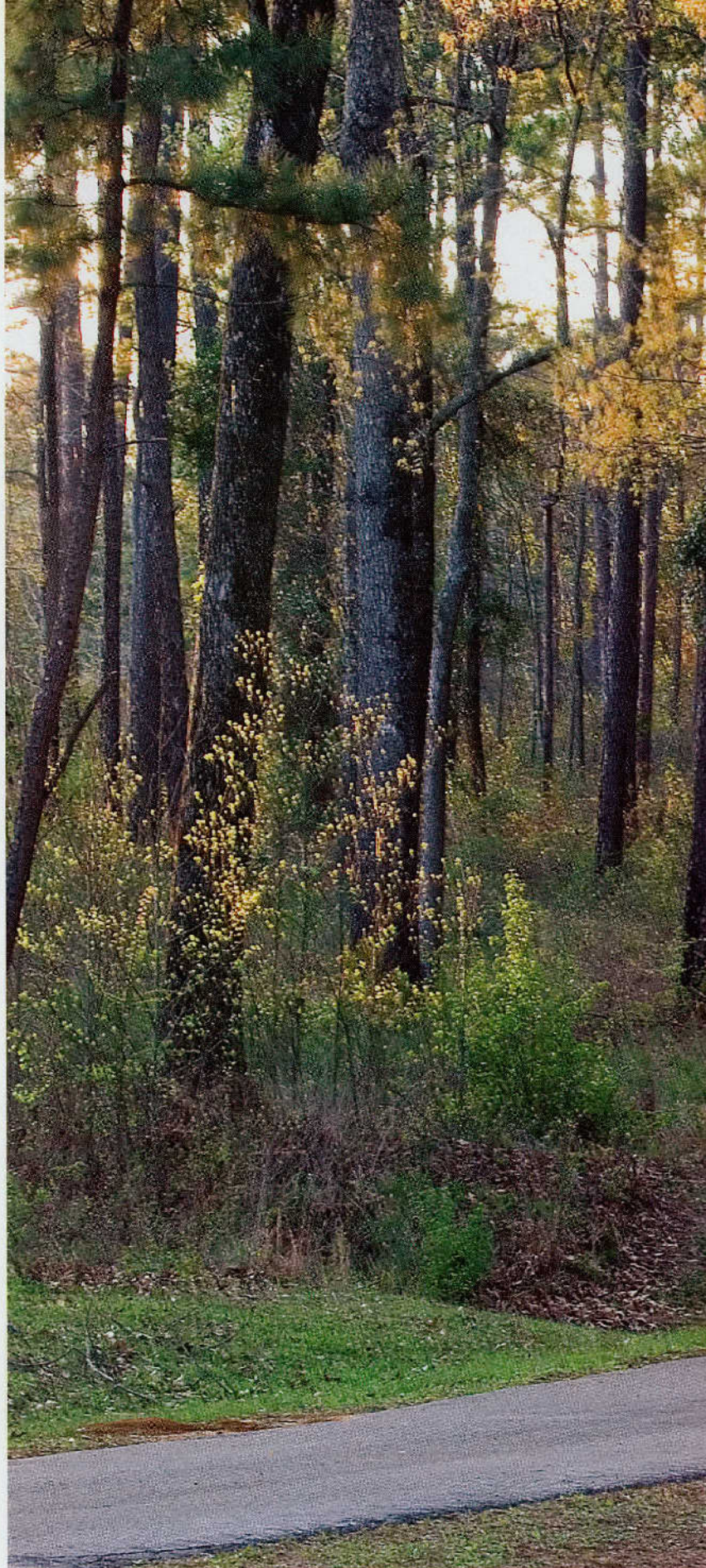
If your wanderlust aches for backwoods wandering and Southern small-town charm, grab your official state map and follow my 100-mile ramble. Look to the Piney Woods of East Texas—home of Toledo Bend and Sam Rayburn reservoirs, plus the Sabine and Angelina National Forests.

Outdoor enthusiasts know this land of water and woods as a recreational haven of public trails, campgrounds, and prolific fishing holes. History buffs know the place for tales of early exploration and international conflict. On a recent visit, I also found the area chock-full of quaint churches and pretty farmhouses. All in all, it's a getaway where "fast-paced" is out of place and "old-fashioned" is in fashion.

Ten miles south of **Deadwood** on FM 31, I located a historically significant spot. In the 1700s, French and Spanish land claims overlapped along today's Texas-Louisiana line. Eventually, the 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty established Texas' eastern boundary. A few years later, the Republic of Texas and the United States set granite posts to mark the new line.

One remains on FM 31. Chiseled on the east face is "U.S." and on the west face "R.T." for Republic of Texas. It's the only international boundary marker inside the contiguous United States.

Texas' easternmost national forest, Sabine National Forest sidles up to Toledo Bend Reservoir and forms part of the boundary between Texas and Louisiana. In the fall, when the tree canopy changes from green to copper and gold, hiking and biking the forest's serpentine trails proves especially rewarding.





Where
Fast-Paced is
Out of Place

From the marker, I zigged along US 84 to **Tenaha**, then zagged via US 96 to **Center**, where historian Joe Louis Jones and ex-county judge Floyd A. “Doc” Watson showed me the 1885 Shelby County Courthouse. Designed by Irish architect J.J.E. Gibson, the restored edifice is known as the “Irish Castle.” Actually, Joe noted, “Gibson was a religious man and meant the courtroom to look like a European cathedral.” Gibson also blessed the judge’s bench with a secret trap door and stairs, which alleged-



When guests arrive, they're worried about cell phone service, but after two days on the lake, they're glad to be away from it all.

ly allowed a hasty retreat in case of danger.

Next, I strolled across Shelbyville Street to the Attoyac River Gallery, where artists Ed and Tresa Konderla turn local trees into elegant bowls, vases, and furniture. I especially admired Ed’s sweetgum bowls, which reveal beautiful patterns and colors.

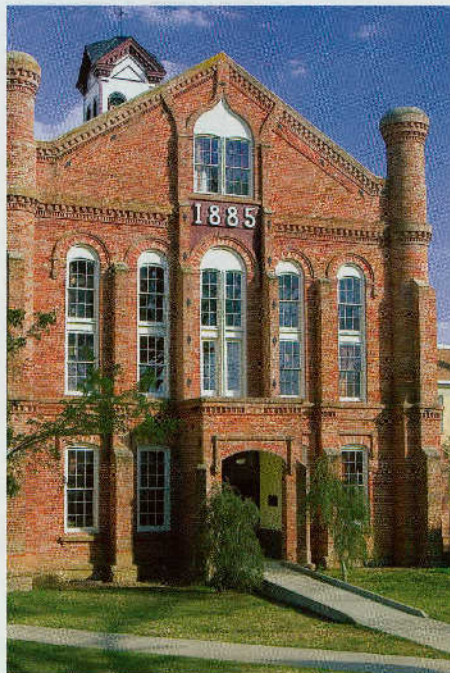
Scenic Texas 87 winds from Center through Sabine National Forest. At **Shelbyville**, I took equally lovely scenic FM 2694 to Boles Field Recreational Area. The camping and picnic area centers around a cemetery for fox hounds. Graves of more than two dozen prized dogs from across the nation honor a hunting tradition still practiced in the deep woods.

FM 2694 also leads to Huxley Bay Marina, on the north shore of Toledo Bend Reservoir, the largest man-made lake in the South. The marina has a café, motel, and campground. You can embark on fishing treks with Greg Crafts, who operates Toledo Bend Guide Service. Greg and his wife, Beth, also run the nearby Toledo Bend Lake Cottage, a two-bedroom lodge on the lake.

On another north-end cove, I hooked up with lake guide Mark Robinson. Mark and his wife, Paula, operate Robinson’s Lodge, a five-room B&B with a fine view. Mark enjoys watching a change come over corporate groups who book weekend fishing and nature retreats. “When they arrive, they’re worried about cell phone service,” he says, “but after two days on the lake, they’re glad to be away from it all.”

I moved on via the backroads to **San Augustine**, a veritable living museum of history and architecture. This sleepy town boasts more than 50 Texas Historical Landmark homes and sites, including the 1839 Ezekiel Cullen House and churches dating to pre-statehood.

San Augustine sits on El Camino Real de las Tejas, a National Historic Trail



Not your ordinary salad bar: In Jasper, Ann’s Tackle Shop sets the hook with all manner of fishing lures. The 1885 Shelby County Courthouse houses a small museum dedicated to area history. Gene Nethery shows off an antique pot-bellied stove in the C.A. Nethery Store, which was established in 1880.



Sunrise dapples Sam Rayburn Reservoir with shimmery light as anglers cast lines for largemouth bass and crappie. Stringtown's 1908 schoolhouse still hosts community activities and reunions. Peddlers in the late 19th Century dubbed the village "Stringtown" because its houses were strung out along the road.

traced by Texas 21. In the 18th Century, it was the main route between missions in San Antonio and one here, Mission Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de los Ais, established in 1717. The Mission Dolores museum offers a visitors center and RV park.

From San Augustine, I headed east on Texas 21, then veered onto Spur 35, a few miles west of Geneva. That's where the state's oldest Protestant church, McMahan's Chapel, sits in a picturesque setting beside an old cemetery and picnic park. Organized in 1833 as a "Religious Society" (in order to skirt Spanish prohibition of Protestant worship), the church still holds services in a small brick chapel built in 1950.

Texas 21 continues to Milam and ends at the Pendleton Bridge. From 1819 to 1839, James Gaines owned a ferry here, by which American settlers crossed the river into Texas. Gaines also built a two-story, dogtrot home overlooking the river. Now known as the Gaines-Oliphant

House, it's the state's oldest standing log structure.

At Milam, I poked my head into the general store established in 1880 by C. A. Nethery. The current store was built in 1917 and still has C.A.'s tall oak desk and ledger. C.A. died in 1942, and his son, Buddy, took it over. Buddy was so tight with money, his nephew Gene Nethery told me, that he burned only one light at a time, clicking bulbs on and off as he moved about. The store now offers antiques and hosts an annual trades day market in May.

Just south of Milam along Texas 87, I encountered living history in Hemphill at a



I went from baits to boxes of boots and bras displayed in apparent pandemonium at the P.N. Ashy Store on Jasper's square.



With her platinum wig, slight forward tilt, and broad smile, Kaytlyn Sweet of Dallas portrayed an impeccable Dolly Parton at the East Texas Jamboree in Broaddus. On FM 363 east of Bleakwood, a row of bottle trees—said to trap evil spirits—work their magic next to an American flag and a windmill.

Civil War Reenactment held each spring at the historic Pratt House. Dressed in period garb, men, women, and children played dulcimers on the 1908 mansion's wraparound porch, demonstrated pioneer crafts, and enjoyed the exciting powwow performance of Alabama-Coushatta dancers from nearby Woodville.

On Hemphill's downtown square, I admired the 1910 Sabine County Courthouse and the 1904 Sabine County Jail, now a museum and genealogy archive. The gaggle of domino players who come to the square every morning were busy slamming down bones under a nearby cedar tree. Watching the action reminded me of countless domino games I played as a youngster at my grandmother's house.

I then took the quick way to Sam Rayburn Reservoir, FM 83, to catch the Legends Show at the East Texas Jamboree in Broaddus. The weekly Jamboree kicked off its country music review a decade ago to "bring a little Branson to Broaddus," says owner and house band member Coy Buchanan. The Legends Show features area and statewide talent portraying country music legends like Patsy Cline and Dolly Parton.

I found myself lured to Jasper, a prime jumping-off spot for anglers. At Ann's Tackle Shop, owner Ann Thomasson-Wilson showed off her "wacky-style" trick worms as well as her "Crappie Bar"—several hundred colorful plastic baits arrayed buffet style. Catching a trophy fish on Sam Rayburn is possible for old-

hands and novices alike, she assured me.

I went from baits to boxes of boots and bras displayed in apparent pandemonium at the P.N. Ashy Store on Jasper's courthouse square. As I perused blue-striped overalls, proprietress Mary Ashy told me about selling cowboy hats to World War II soldiers during the Louisiana Maneuvers, at the time the largest U.S. training exercise. "We must've boxed and shipped hundreds of hats all over the country," she recalled.

Some of the soldiers no doubt ate lunch across the square in the dining room of the Belle-Jim Hotel, which opened in 1910. Innkeepers David and Pat Stiles now offer bed and breakfast lodging and homestyle lunches. I gobbled my chicken-pot pie, salad, sweet tea, and chess pie with gusto. Pulling up a chair, David pointed across the room to where military leaders George Patton and Dwight D. Eisenhower dined during the Louisiana Maneuvers.

From Jasper, I took US 190 east to Newton, where the Texas Historical Commission is restoring the stately Second Empire Courthouse, built in 1902. In 1909, the former home of the W.H. Ford Male and Female College was hoisted on logs and rolled a hundred yards to face the courthouse. In 1914 it became the Powell Hotel. The structure is now a museum, featuring nine upstairs guest rooms decked out with period furniture and memorabilia from area families. Downstairs is a replica schoolroom of the early 1900s.

From Newton, I drove to the community of Stringtown, so-named by 19th-Century peddlers because its houses were strung out along the road. A state historical marker at the 1908 Stringtown school-

house notes that it served the community for nearly 40 years.

From the hilltop school, FM 1414 continues seven more miles to Wild Azalea Canyons. I grabbed a walking stick provided at the trailhead and ventured into the rock canyons and longleaf pines. In spring, the wild azalea trees on the hill-sides expolde with pink blooms. Temple Eastex Lumber Company (now Temple Inland) designated the rarefied site a public-use wilderness preserve in the 1970s.

Generations have also enjoyed my next destination, located southeast of Newton



Kaylon Booker shows off a plate of pork chops at Mama's Kountry Kitchen in Bleakwood.

off FM 2626, a watery oasis called Artesian Springs Resort. Beginning in the 1940s, locals excavated the sand and gravel that had piled up in the Sabine river bottom for centuries, creating pits that turned into ponds and small lakes. Vacationers have flocked here for swimming, camping, hiking, and lodging in cozy waterfront cabins since the 1980s. The resort's focal point is a large swimming pond, lined by sugar sand and fed by artesian springs. A 100-foot water slide plunges kids of all ages into the constant 63-degree water.

FM 2626 loops through dense riverbottom, then junctions with FM 363, where I headed west to **Bleakwood**. The community got its name in 1867 when T. L. McDonald suggested the name to honor his former home in Scotland. In Bleakwood,

essentials TALL TIMBER TRAILS

FOR THE AREA'S national forests, call **Sabine National Forest** (409/787-3870) or **Angelina National Forest** (936/897-1068), or visit www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas. For **Toledo Bend Reservoir** information, contact the Sabine River Authority (409/746-2192; www.sra.dst.tx.us or www.toledo-bend.com). For **Sam Rayburn Reservoir** information, contact the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (409/384-5716; www.swf-wc.usace.army.mil/samray).

DEADWOOD

To reach the **1840 International Boundary Marker**, go south from the community of Deadwood on Texas 31 approximately 10 miles to the site.

CENTER/SHELBYVILLE

Attoyac River Gallery (936/590-9968), **Huxley Bay Marina** (936/368-2494), **Toledo Bend Guide Service and Lake Cottage** (936/368-7151), **Robinson's Lodge on Toledo Bend** (936/368-2211), **Boles Field Recreational Area** (409/787-3870). For details on the **Shelby County Courthouse** and other attractions—such as the **Rio Theater** (first-run movies since 1926)—contact the Shelby County Chamber of Commerce (936/598-3682).

SAN AUGUSTINE

San Augustine County Historical Records Research Center (936/275-1452, www.sarecords.info)

Ezekiel Cullen House
(936/275-5110)

Mission Dolores museum and visitors center (936/275-3815, www.missionrv.san.augustinetx.com)

For more information, call the San Augustine County Chamber of Commerce (936/275-3610, www.sanaugustinetx.com).

GENEVA

McMahan's Chapel (936/275-2213, www.mcmahan.chapel.org)

MILAM

C.A. Nethery Store
(409/625-4063)

HEMPHILL

Pratt House (409/787-1845, www.sabinecountyhistorical.foundation.org)

For other attractions, call the Sabine County Chamber of Commerce (409/787-2732, www.sabine-countytexas.com).

BROADDUS

East Texas Jamboree
(936/872-3353 or 936/872-3008, www.myspace.com/easttexasjamboree)

Catfish Junction
(936-872-3008)

JASPER AREA

Ann's Tackle Shop
(409/384-7685)

P.N. Ashy Store
(409/384-4332)

Belle-Jim Hotel (409/384-6923), www.belle-jim.com

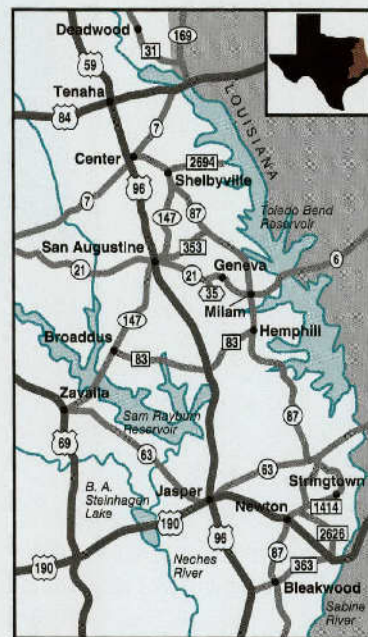
Martin Dies State Park
(409/384-5231, www.tpwd.state.tx.us)

NEWTON AREA/ BLEAKWOOD

Artesian Springs Resort
(409/379-8826, www.artesianspringsresort.com)

Mama's Kountry Kitchen
(409/420-0001)

For information on the **Ford College/Powell Hotel Museum**, **Wild Azalea Canyons**, and other area attractions, call the Newton County Chamber of Commerce (409/379-5527, www.Newton-Texas.com).



I pulled into Mama's Kountry Kitchen, where I found no haggis (a Scottish delicacy)...just old-fashioned East Texas dishes served in a former school cafeteria.

The menu varies weekly, but always offers a dozen or so entrées—from chicken and dumplings to gumbo and étouffée, plus a baker's dozen of vegetable side dishes and homemade desserts. My grilled pork chops were tender and subtly spiced, my cabbage rich with bacon, and my candied yams more dessert than side dish.

That did not, however, keep me from boxing up a warm slice of apple pie to go.

As I headed for US 96 and home to Tyler, I put on Hank Williams' rendition of "Hey, Good Lookin'!" Well before the final chorus—"Say hey, good lookin'. What ya got cookin'? How's about cooking somethin' up with me?"—the cinnamon-laced apple pie was already half gone. ★

Writer and photographer **RANDY MALLORY** loves snooping around the backroads of the Piney Woods of East Texas.

TEXAS
off the
beaten
path

PANHANDLE
PLAINS

Small Roads.

BY KATHRYN JONES
PHOTOGRAPHS
BY WYMAN MEINZER



"Call Me The Breeze." A classic windmill spins away in Lubbock. You can rock your world on the planet's largest cedar rocking chair, south of Mineral Wells.

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THE PANHANDLE PLAINS region surely deserves the title “King of the Back Roads.” Farm-to-market and ranch roads crisscross counties where cattle often outnumber people. Taking the path less traveled isn’t just a choice, it’s a necessity to appreciate just how big the “Big Country” is. You’re entering real-deal ranch country, home of storied ranches and sprawling spreads such as the JA, the Guitar, the Matador, and the XIT. Get ready to chow down on some of the best beef in Texas and stay in places steeped in history.

Here’s a sampling of some of my favorite Panhandle Plains finds you might miss barreling down the interstate at 70 mph. Take the next exit, follow a two-lane road that disappears over the horizon, and discover them for yourself.

Out-of-the-way cafes and shops

WHERE does the West really begin? The revered Texas historian and author Walter Prescott Webb pinpointed the 98th Meridian as the boundary. Heading west on Interstate 20 or US 180 from Fort Worth, you’ll cross that invisible longitudinal line in Palo Pinto County. That’s where my husband, Dan, and I began our Western swing.

We took US 281 south of Mineral Wells and I-20, in search of a curious complex of barnwood buildings we recalled from previous excursions. A few miles later, an object loomed against the cedar-covered hills. Could it be...was it really...a gigantic rocking chair?

Yep, a 26-foot-tall, more-than-12-foot-wide cedar chair. It’s so big it’s listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* and draws visitors to Larry and Sherry Dennis’ sprawling Texas Hill Country Furniture and Mercantile store, housed in a reconstructed barn built in 1885. “It took five-and-a-half days to build the rocker,” Sherry reports. “We should have named the store ‘The Big Rocker,’ because that’s how everybody knows us.”

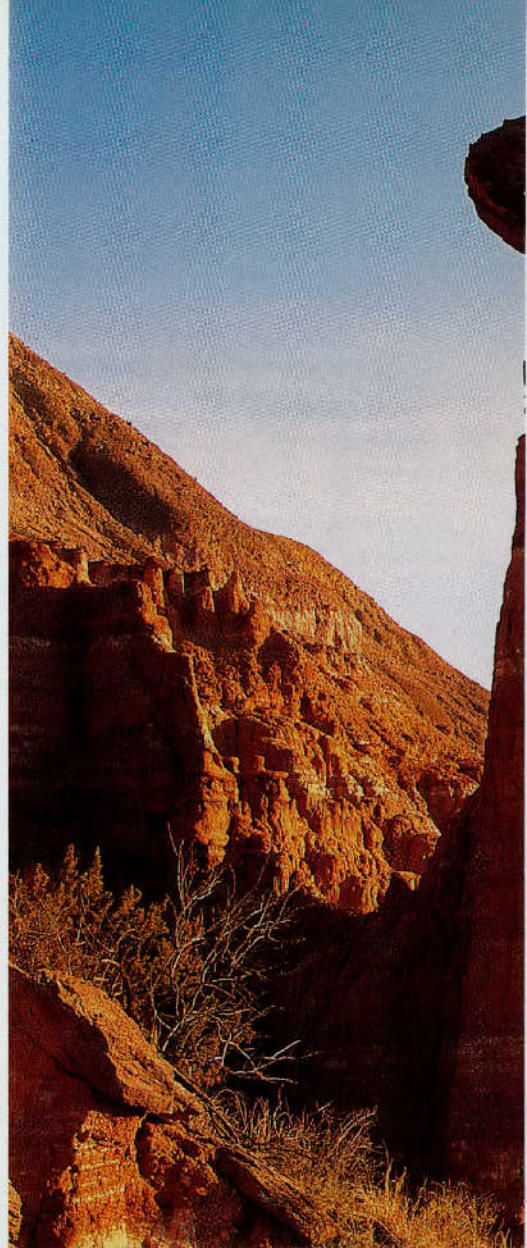
People-sized highback rockers, including the store’s signature chair with a carved five-point star of Texas, line the front porch. Larry built his first rocker 10 years ago and says he can’t keep up with demand. He also expanded into other furniture, rough hewn from cedar, mesquite, oak, and pecan. Sherry personally picked out the Western-themed place settings, paintings, wall decor, candles, and handcrafted

Texas trinkets. A red circus caboose holds clothing and etched glass pieces.

Stroll around the complex of other barnwood buildings, including a blacksmith shop, before heading to the Natty Flat Smokehouse next door. The rustic eatery makes fresh and flaky fried pies (apricot, cherry, apple, blackberry, and chocolate) Tuesdays and Fridays. Or you can dive into a plate of tender smoked brisket, turkey, or ham; nibble on a piece of homemade fudge; or indulge in ice cream at the soda fountain.



Above, bars of colorful and fragrant soap are among the assorted body care products—which also include creams, balms, lotions, and oils—at An Ancient Art Handcrafted Soap Company in Strawn. Below, manager Jennifer Kinkel at Natty Flat Smokehouse offers up mighty enticing road food. At right, an iconic hoodoo formation in Palo Duro Canyon is a Panhandle Plains wonder.





**Taking the path
less traveled isn't just a
choice, it's a necessity to
appreciate just how big
the "Big Country" is.**

If you're still hungry, keep going another 26 miles on I-20 and take the Strawn exit (#361). Follow Texas 16 several miles north to Mary's Café, an institution for chicken-fried steak. Owner and cook Mary Tretter has operated the café for 21 years. She offers her trademark entrée in three sizes: quarter-pound, half-pound, or a hefty three-quarter pounder that hangs off the plate's edge. This is some of the

best chicken-fried steak you'll ever put in your mouth. Golden, crunchy crust encases meat so tender it cuts with a fork.

Folks drive hundreds of miles for the scrumptious, unfussy, and inexpensive food (my dinner tab ran under \$10) and the laid-back ambiance. Simple black chairs and tables, along with beer signs, make up the no-frills decor. "Ninety-nine percent of my customers are from out of

town," Mary says. "I've had 'em come from as far away as Amarillo."

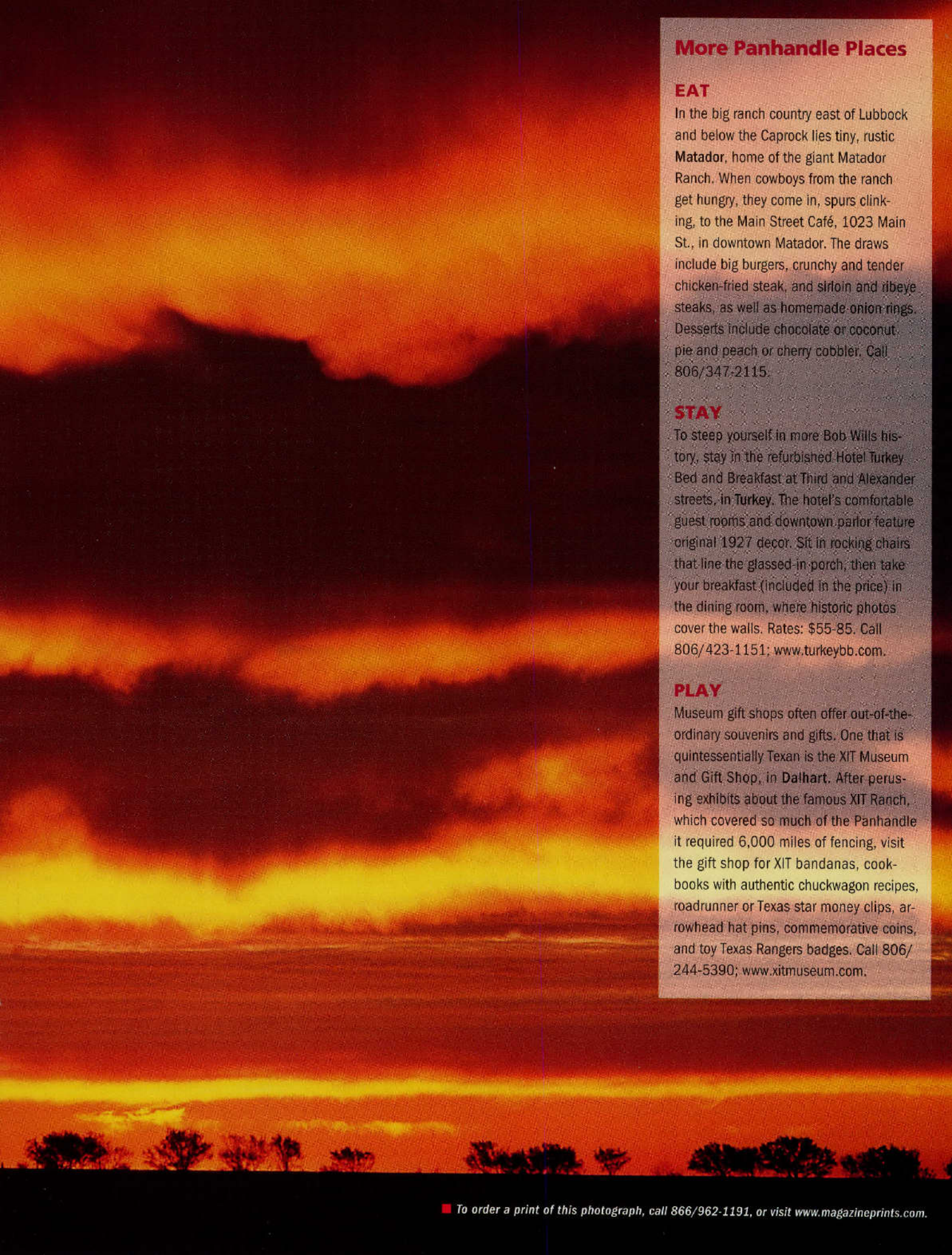
After leaving Mary's, I spotted An Ancient Art Handcrafted Soap Company across the railroad tracks in Strawn's tidy downtown area. Soapcrafters Shanah Coe and Becky Lenoir, two single moms who started their business eight years ago, create "gourmet body products" including rich soaps that *(continued on page 38)*

Georgia O'Keeffe

wrote "SKY" in capital letters
when she described the Panhandle
and its glorious sunsets.



A blazing horizon of psychedelic proportions transforms the Panhandle Plains sky near Benjamin.



More Panhandle Places

EAT

In the big ranch country east of Lubbock and below the Caprock lies tiny, rustic **Matador**, home of the giant Matador Ranch. When cowboys from the ranch get hungry, they come in, spurs clinking, to the Main Street Café, 1023 Main St., in downtown Matador. The draws include big burgers, crunchy and tender chicken-fried steak, and sirloin and ribeye steaks, as well as homemade onion rings. Desserts include chocolate or coconut pie and peach or cherry cobbler. Call 806/347-2115.

STAY

To steep yourself in more Bob Wills history, stay in the refurbished Hotel Turkey Bed and Breakfast at Third and Alexander streets, in **Turkey**. The hotel's comfortable guest rooms and downtown parlor feature original 1927 decor. Sit in rocking chairs that line the glassed-in porch, then take your breakfast (included in the price) in the dining room, where historic photos cover the walls. Rates: \$55-85. Call 806/423-1151; www.turkeybb.com.

PLAY

Museum gift shops often offer out-of-the-ordinary souvenirs and gifts. One that is quintessentially Texan is the XIT Museum and Gift Shop, in **Dalhart**. After perusing exhibits about the famous XIT Ranch, which covered so much of the Panhandle it required 6,000 miles of fencing, visit the gift shop for XIT bandanas, cookbooks with authentic chuckwagon recipes, roadrunner or Texas star money clips, arrowhead hat pins, commemorative coins, and toy Texas Rangers badges. Call 806/244-5390; www.xitmuseum.com.



The dark, stormy sky of a weather front can make the Panhandle Plains seem like a real life meteorological laboratory. This photo was taken between Benjamin and Seymour on US 82/Texas 114. The inviting ranch house at Finch Ranch Lodge, south of Hedley, provides a perfect Panhandle Plains experience.

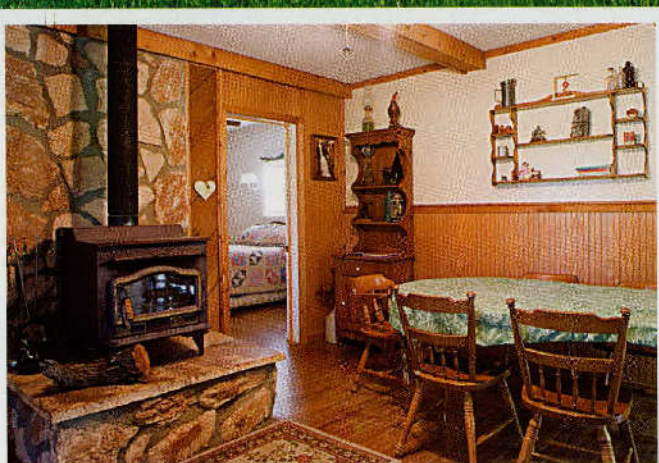
combine fragrances, herbs, and essential oils in an olive-oil base, as well as hand-crafted creams, balms, lotions, and oils.

They whip up 50 pounds of soap at a time, which makes 15 loaves that Shanah and Becky slice into bars. I snapped up several of the clean, sweet-smelling blue-bonnet soap bars shaped like the state of Texas along with some lemon verbena soaps. Shanah and Becky make more than 30 varieties, including the “Yellow Rose of Texas,” which they describe as “reminiscent of grandmother’s rose gardens.”

Postcards from the edge

MUCH of the Panhandle Plains’ spectacular scenery comes from the enormous sky. Artist Georgia O’Keeffe, who lived in Canyon in the early 20th Century, wrote “SKY” in capital letters when she described the Panhandle and its glorious sunsets.

Some of the state’s most dramatic vistas are thanks to the Caprock Escarpment, the



ic view from Texas 207 between Claude and Silverton gives an even better perspective of Palo Duro’s breadth and depth.

Dan and I like to start or end our Panhandle Plains outdoor adventures at Palo Duro, and use back roads that fringe

rugged stairsteps to the High Plains that run in a 250-mile, north-to-south route from near Amarillo to Big Spring. The Caprock marks the edge of the Llano Estacado, “Staked Plains” in Spanish. Here, elevations can reach 1,000 feet. One minute you’re sailing past seas of grass, the next you’re skirting the Caprock, up and down rugged bluffs and canyons.

The approach to this region’s most-visited scenic gem, Palo Duro Canyon, makes the first sight of it all the more memorable. The plains crack open and reveal canyon walls that look like petrified fire—red, pink, orange, and yellow rock layers. Many travelers visit the state park via Texas 217 east from Canyon, and south of Amarillo. But the panoram-

the escarpment to explore smaller canyons such as Caprock, Tule, and the lesser-known Blanco Canyon. From Lubbock, take US 82 east to Crosbyton. Four miles east of town, the highway crosses the White River and leads to one of Texas’ loveliest roadside parks, Silver Falls Park. While Palo Duro impresses with its size and depth, Blanco Canyon feels intimate and sheltering. No wonder nomadic tribes such as the Kiowa and Comanche, as well as buffalo hunters and frontier soldiers, once used it as their campground. Picnic at one of the tables, then take an easy hike along the clear river to see the small waterfall spilling over rock ledges.

Continuing southward along the Caprock, one of the prettiest drives is the 25-

essentials PANHANDLE PATHS

mile trek between Post and Gail on FM 669. The route offers dazzling views of the Caprock's rugged red-gray cliffs and striated bluffs. A butte called Mushaway Peak, elevation 2,862 feet, looms southeast of Gail. It's a piece of the Caprock that resisted erosion and a landmark that ties together the plains and its seemingly endless sky.

Rooms with a view

WE OFTEN take US 287 to Amarillo and stay at small motels along the way. Now, though, many Texas ranches are opening their doors to guests as a way not only to survive financially, but also to give visitors a firsthand glimpse of Texas' ranching heritage.

If the walls could talk at the historic Finch Ranch Lodge, near Hedley on US 287 between Childress and Amarillo, they'd tell stories about the pioneers who established the ranch in 1885. The settlers sold bulls to cattlemen such as Charles Goodnight who, with his friend Oliver Loving, established the Goodnight Loving Trail through the Panhandle Plains into New Mexico. The two were the models for the main characters in Larry McMurtry's epic novel *Lonesome Dove*.

Connie and Andy Wheatly started the lodge as a way to keep the old family homestead alive (Andy's great-grandmother originally owned the ranch). They offer three guest rooms furnished with rustic decor, each with its own bathroom. The rooms bear the names of Andy's maternal and paternal grandmothers, Ruth and Nawasa, while Moosey's Retreat, a three-room suite, honors Andy's mother.

The grounds afford views of bubbling Indian Creek and offer trails for strolling. Watch for wild turkey and white-tailed deer that roam the property, or just sit on the front porch, relax, watch the sunset, and enjoy the sparkling nightlife—the stars, that is. “I remember the first time I came out here 15 years ago,” Connie says. “There was no moon, and it was so dark I couldn't see my hand in front of my face. The stars were like nothing I'd ever seen before.”

Wildlife and history get top billing at Stasney's Cook Ranch, a 25,000-acre historic working ranch five miles north of

Hill Country Furniture and Mercantile and Natty Flat Smokehouse, 19280 US 281, 5 miles south of I-20. Call 254/646-3376 (store); www.txhcountry.com and 254/646-3844 (restaurant); www.nattyflat.com.

Mary's Café, 119 Grant Ave., Strawn. Call 254/672-5741.

An Ancient Art Handcrafted Soap Company, 108 N. Central, Strawn. Call 254/672-5421 or 866/604-7180; www.anancientartsoap.com.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park, 11450 Park Road 5, 12 miles east of Canyon off Texas 217. Camping, horseback riding, hiking, nature study, bird watching, mountain biking, and scenic drives. Outdoor theater productions run from early June to mid-August. \$4 entrance fee. Call 806/488-2227; www.palodurocanyon.com.

Finch Ranch Lodge, 3400 CR 23, 7 miles south of US 287 in Hedley. Full continental breakfast included. Rates: \$95-\$110. Call 806/856-5930; www.finchranch.com.

Stasney's Cook Ranch, FM 1084, 5 miles north of Albany. Rates: \$135 to \$175 for 2-4 people, \$625 to rent the 93-

year-old ranch headquarters with 5 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms. Call 888/762-2999; www.stasneyscookranch.com.

Bob Wills Museum, one block west of Texas 70, Turkey. Call 806/423-1253. Open Mon-Fri 9-

11:30 and 1-5. Free. For information about Bob Wills Day, call the Bob Wills Foundation at 806/423-1033; www.bobwills.com.

The Trio Club, 908 S. Mingus Blvd., Mingus. Bands play Sat night 9-1; C.B. Sutton and Outcast play every Sun 5-9. Call 254/672-5664; www.trioclubmingus.com.



Albany. It's named for the Cook family (who used their oil fortune to establish Cook Children's Hospital in Fort Worth) and the Stasneys, who later bought it. The ranch is part of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Panhandle Plains wildlife viewing trail, so look for plenty of deer, turkey, quail, bobcats, coyotes, and migratory birds.

Guests can stay in replicas of the officers' quarters at historic Fort Griffin or Fort Concho. Larger parties can book the ranch headquarters, a registered Texas historical site that has been restored. With this much space to explore, you can hunt, fish, watch birds, hike, or bike 'til you drop—and then do it all over again the next day.

Swing your pardner

ANY TRIP to the Panhandle Plains should be accompanied by music that evokes the feel of back roads and wide-open spaces. You can pop in a CD for your Western swing soundtrack, or you can visit tiny Turkey, just minutes east of the Caprock, between Matador and Clarendon, to see the home of the “King of Western Swing,” Bob Wills.

Every Texan should make a pilgrimage

to Turkey for the annual Bob Wills Day, held the last Saturday of April. Sure, it's crowded, but seeing members of Wills' original band, the Texas Playboys, perform in the birthplace of this distinctly Texan music, makes for a priceless memory. Take a look at the boots, fiddles, hats, sheet music, and other items related to the Texas Playboys on display at the Bob Wills Museum.

Head back to where the West begins, Palo Pinto County, to swing your sweet-heart at one of the region's best-known honkytonks, the Trio Club near downtown Mingus, located a few miles north of I-20 between Weatherford and Ranger. White letters spell out “TRIO” on the side of the red brick building with a curved roof. Inside, the club sports a long bar, a pool table, neon beer signs, a big dance floor, and tables for sitting and beer-sipping.

We want more of this kind of traveling, where less—less-crowded spaces, less traffic, and less hassle—is, indeed, more. ★

Regular contributor KATHRYN JONES wrote about Yoakum's design house, Double D Ranch, in the June issue.

See more photographic excellence by WYMAN MEINZER at www.wymanmeinzer.com.

**"I took
 the one less
 traveled by,
 And that has
 made all the
 difference."**

—FROM "THE ROAD NOT TAKEN"
 BY ROBERT FROST

© KATHY ADAMS CLARK



BY GENE FOWLER
 PHOTOGRAPHS BY BOB PARVIN

This utopian route through the Hill Country includes Lost Maples State Natural Area, a many-hued playground come fall. Chef Laurel Waters of The Laurel Tree in Utopia plans menus around offerings from her garden. Bald cypress trees fringe the Frio River at Garner State Park, north of Concan.

■ To order a print of the facing page photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.magazineprints.com.



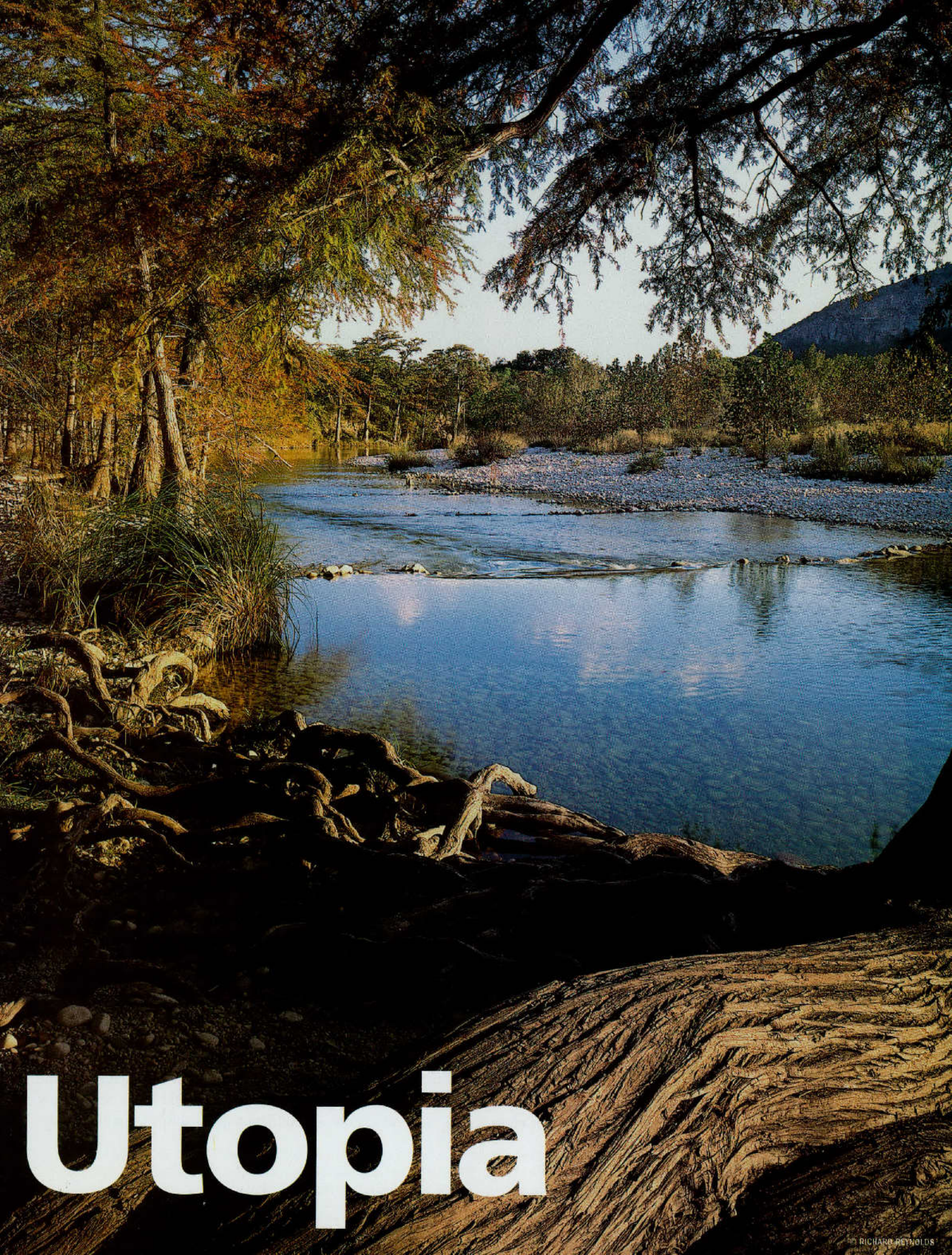
IT'S SAID that when Robert Frost lived in San Antonio in the mid-1930s, the poet enjoyed trekking the Texas Hill Country because the terrain reminded him of a Western version of rural Vermont and New Hampshire in his native New England. As naturalist Richard C. Bartlett notes in his 1995 book *Saving the Best Of Texas*, the Hill Country—and the larger Edwards Plateau that contains it—"still looks much as it did millions of years ago." The question of which backroads in this area to explore likely presented Robert Frost with dilemmas as intriguing as those encountered in his famous poem. For wherever one may wander in the Hill Country, adventure, discovery, and earthly splendor lie in wait.

Selecting a sampler of unbeaten pathways to chronicle here proved just as challenging. I chose an area southwest of Kerrville that ranges across portions of Kerr, Real, Bandera, and Uvalde counties. It's a land of expansive valleys and soaring canyon walls, where roads skirt clear, spring-fed rivers and snake along roller coaster-like routes with breathtaking views. Inviting hideaways, resorts, and

lodges seem to hug the road 'round every bend. As reflected in the name of one of the towns here, the region strikes many as a veritable utopia.

My route begins on Texas 39 West after passing through Ingram. In the small community of Hunt, diners at Elaine's Table enjoy dishes like "Bruce's Famous Tortilla Trout" while watching the Guadalupe River flow. Turning south onto

The Road to



Utopia



RM 187, I soon descend from the ridge of high hills that lead into the Sabinal River Valley. A particularly memorable stretch cuts through mammoth rock walls shortly before the entrance to **Lost Maples State Natural Area**, named for a relict stand of bigtooth maples. Springs that flow from fissures in massive limestone slabs at Lost Maples give rise to the Sabinal River.

River and road arrive shortly in **Utopia**. “The community was first called Waresville and then Montana,” explains Lois

Farmer, one of Utopia’s many descendants of pioneer settler Captain William Ware, “but then one of the town’s first postmasters, George A. Barker, who had come to the area from Alabama in 1876 and regained his health, renamed the town for Sir Thomas More’s fictional island that was ideal in beauty, fertility, and climate. As far as we know, it’s the only town in the United States named Utopia.”

Native American archeological displays and pioneer photographs and artifacts un-

fold the utopian tale at the Sabinal Canyon Museum. A panoramic image of a 1932 Utopia school music class especially caught my eye, as did a Utopia Centennial Celebration poster from 1952, when revelers enjoyed rodeo performances, music by the Texas Star Playboys and the Sagebrush Ranch Hands, and a “Golden Memories Pageant directed by the Toepperweins of Boerne.”

You can also find vintage Utopia in the form of the 1873 Old Rock Store, now a building-supply shop. Longtime locals

A winding stretch of RR 337 (above) offers extraordinary hilltop views between Vanderpool and Leakey. An enormous bald cypress (above right), said to be more than 800 years old, grows along the riverbank at Utopia on the River, one of many picturesque lodgings that line the Sabinal. Hill Country Adventures storytellers LeAnn and Anthony Sharp (right) entertain guests gathered around an evening campfire.



**Fittingly,
the Utopia area
boasts spring-fed
rivers and roller
coaster-like routes
with breath-
taking views.**



gather for early-morning coffee klatches at the down-home Lost Maples Cafe. And newer traditions in caffeine culture sidle gracefully into Utopia in the cozy interior of Utopia Joe's. "We roast our own coffee beans from Guatemala, Costa Rica, and other countries," says co-owner Tracy Garofano. "We have the only drive-through window in Utopia, and we're also the only Wi-Fi spot in town."

A store called Main Street Utopia offers French antiques alongside Elmer Kelton novels, and just south of town, the shop's co-owner, Cordon Bleu chef Laurel Waters, serves four-course gourmet fare at her elegant restaurant, The Laurel Tree. Open only on Saturday for lunch and dinner, The Laurel Tree draws local folks as well as diners from San Antonio and beyond.

Since it was Friday, I took FM 1796 into D'Hanis and ate at the 1883 Buckhorn Saloon, which is open only on Friday nights. (My pepper steak, served with borchacho beans, was excellent.) Owners Paul and Anna Harmon's restoration of the rock building and mesquite-wood fixtures stayed true to the building's Wild West heritage. "Local legend has it that a pistol-packing priest used to ride his horse into the saloon and buy two bottles of beer, one for himself and one for the horse," says Paul.

Back in Utopia, I headed for a classic-country jam session at the Utopia Senior Citizens Center. Held the third Friday of each month, the jam draws well-seasoned musicians from all over the area, and plenty of music fans—young and old alike. Gene Profftt from Leakey laid down a lively version of "San Antonio Rose," complete with "Ah-hahs" from the crowd, and Wayne Russell of Uvalde served up a spirited "My Shoes Keep Walkin' Back To You." After crooning "Streets of Laredo," Mike Hawkes, a former rodeo rider from Sabin, talked about meeting Gene Autry at the Madison Square Garden Rodeo in 1952.

The next morning, I followed Texas 127 from Sabin to the resort village of Concan on the Frio River. Area lore says the name came from a Mexican card game called coon-can. One look at the Frio and you'll understand why the narrator in the George Strait hit song "All My Exes Live in Texas" returns to the Frio nightly "by transcendental meditation." Perched on a

A series of "river roads" between Concan and Leakey offer quintessential Hill Country scenes.

high bluff above the river and boasting the "Best Swimming Hole in Texas," a popular rustic spot called Neal's Lodges celebrated its 80th birthday last year. "We have guests whose grandparents stayed here as newlyweds," says proprietor Mary Anna Roosa.

A short distance south of Concan on US 83 and then northwest on FM 1051, **Reagan Wells** on the Dry Frio bills itself as "A Few Miles from the Action, 20 Years from the Crowds!!!" Here, you can visit The Hummers, an environmentally-conscious studio/shop that sells handblown glass, purses made of recycled rubber, and more than 4,000 other earth-friendly products. At Reagan Wells Ranch, guests stay in some of the buildings that served health-seekers who traveled here to "take the waters" long ago.

After visiting Reagan Wells, take US 83 to Concan, go right on Texas 127 for a bit, and follow CR 348 northward for some quintessential Hill Country scenery.



(The Frio Canyon Chamber of Commerce Web site, www.friocanyonchamber.com, offers a detailed area map.)

The road crosses and recrosses the Frio and eventually loops around to join US 83. A few miles north, another scenic "loop," formed by CR 350, FM 2748, and FM 1120, parallels the Frio before rejoining US 83 south of Leakey. Camping, cabins, and Frio River fun are also

available at **Garner State Park**, seven miles north of Concan.

At **Leakey**, the Real County seat, Leakey Springs provides a healthy portion of the Frio's cool, clear flow. In the Real County Historical Museum, trustee Kitty Harrison points out a portrait of town founder John Leakey, along with Native American artifacts found on area ranches. A vintage spinning wheel used by Ruth "Granny Fat" Horton, a pioneer resident of this area, stands next to her photograph. A framed newspaper article recounts the short-lived movie colony known as "Hox-



Summer-vacation buddies (from left) Shonna Carter and Kim Sweat of Odessa and Kaila Sasse of Utopia enjoy bicycling the quiet roads around Utopia. Fishing in the Frio is just one of many activities at ever-popular Garner State Park (above right). Longtime country singer Mike Hawkes (facing page) of Sabin, one of the regulars at the monthly jam sessions at the Utopia Senior Citizens Center, strums his signature leather-wrapped guitar.

■ To order a print of the Garner State Park photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.magazineprints.com.



ie's Stockade," founded by Western actor Jack Hoxie around 1930. "His official biography states that no one knows where he was at that time," says Kitty, "but he was right here in Leakey."

The same rugged, natural beauty that drew Hoxie and Robert Frost makes the area a popular spot for ecotourism. Birding expert June Osborne of Waco, who calls the area her "favorite place to bird in the whole world," is Resident Birder each April and May at Neal's Lodges, talking to birdwatching groups from as far away as England and Switzerland. June has recorded more than 268 species here, including the black-capped vireo and gold-en-cheeked warbler. Two area organizations—Hill Country Adventures and the Texas Hill Country River Region—also offer educational experiences and ecotourism activities.

In addition to birding hikes, Hill Country Adventures features campfire storytelling with cowboy music and poetry, sport caving and rappelling, and river treks by kayak. Both organizations sponsor Sunset Bat Flight Tours, during which millions of bats emerge from an area cave (on private property) for their nightly hunt for tasty insects.

The Texas Hill Country River Region organization presents an eco-fest called Nature Quest each April, and they've added a special fall Nature Quest on September 14-16. If you go, you'll learn about area birds, butterflies, native plants, springs, and famous trees. Special sessions will cover dinosaurs that once roamed the region and the endangered Texas horned lizard. A River Region Classic bicycling

essentials UTOPIA AND ENVIRONS

CONTACT information for sites and resources mentioned in the story follows. The area code is 830, unless otherwise noted.

For information on Hill Country Adventures, call 966-2320; www.hillcountryadventures.com.

For information on the Texas Hill Country River Region, call 591-1074; www.thcrr.com.

HUNT

Elaine's Table, 238-4484; www.elainestable.com. *Reservations recommended.*

VANDERPOOL

St. Clare's Cabins, 361/549-4719 or 361/993-1071; www.stclarescabin.com.

Lost Maples State Natural Area, 966-3413; www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

UTOPIA

For general information, visit www.utopiatexas.com.

Sabinal Canyon Museum, 966-3747.

Utopia Joe's Coffee House, 966-5656; www.utopiajoes.com.

Utopia on the River, 966-2444; www.utopiaontheriver.com.

Main Street Utopia, 966-5544.

The Laurel Tree restaurant, 966-5444; www.utopia-gourmet.com. *Reservations recommended.*

Lost Maples Cafe, 966-2221.

Sabinal River Lodge, 966-3393; www.sabinalriverlodge.com.

D'HANIS

Buckhorn Saloon, 210/410-5916; e-mail 1883-buckhorn@sbcbglobal.net.

CONCAN

Neal's Lodges, 232-6118; www.nealslodges.com.

Frio River Cabins, 232-5996; www.friorivercabins.com.

Buchanan Cabins, 988-3272; www.buchanancabins.com.

Seven Bluff Cabins & RV Park, 232-5260; www.frioconcan.com.

Andy's on River Road, 232-5444; www.andysonriverroad.com.

Cloud Dance Log Cabins, 232-5994; www.clouddancecabins.com.

Garner State Park, 232-6132; www.garnerstatepark.com.

REAGAN WELLS

Journey's Inn, 486-8334.

Reagan Wells Ranch, 210/232-3164; www.reaganwells.com.

The Hummers, 232-6467.

RIO FRIO

Rio Frio Lodging, 966-2320; www.friolodging.com.

Treehouse Bed and Bird, 232-6666.

LEAKEY

Frio Canyon Chamber of Commerce,

232-5222; www.friocanyonchamber.com.

Frio Canyon Lodge, 232-6800; www.friocanyonlodge.com.

Josh's Frio River Outfitter, 232-6292 (in Concan, 232-4243); www.frioriveroutfitter.com.

Leakey Springs Cabins, 232-6351.

River Haven Cabins, 232-5400; www.riverhavencabins.com.

Frio River Cabins, 232-5996; www.friorivercabins.com.

Frio Springs Lodges, 232-4174; www.friosprings.com.

Vinny's Italian Restaurant, 232-4420.

Frio Pecan Farm Log Cabins and RV Park, 232-5294 or 877/832-0674; www.friopecanfarm.com.

Real County Historical Museum, 232-5330; www.realcountyhistoricalmuseum.com.



event on October 13 will feature group rides ranging from 32 miles to 94 miles.

I wound up my sojourn through the Sabinal and Frio canyons and valleys by heading east toward Medina on RR 337, a route that affords some truly spectacular views. Petroleum geologist Bob Wightman was so impressed with the view of the Sabinal valley from RR 337, which he'd discovered years ago on a return trip to Houston from the Big Bend, that he moved to Utopia upon retirement.

Pull over to one of the many scenic overlooks along the route, and you will behold what so captivated the well-traveled Texan. As chef Laurel Waters sums up the area's appeal, "We don't call it Utopia for nothin'." ★

Austin writer GENE FOWLER still has the snapshots he took in the 1960s of every sign in Utopia that bore the town's name.

A recent stranger to his native Hill Country, BOB PARVIN says this photo assignment was something of a reunion with his favorite Texas region.



GULF COAST

BY HELEN BRYANT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. GRIFFIS SMITH

NOBODY has ever dug up the hidden treasure that Jean Lafitte and his pirate pals supposedly buried somewhere on the Texas Gulf Coast. But who needs it? The Gulf has plenty of treasures that don't require digging. As movie buccaneer Captain Jack Sparrow would say, "Not all treasure is silver and gold, mate." And sometimes you may have to take a circuitous route to satisfy your wanderlust or find the particular prize that strikes your fancy. Catch some wind in your sails à la Captain Jack and go for it. Seize the breeze, and discover some of the treasures that coastal Texas harbors.



GUIDING LIGHTS

LIGHTHOUSES beckon with a romantic allure. As they guided mariners through treacherous waters, their keepers led extraordinary lives battling weather, wild animals, and insects to keep the beacons going. There were dozens of lighthouses along the Texas coast in the 1850s. Only five remain today, and of those, only two are open to the public. Their lights no longer shine to guide seafarers, but they're fun to explore.

Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site

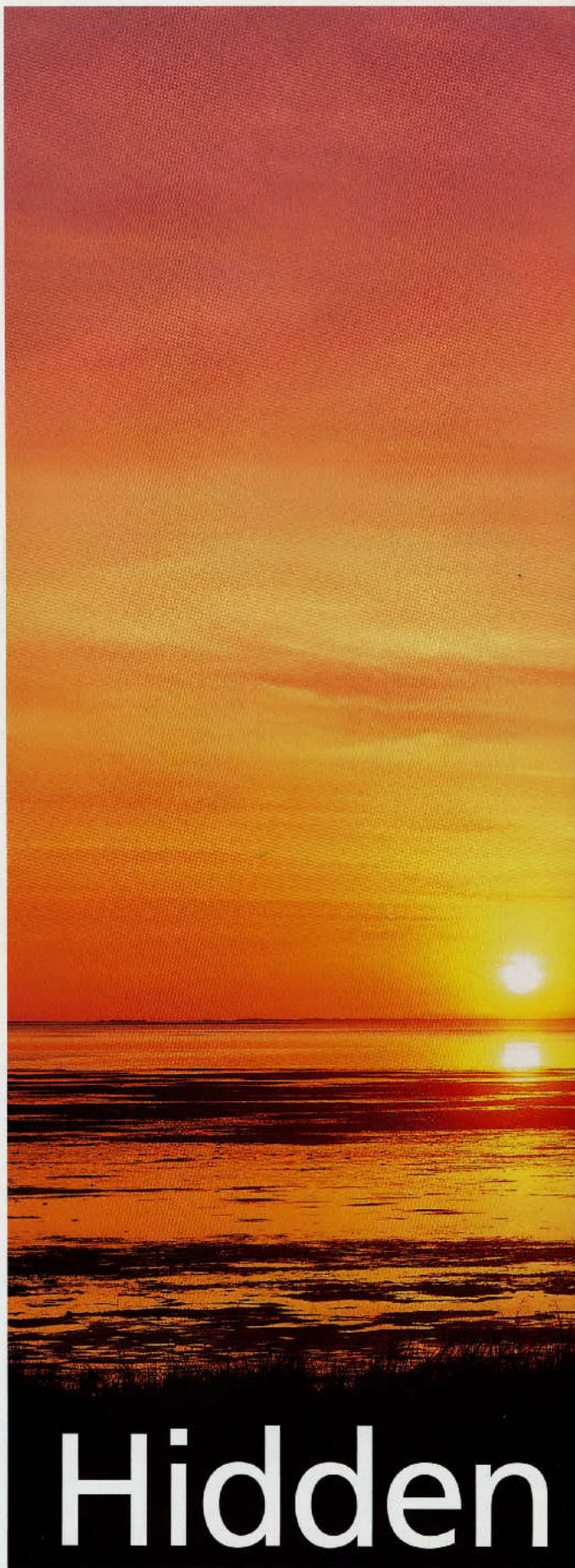
BEFORE you head up the 75 steps to the top, read the lighthouse's story on its exterior walls. The climb up the spiral staircase is steep and staff had to make the trek twice a day until the light was decommissioned in 1905. But the view of South Padre Island and the coastal mainland is one you can't get from anywhere else.

Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse

NOW a museum on dry land in Port Lavaca, this squat, hexagonal lighthouse once presided over Matagorda Bay. Life in the three-story

See an adorable sea turtle at South Padre Island's Sea Turtle, Inc. A yucca silhouette catches the sunrise over Laguna Madre at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

■ To order a print of the facing page photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.magazineprints.com.



Hidden



Treasures

Autographed tarpon scales, including one from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, line the lobby of Port Aransas' legendary Tarpon Inn.





Colorful T-shirts cover the ceiling at South Padre Island's Dolphin Cove Oyster Bar, where patrons and their pooch enjoy the good life. The Port Isabel Lighthouse offers a sweeping view of its coastal surroundings. What could be better than a shrimp po'boy at Galveston's Shrimp n Stuff?

lighthouse, perched 25 feet above the waves out in the middle of the bay, was especially difficult. Supplies were delivered only twice a year. Keepers fished a lot and grew what they could on the lighthouse deck. They told of picking up ducks that fell to the deck after flying into the light. They'd eat the fowl,

then stuff featherbeds with the feathers.

GREAT FEEDS

COASTAL kitchens get to work with the Gulf's treasure-trove of shrimp, oysters, and fish. In many cases, the restaurants that do it simply do it best. Here are several seafood spots, along with a staple of that prime element of Texas pride: barbecue. All will feed you fabulously for \$12 or less.

Lost Galleon, Port Isabel

EVEN at 3 in the afternoon I've seen lines outside this tiny, no-frills eatery. The place knows exactly what to do with a flounder: Fry it up, and keep it coming. The

special is all-you-can-eat fish—consistently crunchy on the outside, tender on the inside—with two huge side dishes (the coleslaw's killer) and a piece of Texas toast. Shrimp's great, too.

Shrimp n Stuff, Galveston

HERE, too, is just plain ol' good food with no fanfare. There's not even a view; this eatery is on Avenue O, in the island's interior. Sit at the long tables and enjoy a plate of fried shrimp, oysters, or catfish—or a combo. Po'boy sandwiches are favorites, too.

Dolphin Cove Oyster Bar, South Padre Island

COME here for the food and enjoy watch-



The Surf Motel on South Padre Island just screams "beach."



Joe Cotten's Barbecue, Robstown

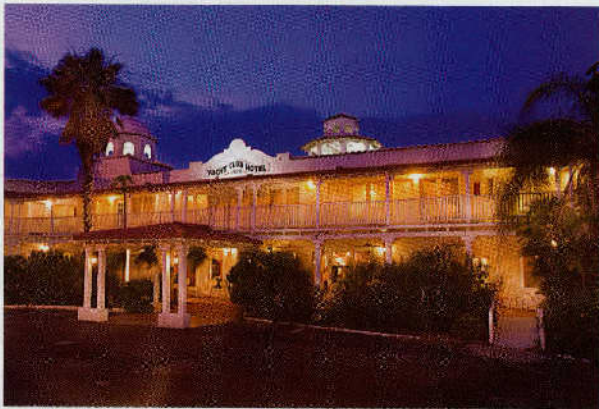
AS IT IS at any serious barbecue spot, it's all about meat at this popular place just west of Corpus Christi on US 77. Pick brisket, sliced pork, ribs, or sausage, or make it a combo. Whatever you mention first, you'll get the most of on your butcher paper. I like to order the beef "stringy" (extra moist). Potato salad's a good side. The waiters, attired in maroon coats and bow ties, impart a certain elegance to this famous barbecue joint.

INDIGENOUS HOTELS

AMID all the chain hotels and motels and beach houses on stilts are a few places with character all their own. They're favorites because they embody their location: the sea, the surf, the fish, the fun and, sometimes, a little bit of legend.

ing dolphins, or come for the dolphins and enjoy the food. This cement, boat-shaped oyster bar has survived several hurricanes (check out the pictures on the wall) at the very tip of South Padre Island, where dolphins often frolic. Put your beer in a coozie so you can stroll on the beach and look for them in the water. Inside, enjoy a plate of oysters on the half shell or fried. Hot dogs are good, too. You'll have to pay a fee of \$4 to get on that part of the island, a county park, before 5 p.m.; \$2 after that.

From the pool to the deck, the Surf Motel defines "fun in the sun." Neila Vasquez serves up seafood platters at Lost Galleon in Port Isabel. The Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse is now a museum in Port Lavaca.



Port Isabel's Yacht Club Hotel, built in the 1920s, now serves as a B&B.

Tarpon Inn, Port Aransas

THOUSANDS of fish scales on the lobby wall tell the story: This place has been home base for anglers for more than a century. Its rooms, recently remodeled, are now so cute (one has a picket fence headboard) that fishermen have to be careful not to get 'em grungy. Located right across from the wharf, it's considered by many the only place to stay in Port A.

The Yacht Club, Port Isabel

DURING Prohibition, wealthy boaters would dock their crafts and walk over to the Yacht Club, where they would dine and, possibly, wine. The latest incarnation of the Yacht Club is a B&B with beautifully decorated rooms. The former restaurant has been remodeled into an event space. A



The gates of Simon Vega's Little Graceland in Los Fresnos open up to a world of Elvis Presley memorabilia.

newly opened bar is a great place to swap fish stories.

The Surf Motel, South Padre Island

IF YOU miss the old, funky beach motels of the '60s, head for this orange strip of rooms. It just screams "beach." Many rooms have two beds and a kitchenette, making this a good choice for families. But adults will love the Surf's outdoor bar, Boomerang Billy's, right on the beach. It's a good place to meet locals.

ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES

Little Graceland, Los Fresnos

IN THIS TOWN perhaps best known as a speed trap, Simon Vega, an old Army buddy of Elvis Presley's, keeps watch over a house full of memorabilia and hosts a semiannual celebration of Elvis (commemorating his birth in January and his death in August) that attracts impersonators from all over. In the yard, there are replicas of Elvis' Tupelo, Mississippi, birthplace and Memphis grave.

Sea Turtle Inc., South Padre Island

ILA LOETSCHER, who started rescuing sea turtles from the area back in 1963, has died, but her legacy lives on. For a few bucks, you can visit wounded sea turtles—I once watched one try to climb out of his tank and into a girl turtle's tank next to it—and hear about efforts to rehabilitate them and revitalize the species. It's heartwarming.

WATCHING FOR WILDLIFE

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, near Rio Hondo

THE TEXAS COAST is filled with places to view wildlife, especially birds, but I like this smaller refuge not far off Texas 100. Roseate spoonbills can be found here in the spring, and the last time I went, I saw an armadillo in the road, alive and waddling. There's never much traffic here, so it's easy to slow down and park or get out for a walk. ★

For more Texas travel nuggets, see HELEN BRYANT's "Old Friends, New Finds in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio" in the July issue.

Photographer GRIFF SMITH also teamed up with Helen on "Old Friends..." and shot images for "Have Dog, Will Travel," in the same issue.

essentials GULF COAST GEMS

Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site, 421 E. Queen Isabella Blvd. (Texas 100), 956/943-2262; www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Halfmoon Reef Lighthouse, 2300 Texas 35, Port Lavaca, 361/552-1234.

Lost Galleon, 202 Queen Isabella Blvd. (Texas 100), Port Isabel, 956/943-4400.

Shrimp n Stuff, 3901 Avenue O, Galveston, 409/763-2805; www.shrimpnstuff.com.

Dolphin Cove Oyster Bar, Isla Blanca Park, South Padre Island, 956/761-2850; www.spisland.com/dolphincove.

Joe Cotten's Barbecue, 607 S. US 77, Robstown, 361/767-9973.

Tarpon Inn, 200 Cotter Ave., Port Aransas. Rates start at \$69

off-season. 361/749-5555; www.thetarponinn.com.

The Yacht Club, 700 Yturria St., Port Isabel. Rates start at \$79 weekdays. Call 956/943-1301.

The Surf Motel, South Padre Island. Rates start at \$39 off-season. 956/761-2831.

Little Graceland, 741 W. Texas 100, Los Fresnos. Free admission. 956/233-5482.

Sea Turtle Inc., 6617 Padre Blvd., South Padre Island. Suggested donation: \$3 adults, \$1 children. 956/761-4511; www.seaturtleinc.com.

Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, east of Rio Hondo, off Texas 106; and north of Laguna Vista and Los Fresnos, off Texas 100; 956/748-3607; www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/laguna.html.



Whether it's a Biergarten experience in Muenster or solitude at McKinney Roughs Nature Park, plenty of diverse pastimes await you.



BY MARY G. RAMOS
 PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEVIN STILLMAN

Above, the Nocona Athletic Goods Company is world famous for crafting superior leather baseball gloves. Top, Brianna and James Fleitman of Fischer's Meat Market in Muenster display a variety of the shop's tasty products. At right, Carol Bandy from the Happy Horse Hotel (www.happyhorsehotel.com) rides Target through the pines at McKinney Roughs Nature Park.



LIKE a lanky Texan, the Prairies and Lakes region stretches from the Red River down to the Guadalupe. Delightful surprises are sprinkled along its backroads like wildflowers in springtime. My husband, Charles, and I found everything from archeology to architecture, baseball gloves to blacksmithing, diamonds to Duesenbergs. The finds are way too numerous to mention them all, but here are some of my favorites, listed more or less from north to south.

Music and Munchies in Muenster

A VISIT to Fischer's Meat Market in Muenster isn't just about food. Time it right, and you'll hear German music booming from the building's clock tower, where an authentic German *glockenspiel* puts on a short show every hour. The *glockenspiel*'s seven hand-carved wooden traditional figures—among them a milkmaid, a cow, a bear, and a king—rotate in and out of the tower on a moving platform. And check out the market's homemade sausages and imported German specialties, such as pickles, noodles, and sauerkraut. A few blocks away, a bakery called Bayer's Kolonial-waren offers everything from sausage kolaches to 11 flavors of strudel. Yum!

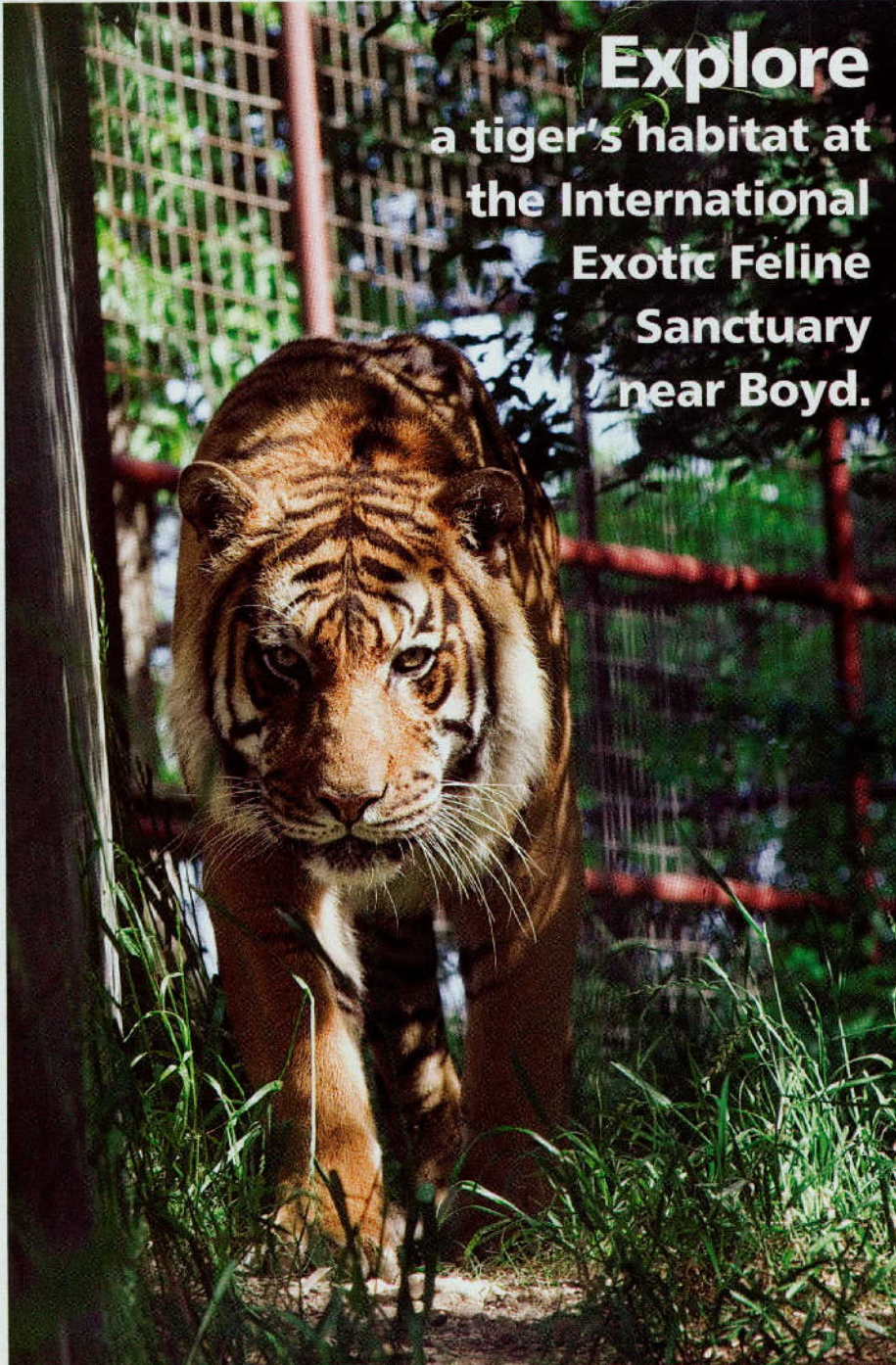
Play Ball!

EVER wonder where baseball gloves come from? Some of them are made in the North Texas town of Nocona. For the past 75 years, craftspeople at the Nocona Athletic Goods Company have been making baseball gloves with painstaking care, by hand. A tour of the factory starts at the stacks of cowhide, bison, and kangaroo leathers in many colors and finishes. (Kangaroo? Who knew?) You can watch Nocona's experts die-cutting the pieces, embroidering names, stitching gloves together, inspecting them, beginning the breaking-in process by slowly turning each glove by hand—very carefully—under a steadily pounding, machine-powered mallet, then packing gloves for shipment

The Long, Un



winding Road



Explore a tiger's habitat at the International Exotic Feline Sanctuary near Boyd.

all over the globe with efficient precision. Included is a stroll through Nocona's company museum, where old photos and vintage gloves trace the evolution of baseball equipment since 1933.

Lions and Tigers and Cheetahs, Oh My!

PLUNKED down in North Texas a couple miles east of Boyd is a 40-acre tract that resembles parts of Africa and Asia. Sounds like them, too. The International Exotic Feline Sanctuary is a non-profit refuge for more than 60 exotic cats—from lions and tigers to bobcats and margays—that have been abused or abandoned. The IEFS's staff nurses the felines back to health, housing them in spacious enclosures with grass, running water, and plenty of food for the rest of their lives. Scheduled tours are available on weekends and by reservation on weekdays.

Seems Like Old Times

IF YOU'RE fond of old-fashioned drugstores with their tile floors, dark wood shelves, and soda fountains, then welcome to Miller's Pharmacy, a step back in time. Located on a brick-paved street in downtown Cooper, Miller's is part museum and part modern drugstore, with a working soda fountain. In 1930, Miller's moved into a former bank building, says the lively Mable Wheat, who has worked there nearly six decades. Miller's fixtures and floors

Beth Brown decorates a tray in the Potters Brown Studio & Gallery, which she opened in Edom with her husband, D.W., in 1971. Walk a mile in these shoes from the 1920s, in their original boxes, at the Stuermer Store in Ledbetter. Mable Wheat and Marion Miller relax by the old jukebox at Miller's Pharmacy in Cooper. Cedar Creek Furniture in Kemp (facing page) offers hand-crafted chairs, loungers, windmills, and even a lighthouse.

essentials FINDS ALONG PRAIRIES AND LAKES

Fischer's Meat Market, 304 N. Main St., 2 blocks north of US 82, Muenster. 800/259-7248 or 940/759-4211; www.fischersmeatmarket.com.

Bayer's Kolonialwaren, 824 E. Division St., Muenster. 940/759-2822.

Nocona Athletic Goods Company, 901 E. US 82 (at 10th St.), occupies part of the former Nocona Boot Company building. 800/433-0957; www.nokona.com.

International Exotic Feline Sanctuary, Texas 114 West, Boyd. 940/433-5091; www.bigcat.org.

Miller's Pharmacy, 100 E. Dallas Ave. (Cooper Square), Cooper. 903/395-2161.

Edom: Artists' studios are located a few steps from each other near FM 279 and FM 314. Call before going; the artists may close their studios when they attend art festivals: **Potters Brown**, 903/852-6473; **Zeke & Marty**, 903/852-3311; **Pottery by Sherry**, 903/852-3927 or 903/570-0757; **Ken Carpenter Jewelry**, 903/852-5232; **Arbor Castle Birdhouses**, 903/852-

7893. **Edom Bakery**, at the same intersection. Call 903/852-5552. Web links to all are found at www.edomtexas.com/links.asp.

Heritage Bakery and Market, 109 Texas 274, Kemp. 903/498-3366. Next door, **Cedar Creek Furniture**, 903/498-6156.

Layland Museum, 201 N. Caddo St. (one block north of Bus. US 67), Cleburne. 817/645-0940; www.ci.cleburne.tx.us/departments/museum/index.htm.

Bosque Museum, 301 S. Avenue Q, Clifton. Call 254/675-3845; www.bosquemuseum.org.

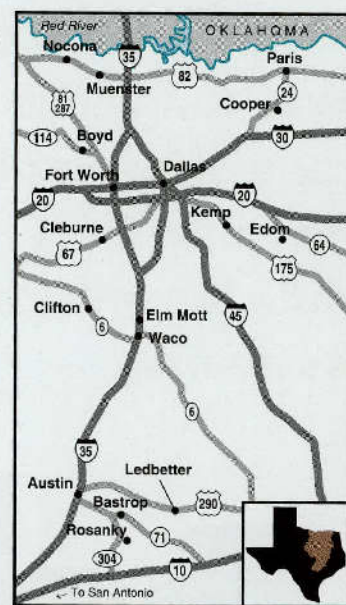
Homestead Heritage Traditional Crafts Center, about 5 miles north of Waco via FM 933 on Halbert Ln. Call 254/754-9600; www.homesteadheritage.com.

Stuermer Store, US 290, Ledbetter (nine miles east of Giddings on south side of high-

way). 800/240-3066 or 979/249-3066; www.ledbettertexas.com.

McKinney Roughs Nature Park, 1884 Texas 71 West. 800/776-5272, ext. 8041 or 512/303-5073; www.lcra.org/parks/developed_parks/mckinney_roughs.html.

Central Texas Museum of Automotive History, FM 304, Rosanky. 512/237-2635; www.ctmah.org.



haven't changed since the store opened. Though prices have increased just a tad, the menu still features luscious milkshakes, malts, and frosted root beers. Mmmm.

Artisans in the Pines

NESTLED in the woods halfway between Canton and Tyler, we discovered the tiny town of **Edom**, known for the annual Edom Art Festival held the third weekend in October. Some of the festival's artists live and work in Edom year round at studios on the main street: Potters Brown (Doug and Beth Brown) creates platters, vases, and bowls in vivid jewel tones; Zeke & Marty's jewelry combines precious metals with natural bone and antler; Pottery by Sherry offers earthtoned, functional wares from casserole dishes to tortilla warmers; Ken Carpenter Jewelry features gold and sterling silver set with gemstones; and Arbor Castle Birdhouses' whimsical quarters for feathered songsters look as though they were conjured up by pixies. Enchanting.

Whoopie Pies and Gooseberry Jam

THE "HERITAGE" part of Heritage Market and Bakery in **Kemp** is Pennsylvania Dutch, and the aromas smell delicious. Heritage Market features locally produced specialties alongside jars of jams and vegetables imported from Pennsylvania's Amish country. We saw seven kinds of pretzels and at least 10 flavors of fried pies. Oh, yes, those whoopie pies: They're two puffy chocolate or pumpkin cookies sandwiched together with buttercream icing. Betcha can't eat just one. Next door, Cedar Creek Furniture displays beautifully detailed, hand-crafted fine furniture, plus rustic,

sturdy outdoor chairs, tables, and—even, would you believe, a little wooden lighthouse to decorate your garden or pool.

The Way We Were

THE ELEGANT Layland Museum in **Cleburne** evokes a certain charm. The museum occupies the former Carnegie Library, which sports stately Ionic columns in front and a frill of decorative garlands atop the lobby's walls. The Layland's exhibits bring to life the history of the area from prehistoric times to the 20th Century, emphasizing the everyday lives of Texans through the years with displays of household items, tools, clothing, and photographs. I was most touched by the depiction of a settler's cabin. What fantastic determination and energy it took to create a home in the wilderness using only what would fit into a couple of steamer trunks.

The Oldest Known Texans

ROUGHLY 11,000 years ago, two people who lived on the banks of the Brazos River were buried in a cave-like shelter a few miles southeast of **Clifton** in Bosque County. Experts at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History say that the site is outstanding because it is one of only three graves of this age in the United States where burial goods have been found with human remains. At the Bosque Museum, you can study a depiction of part of the cave and replicas of artifacts found there, such as a human skull, badger claws, and coyote teeth. Other beautifully designed displays honor Bosque County's mid-19th-Century Norwegian settlers. My favorite: a little rocking chair handmade in the 1850s by Cleng Peerson, referred to by many as the father of Norwegian immigration to America. (continued on page 63)



SOUTH TEXAS
PLAINS

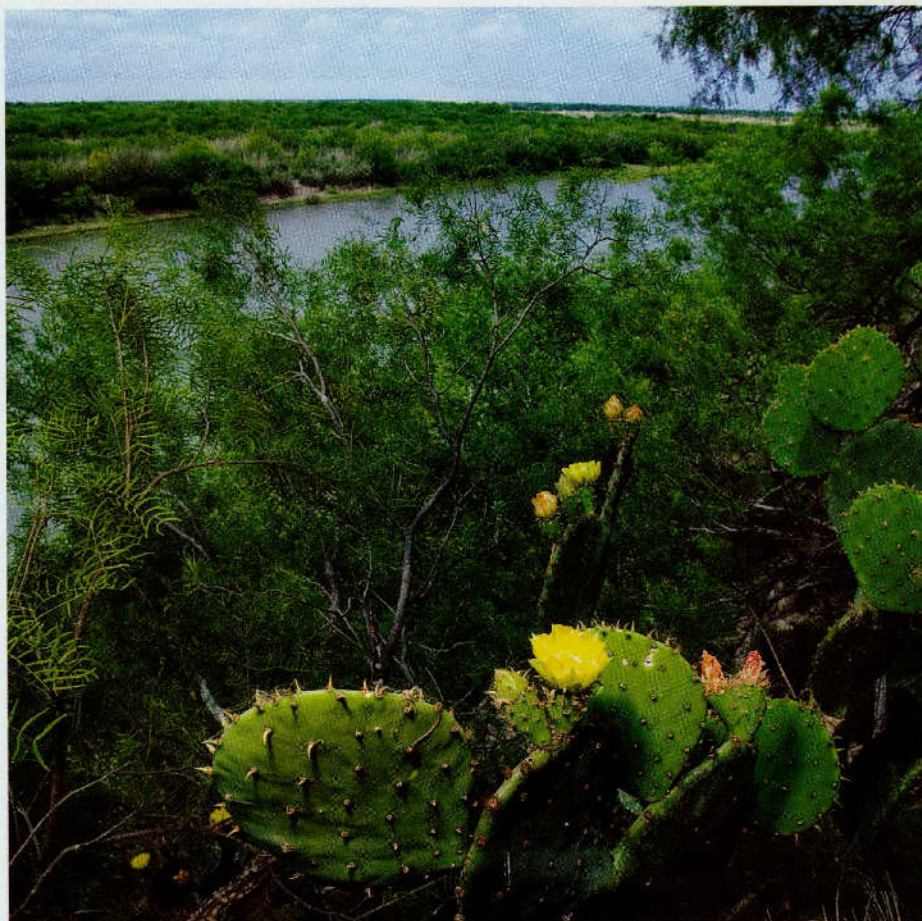
Three rural retreats in South Texas' tangled landscape offer respite and relaxation, while adventure lies nearby.



BY MAXINE MAYES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL SALCIDO

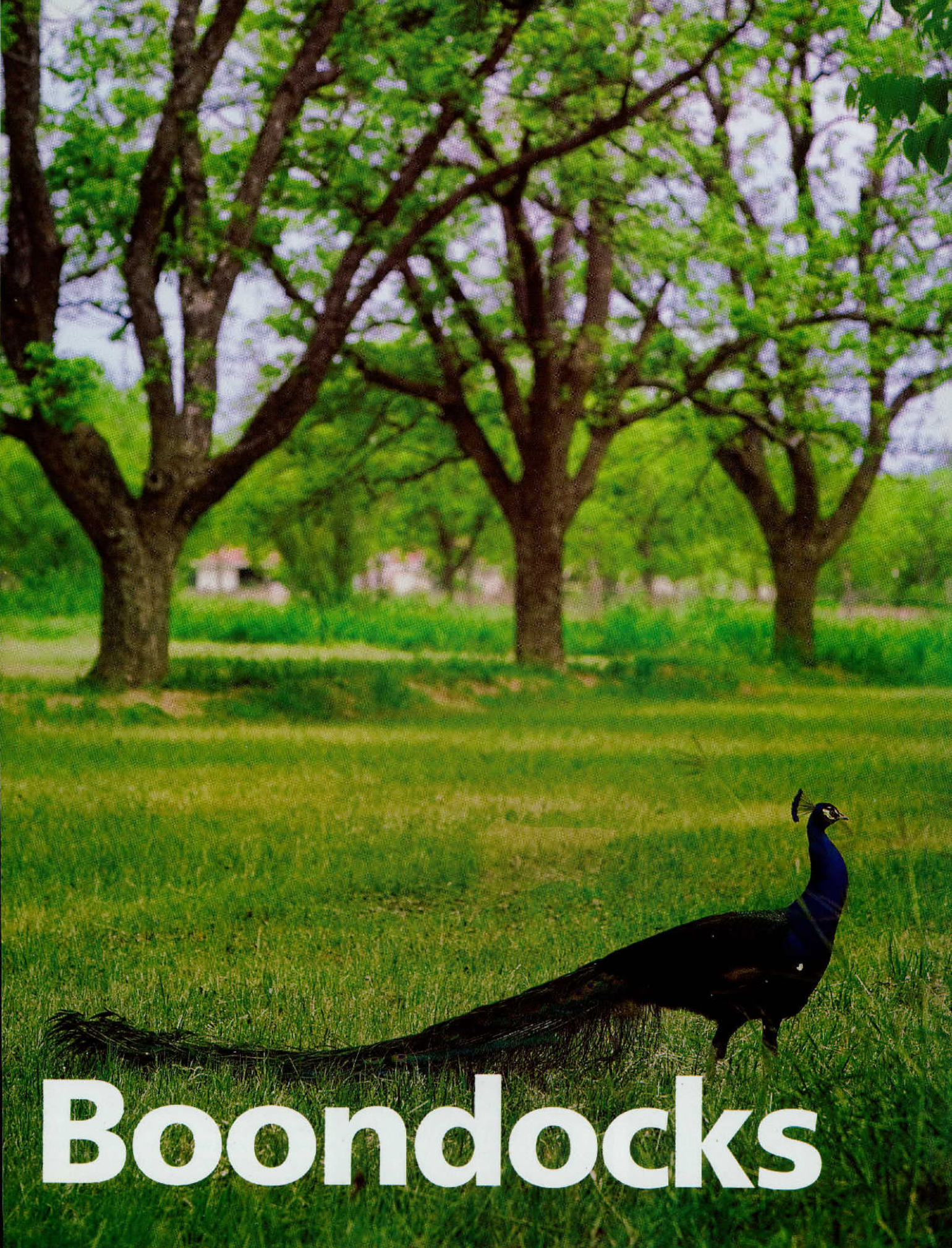
Marked by a subtle beauty, the region is full of delightful surprises, from peacocks in a pecan orchard to cactus-framed views of the Rio Grande. The antique tractor (above) resides at the Orange Grove Area Museum.



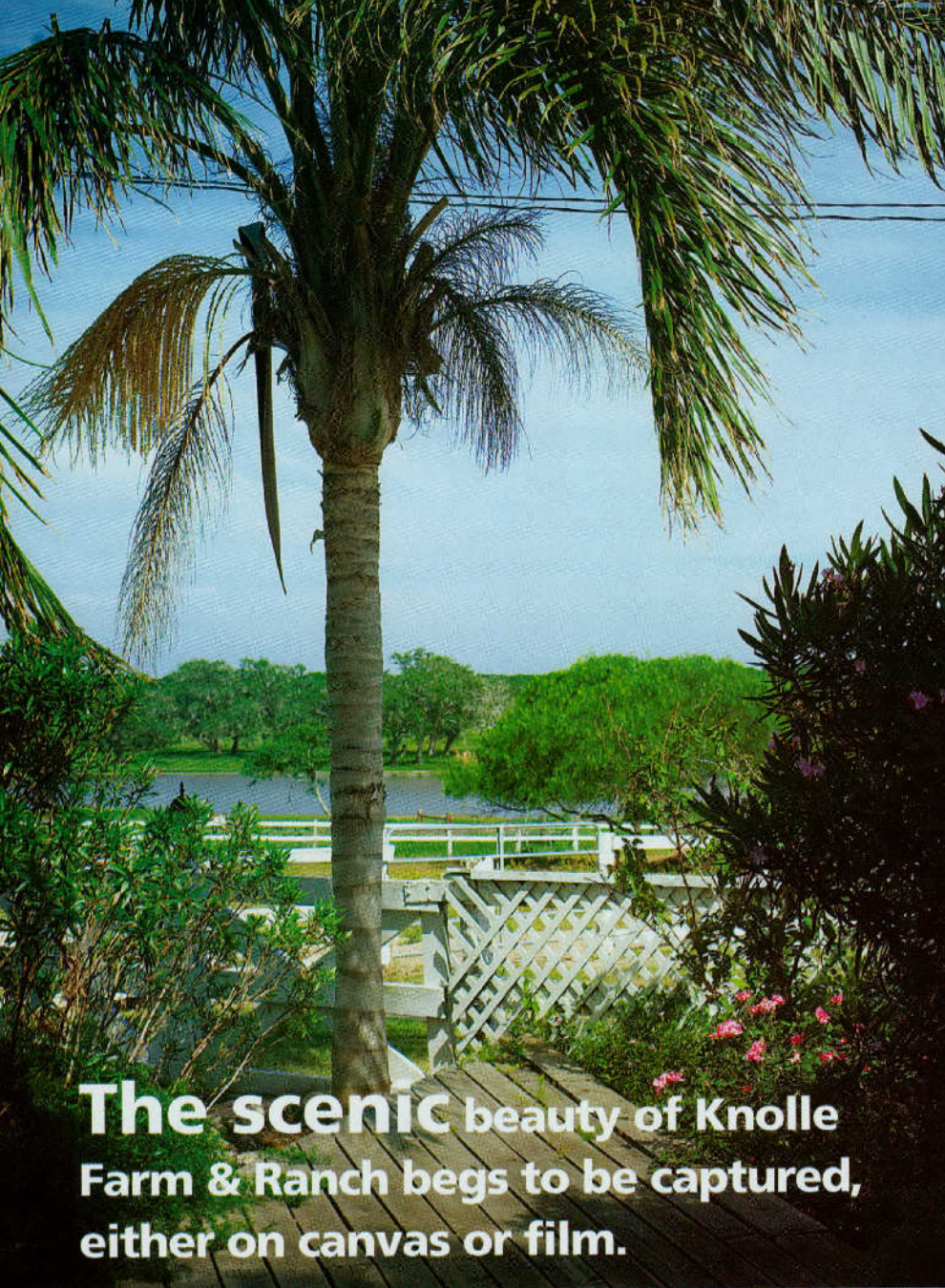
BACKROADS beckon to me, and I'm prone to answer their call. When time allows, I travel state highways or farm-to-market roads instead of interstates, and whatever my destination, it's not uncommon for me to detour off my route to explore some irresistible country road. My husband, Carl, once told me, "If your car had four-wheel drive, you'd take off down a cow trail." And he's probably right. So an assignment that involved seeking places "off the beaten path" in my part of the world—the South Texas Plains—was right up my alley, or, should I say, right up my dirt road.

"The boondocks" best describes the bulk of this region, where mazes of dense brush sprawl across thousands of square miles. The land once produced plentiful grasses, but overgrazing left it a wasteland eventually claimed by thickets of mesquite, huisache, yucca, guajillo, catclaw, cactus, and other thorny scrub. At a glance, the tangled landscape seems desolate, and mind-numbing in its sameness. But a closer look unveils an ecosystem teeming with wild creatures like white-tailed deer, javelinas, bobcats, coyotes, coatamundi, turkeys, quail, doves, roadrunners, and rattlesnakes. In the spring, soaring yuccas sport thick clusters of white blossoms,

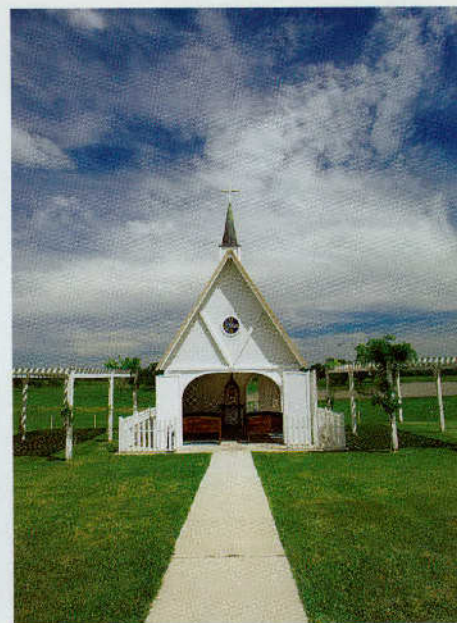
Down in the



Boondocks



The scenic beauty of Knolle Farm & Ranch begs to be captured, either on canvas or film.



huisache blooms cast a golden glow, and prickly pear flowers brighten the chaparral like decorations on a Christmas tree.

Richard Phelan writes in *Texas Wild* (1976) that the American cattle kingdom had its beginnings here after Texas gained its independence from Mexico. In some sections of the South Texas Plains, the brush has been cleared, giving rise to irrigated farms, but the area remains primarily ranchland. Today, hunting leases, more than cattle, sustain the ranches. Large corporations own some of the ranches, as well as much of the rich farmland that produces bumper crops of cabbage, spinach, onions, melons, and corn.

Family-run farms and ranches still exist, though, and in a struggle for survival, some of the owners have embraced ecotourism, offering visitors lodging, dining, and the opportunity to explore their wildscapes. Here are three remote retreats owned by families whose personal magnetism and love for their land will draw you into their legacy, at least for a weekend.

Barnhart Q5 Ranch & Retreat

MOVING from Houston to the rugged 706-acre family ranch near Berclair in Goliad County was a drastic lifestyle change for Claire Barnhart, but one that she rel-



The Knolle Farm & Ranch Bed, Barn, & Breakfast features a tiny chapel. A historic home (left) serves as a guesthouse at the Barnhart Q5 Ranch. Known for her exceptional tacos, Maria de Jesus "Jesusita" Rodriguez is a fixture at Weyrich Pecan Farm.

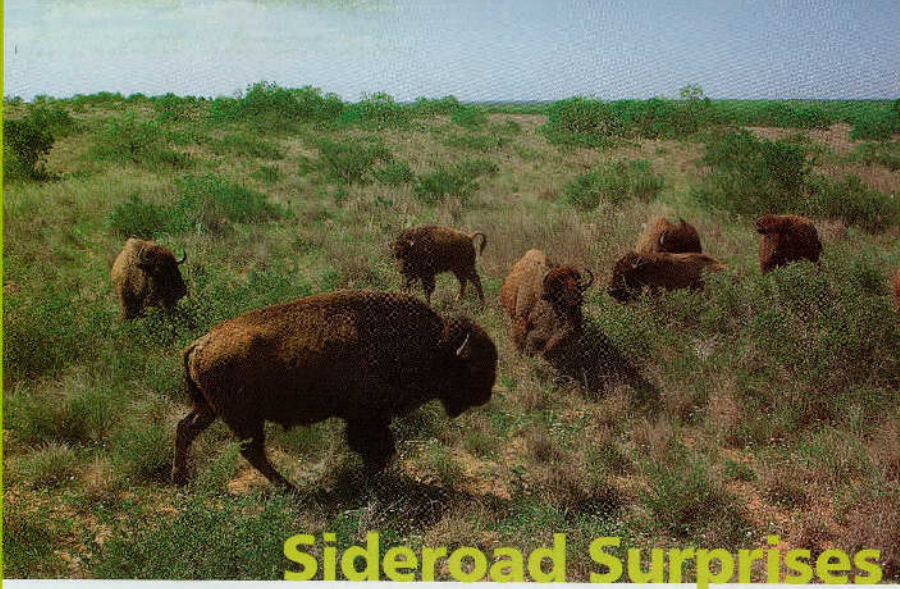
ished. As a youngster, Claire pictured herself “living a self-sustained life in the country, gardening, baking breads, hosting friends, surrounded by animals.” Decades later, after a career as a legal assistant, she resurrected that dream and, through nature tourism, is sharing it with others. Her father, retired Houston attorney John Barnhart, calls her an “earth mother.”

Of his beloved ranch, where he and Claire raise cattle and miniature Mediterranean donkeys, John says, “We cherish and have sought to serve every inch of it.” When he inherited the land 14 years ago, it consisted of nearly impenetrable brush. Now, strips of brush (wildlife habitat) alternate with native grasses (food for livestock and wildlife). That change, along with John’s other land-management techniques, like rotation grazing and solar-powered gravity-flow watering, earned the ranch a Lone Star Land Steward award from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 2004.

Ample activities await visitors to this awe-inspiring wilderness. Ride shotgun with John and hear his fascinating narrative of the ranch’s metamorphosis. Park yourself in a photo blind by a pond, and watch the wildlife. (Several years ago, a rare jaguarundi and cubs were sighted in the southeast pasture.) Ponder a 360-degree nightscape, free of light pollution, on Stargazer Hill, the ranch’s highest point. Take a hike with Claire and learn to distinguish a dog’s tracks from a coyote’s.

After a day of exploring, retire to your suite in the historic Maetze-von Dohlen Home. The 1877 structure once sat dilapidated and abandoned in downtown Goliad. Now, thanks to Claire’s toil and artistry, it basks in refurbished glory on the ranch, looking like it was born there. On the front porch, rocking chairs invite you to savor the sunrise in a silence broken only by a distant coyote chorus or the call of mourning doves. Inside, longleaf-pine walls and ceilings contrast with colorful, hand-stitched quilts, a painted Mexican chest, country-blue wood floors, and Guatemalan wall hangings and carvings.

The kitchen’s generous stash of breakfast fixings includes specialties like Raspetin Jelly, a delectable spread made from raspberries and wild chile-petins. “It’s a product of



WHILE scouting the backroads in the vicinity of these three rural getaways, I found several intriguing places for dining, shopping, and exploring.

At **Terrell Hall Restaurant**, tucked behind the Berclair Mansion (see *Texas Highways*, February '06) in Berclair, owner/chef Margaret Tindol prepares gourmet specialties, including desserts like lemon-raspberry crème brûlée and warm chocolate cake topped with vanilla ice cream and hot Kahlúa-fudge sauce.

The **Mineral Mercantile & Fire Ant Cafe**, at the intersection of FM 673 and FM 623, is just a short, scenic drive from the **Barnhart Q5 Ranch**. Owners Jim and Barbara Auxier brought new life to the community when they reopened the historic general store. Jim’s “y’all come on in” welcome and Barbara’s imaginative, home-style



cooking (be sure to try the “ant bites”—appetizer-size balls of spicy mashed potatoes that have been battered and deep-fried)

should spell success for the Auxiers’ venture.

Just a few minutes from the **Knolle Farm**, in nearby **Orange Grove**, is a 5,000-square-foot storehouse of antiquities, oddities, and historical collections called the **Orange Grove Area Museum**. A collection of Indian artifacts on loan from museum volunteer Rick Stowers includes more than 2,000 points and several Indian Peace Medals. (The United States government once presented the latter to Native

American chiefs as tokens of friendship.)

“I Survived FM 624 from Orange Grove to Cotulla.” If there’s not a T-shirt with that message, there should be. “Wide open spaces” describes this 92-mile stretch of road with no gas pump or convenience store in sight.

On your way to or from the **Weyrich Pecan Farm**, detour south to **Valley Wells** to see a massive iron bridge parked in a cemetery. The bridge, built in 1909, once spanned the Nueces River. When a new bridge was erected, the cemetery seemed a convenient place to “lay to rest” the rusted relic.

After leaving the bridge, head into **Cotulla** a few miles away and have dinner with the Benton family at **Pepper’s Grill**. Steaks and quail grilled over mesquite coals partially explain Pepper’s popularity; the lineup also includes chicken, pork loin, fish, and shrimp—all grilled to perfection—and a couple of pasta dishes. (The spaghetti features meatballs made with ground sirloin.) The staff makes several freezers of vanilla ice cream daily—you can choose your own topping—so be sure to save room for dessert. If you can spare the time, travel 20 miles southwest of Carrizo Springs on FM 186 for a chance to glimpse a buffalo herd roaming the 13,000-acre **Shape Ranch**. By next February, limited luxurious lodging will be available at the ranch for birdwatching and buffalo-viewing, just in time for calving season.

—MAXINE MAYES

Leave the interstate to see this sight: Buffalo still roam on the Shape Ranch (above), near Carrizo Springs.



John Barnhart (above) raises miniature Mediterranean donkeys, as well as cattle, on his ranch near Berclair. The restored 1877 Mae-tze-von Dohlen Home in the background was relocated from Goliad.

The scenic country getaway begs to be captured, either on canvas or film. A pastoral panorama of green meadow, oak motte, and a shallow lake rife with waterfowl forms the backdrop for a small white chapel. That beatific view and the chapel's charming details—copper-coated steeple, arched windows, and stained-glass panels—make the site a popular wedding venue. And attractions like a pool, hot tub, game room, and kayaking

Faye's Texas Naturals in Goliad," Claire explains, "and it's great on everything from ice cream to pork loin."

Knolle Farm & Ranch Bed, Barn, & Breakfast

IF I WERE an artist, I'd gather paints, easel, and canvases for a weekend of plein-air painting at the Knolle Farm & Ranch Bed, Barn, and Breakfast near Sandia.

on the Nueces River make it the perfect spot for a family vacation.

Although the Knolle Farm & Ranch now raises beef cattle, for three generations, it was a renowned dairy farm. From the 1950s to the 1970s, it had the largest Jersey herd in the nation. Several years ago, artist Beth Knolle Naiser and her husband, Steve, reconfigured the dairy barn and two other outbuildings into *(continued on page 62)*

TEXAS HIGHWAYS

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**Keep Texas Beautiful Ornament
Fourth Edition - 2007**

This Texas-shaped metal ornament adorned with a 3-dimensional display of wildflowers is dedicated to Lady Bird Johnson. Proceeds help fund Keep Texas Beautiful projects.

Made in the U.S.A. Width: 3"

39404.....\$18.00



Texas Star Stoneware Ornament

Charley and Holly Pritchard, of Luling Icehouse Pottery, designed this rustic ornament.

Created by hand in Texas

Width: 3"

39501\$18.00

**Merry Christmas Y'all
2007**

Glass ornament hand-painted by Texas artist Pattilu Bowsly.

Made in Texas
Diameter: 2 5/8"

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and Reindeer Cards**

Inside message: "Celebrate the Season!"

12 cards, 12 white envelopes

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**12 Days of Texas
Christmas Cards**

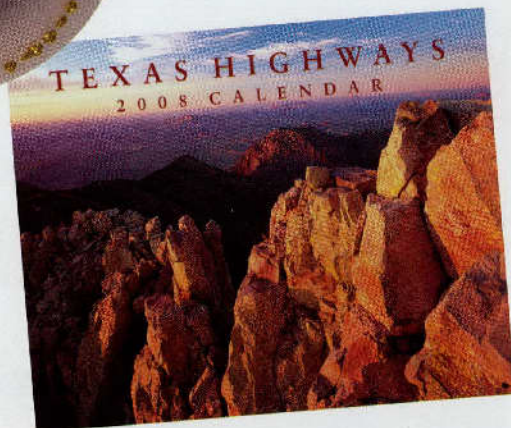
The 12 Days of Christmas—complete with cowboys, longhorns, Bubbas and a partridge in the Alamo.

Inside message: "Season's Greetings"

15 cards, 15 white envelopes

Approximate size: 5" x 7"

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Down in the Boondocks

(continued from page 60)

unusual lodging. For example, a cinder-block farm-laborer's dwelling from the 1930s became "La Casita." Iron scroll-work gates, vintage shutters, and vibrant interior colors create the impression of a French country cottage, but Beth and Steve introduced some purely South Texas elements as well, like the inverted galvanized trough that serves as a coffee table.

Speaking of coffee, the room-service breakfasts at the Knolle Farm & Ranch include such treats as a hearty Mexican breakfast casserole and strips of crisp bacon with apple enchiladas. (Dessert with breakfast! Is this heaven?) Scrumptious gourmet dinners and picnic baskets are available with advance notice.

Weyrich Pecan Farm

IN THE late 1800s, Felix Weyrich established a blacksmith shop in Eagle Pass. In 1910, he bought 40 acres of rich bottom-land on the Rio Grande and planted a pecan orchard. Now, his great-granddaughter Leah

essentials SOUTH TEXAS SITES

CONTACT information for sites in the story follows. Call ahead for hours and details. The area code is 361 unless otherwise noted.

Barnhart Q5 Ranch & Retreat, 8212 FM 883, Berclair, 375-2824; www.barnharttranchretreat.com.

Knolle Farm & Ranch Bed, Barn & Breakfast, 13016 FM

70, Sandia, 547-2546 or 547-3934; www.knolle.com.

Weyrich Pecan Farm, 464 Weyrich Farm Rd., Eagle Pass, 877/898-0991 or 830/773-6168; www.wfpecan.com.

Terrell Hall Restaurant, 66 Moore Rd., Berclair, 439-7600; www.terrellhallrestaurant.com.

Mineral Mercantile & Fire Ant Cafe, intersection of FM 673

and FM 623, Mineral, 375-2427.

Orange Grove Area Museum, 119 S. Eugenia St., Orange Grove, 384-1300 or 389-1271.

Pepper's Grill, 501 N. Main St. and Medina St., Cotulla, 830/879-2904 or 830/879-3433.

Shape Ranch, on FM 186, Carrizo Springs, 210/930-0841; shaperanch@aol.com.



Gray Leonard, with help from her husband, Kyle, manages the Weyrich Pecan Farm. They care for 300 pecan trees, operate a B&B, and sell organic pecans and pecan goodies.

The guesthouse boasts an engaging mix of quirky touches and family antiques. An 80-year-old, white wicker porch swing hangs from the living room ceiling, while a rare Mallard half-canopy bed and matching chifforobe grace one of the bedrooms.

By request, Leah and Kyle host barbecues on the banks of the Rio Grande. With advance notice, Leah's mother, Mary Gray-Partlow, will take guests across the border into Piedras Negras. A seasoned tour guide, Mary knows where to go for memorable dining, shopping, and sightseeing.

Speaking of memorable, one guest, Meera Subramanian, who in October 2005 had followed the monarch butterfly migration all the way from Canada to the farm in an ultralight, wrote in the visitor's book, "The memory of the pecan trees alive with monarchs as the late afternoon light filtered [through the leaves] will stay with me always."

WHILE stays at this trio of South Texas getaways aren't usually associated with dramatic hordes of monarchs, the tranquility of these sites and the warm hospitality of the families who share them will leave memories just as vivid and lasting. ★

MAXINE MAYES' article on Onion Creek Kitchens' cooking classes appeared in the May issue.

JOEL SALCIDO photographed the July cover story on El Paso's missions.



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The Long, Unwinding Road

(continued from page 55)

Hands to Work

TUCKED into a clearing in a wooded area just north of Waco sits Homestead Heritage Traditional Crafts Village, a small community where everything is made by hand. The village's buildings are 100- to 250-year-old structures moved to the site and restored by the village's craftspeople. We watched potters forming clay into graceful vases, a blacksmith creating hand-forged wrought-iron items, and a 1760s gristmill grinding flour and cornmeal. In the furniture shop, students were learning how to create small tables with hand tools. A sturdy barn houses the furniture and gift shop, while a log cabin contains the visitors' center and the deli, which serves generous sandwiches made on the bakery's homemade bread.

A Mix of Old and New, With Ice Cream on the Side

WHEN we opened the screen door of the Stuermer Store in Ledbetter, the loud, rusty-hinged "skreek" provided our first clue that the place was a genuine general store, dating to 1870. Inside, we found an exuberant clutter of old and new, shiny and dusty, all mixed together. New galvanized tubs, party supplies, and lawn tools intermix with a wood-burning stove and old farm equipment. Ladies' hats from the 1890s to the 1960s and 19th-Century celluloid collars share space with modern plumbing supplies. The antiques are not for sale, but everything else is. The adjoining snack bar serves hamburgers, catfish, and banana splits at lunch every day except Sunday.

A Stroll Along the Colorado River

GETTING back to nature without straying too far from civilization is a snap at McKinney Roughs Nature Park (eight miles west of Bastrop), one of 34 Lower Colorado River Authority parks along the river between the Highland Lakes west of Austin and the Gulf Coast. On foot or horseback (bring your own horse), visitors can explore more than 18 miles of trails through examples of Post Oak Savannah, Blackland Prairie, East Texas Piney Woods,



Joseph Lindsay prepares the grist mill at Homestead Heritage, near Elm Mott, just north of Waco.

and Central Texas Plateau ecosystems. In the visitor center, we met some of the hopping, crawling, slithering, and swimming local critters, including Gulf Coast toads and Great Plains rat snakes.

You Auto See This

ON FM 304 south of Bastrop sits a lone 44,000-square-foot steel building. It looks like a workaday warehouse, but inside you'll find a treasure trove of 130 meticulously restored antique and rare cars produced between 1901 and 1988. Even for someone like me who doesn't get all googly-eyed about old cars, the Central Texas Museum of Automotive History in Rosanky proves fascinating. The star of the show is a 1933 Duesenberg Roadster. But we were equally enchanted by the 1911 Napier Garden Car, which has wicker seats, and a tiny, red 1903 Galloway, which looks like a motorized miniature buckboard wagon with lantern headlights.

These and other discoveries await in the Prairies and Lakes, so take a backroad and look for them just around the next bend. ★

MARY G. RAMOS enjoys rambling along Texas backroads with her wonderfully tolerant husband, finding unexpected treasures—artistic, architectural, culinary, and historic. She says it's almost as much fun as eating chocolate.

Photographer KEVIN STILLMAN really enjoyed talking with Mable Wheat at Miller's Pharmacy in Cooper.

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Hidden Chambers Revealed

DRIVING EAST on Interstate 10 from Houston, you might not realize that a vast, verdant coastal prairie—replete with throngs of wildlife, birds, and history—quietly beckons just off the concrete. Do yourself a favor and pull off I-10 at Wallisville (halfway between Houston and Beaumont) and visit Wallisville Heritage Park, a living history museum that offers an intriguing portal into the rich realm of Chambers County.

Stroll through the rooms of artifacts from Texas' pioneer days and browse the Library and Research Center, steeped in local history. Poke around the grounds to see two historic Chambers County schoolhouses that have been moved there for preservation (one from Eminence dates to 1915; the one from Wallisville to 1869).

While you're there, ask for Kevin (pronounced KEE-vin) Ladd, a soft-spoken, genial man and the museum's director. Kevin has served as steward of this resource for more than 20 years, and explodes with facts, places, and recommendations. When I tell him the route I'm planning to follow, he says, "Oh, you're going from here to Smith Point. That's the ride our sheriff took."

Sheriff John Frost, Kevin continues, has been dead for more than a century. His memory lives on today, thanks in no small



© SUSAN L. EBERT

The Skillern Tract of the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge can be spectacular at sunset, when numerous shorebirds, ducks, geese, herons, egrets, and roseate spoonbills flock to these moist-soil units.

part to Kevin's storytelling. (See sidebar, page 67.) And his is just one of the fascinating stories in Chambers County—stories populated by such characters as Cabeza de Vaca and other Spanish conquistadors; bloodthirsty pirates (among them, the nefarious Jean Lafitte); fierce, nomadic Karankawa Indians (rumored to be cannibalistic); Cherokee refugees from the infamous "Trail of Tears"; freed black slaves; and early Anglo pioneers, variously playing starring roles in Texas' cattle industry, oil boom, and oyster industry and, in fact, planting the first seeds of Texas' independence.

From Wallisville, I sidle down FM 563

amid moss-festooned oaks through Turtle Bayou, where, on June 13, 1832, a handful of Texans drafted and signed the first formal protest against Mexican rule. A few days before, Colonel Juan Davis Bradburn, in employ of the Mexican government, had unjustly imprisoned several locals, one of whom was William B. Travis, at nearby Fort Anahuac. The ensuing battle to free the captives would drive Travis to his destiny at the Alamo and lead Texas to independence.

Anahuac

WANT TO SEE an alligator? You surely will here: Alligators outnumber humans nearly three to one in Chambers County, and with a human population of 28,227, that's a heckuva lot of gators.

Each September, Anahuac hosts the Texas Gatorfest at Fort Anahuac, reveling in its reptilian residents. The three-day fête features food, live music, vendors, boat rides, and carnival rides—clinching Anahuac's title as Alligator Capital of Texas.

On to Oak Island

FROM ANAHUAC, I continue south to the tiny town of Oak Island, wending through

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September in Chambers County marks the onset of fall migration, a visual feast complete with its own soundtrack.



This trio of white ibis numbers among the throngs that feed in the marsh at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.

pastoral prairies dotted with grazing cattle. Artie Presley, owner of Oak Island Lodge, greets me—barefoot, tall, tan, and robust. As befitting his relative, *you-know-who* Presley, his engaging smile snares me.

With wraparound porches and windows on all sides, the lodge perches on massive stilts above an expansive lawn at the mouth of Double Bayou. Artie de-

signed it himself. With 36 beds in the 5,800-square-foot main lodge, a separate guide house with an additional 18 beds, boat slips and lifts, two lighted fishing piers—one with a covered gazebo and swing—and the fresh addition of an outdoor hot tub, it seems Artie has thought of everything.

“I had it in my head what I wanted to do here,” he says, “but after the double whammy of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, I really had to check my sanity on building a big coastal lodge. I decided to go ahead and use everything I’ve learned in decades of working construction to make this happen.”

Unlike many lodges that have guides on staff, Artie works with a network of area guides, depending upon his clients’ preference for activities. Fly-fishing, kayaking, birding, or traditional hunt-and-fish activities abound. “Oak Island has become a destination for family reunions and weddings, as well,” he says. “I want everyone here to feel as comfortable as they would in their own home.”

Feathered Jewels

SEPTEMBER also marks the onset of fall migration, when throngs of songbirds, raptors, waterfowl, hummingbirds, and Monarch butterflies wing their way through Chambers County. From Oak Island, travel east to FM 562 South, then take FM 1985 east to the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge—a 34,000-acre wildlife haven.

Stop at the visitors’ center to pick up maps of the hiking and driving trails and to chat with the knowledgeable staff. “I saw an osprey hunting on Shoveler Pond this morning,” one park volunteer recounts, so I idle my truck down Shoveler Pond Road, camera in hand. A bobcat pauses in the roadbed, stopping to glare intensely at me. There it is! The osprey, perched on a high branch, plummets into the shallow marsh, emerging with a hapless fish in its talons. Thousands of red-winged blackbirds chirp from the tall cane, as myriad coots, fulvous

The area code is 409.

Anahuac Chamber of Commerce, 603 Miller St., 267-4190; www.anahuacchamber.com.



Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, on FM 1985, 267-3337; www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/anahuac.

Frascone Winery, 311 Bayside Dr. in Anahuac, 800/920-2248; www.frasconewinery.com.

Jeri’s Seafood, an oyster-production company, is on FM 562 in Smith Point, 355-2216; www.jerisseafood.com.

Wallisville Heritage Park, in Wallisville, 389-2252; www.wallisville.com.

LODGING Oak Island Lodge, 142A Jackson Dr. in Oak Island, 252-4122; www.oakislandlodge.net.

Spoonbill RV Park, on Hawkins Camp Rd., in Smith Point, 355-2347; www.spoonbillrvpark.com.

EVENTS Hawk Watch (Aug. 15-Nov. 15), at Candy Cain Abshier WMA on FM 526 in Smith Point. Call 736-2551; www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Texas Gatorfest (Sep. 14-16) is in Anahuac. Call 267-4190; www.texasgatorfest.com.



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and black-bellied whistling-ducks, herons, egrets, ibis, roseate spoonbills, geese, and shorebirds hunt, loaf, and preen in a cacophony of birdsong.

I walk out on the 750-foot Shoveler Pond boardwalk, and sit motionless on a wooden bench. An American bittern, camouflaged against the cane, resumes his feeding as two purple gallinules paddle by. Throngs of ibis float in, landing in the nearby marsh. What appears to be a submerged log begins to move. It's one of the refuge's many alligators.

Seven miles east of the main refuge, the Skillern Tract's moist-soil units and rice fields attract astounding numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, while migrating songbirds fill the branches. As the tract serves as a roosting area for many of these birds, plan to go in the late afternoon and linger for a spectacular sunset. It's a visual feast, complete with its own soundtrack.

Birthplace of the Blues

ANOTHER distinctive Chambers County soundtrack is *Live at Double Bayou Dance Hall*, by veteran bluesman Pete Mayes and the Texas Houserockers. Mayes was born and raised in Chambers County, in the still small Double Bayou community established by former slaves. I recently caught up with Pete in Houston.

"Oh, Double Bayou," he says, his laugh deep and rich as a river. "Gal, how'd you ever find out about me?"

I've been exploring Chambers County, I explain, and heard about you and Double Bayou Dance Hall.

"I've been wanting to play the blues since I was four," says Pete, who first took the stage when he was 14. "My grandmother called [blues] 'the devil's music' and forbade me from playing it on Sundays. But I had a little battery radio, and knew it was my calling." (He confides that he even played the blues on Sundays.)

Pete Mayes and the Texas Houserockers first played Double Bayou Dance Hall in 1954, and have been gettin' after it ever since. "I brought the Texas sound to the European bandstand," Pete tells me, "playing in Nice, Cannes, Bordeaux, and other European cities. After that, we had visitors from all over Europe come to visit Double Bayou Dance Hall."

As blues aficionados from the world over flocked to this humble shack, Pete's aunt (Martha Rivers) brought sweet-potato pies, men barbecued outside, and inside the hogwire-and-post low-ceilinged shack, all shared their love of the blues.

"When I was 19, I got T-Bone Walker to come play here. He was my hero.



Pete Mayes (shown here in Seabrook) once belted the blues at Double Bayou Dance Hall, scheduled to reopen next year.

T-Bone influenced me to play the blues."

Other blues legends who graced this country watering hole included Big Joe Turner, Clifton Chenier, Gatemouth Brown, Johnny Copeland, and Sam Lightnin' Hopkins. Double Bayou closed last year, but Pete plans to reopen it in 2008.

"[People] call me a legend," he says with his graceful waterfall laugh. "I didn't know I was that old."

Smith Point

MY INTEREST in Smith Point piqued after reading *Forest McNeir of Texas*, an autobiography of late-19th- and early-20th-Century life on the Texas coast. Forest's grandmother, Sara Ridge Paschal Pix, a Trail of Tears refugee and daughter of revered Cherokee chieftain Major Ridge, is buried in Smith Point. A Texas Historical Marker graces the small family cemetery, Kevin Ladd tells me. "Stop by Jeri's Seafood," he says. "The Nelsons, who own Jeri's, are descendants of the McNeirs."

Sheriff John Frost: 1862-1900

JOHN LIGHTER FROST, who, in 1900, had just been re-elected for a third term as Chambers County sheriff, still cut a boyish figure at age 38: tall, elegant, and hard-muscled. Frost was the only lawman in Chambers County.

During the previous election, in 1898, Frost's opponents had accused him of cowardice. A careful, just man, Frost was no coward. But in Smith Point, three heinous souls had seized Lake Surprise, legendary Galveston cotton baron Colonel Moody's private duck-hunting lodge near Smith Point, from two honest and enterprising brothers, Forest and Paschal McNeir, and threatened anyone who dared trespass that they would "kill them all and burn their hides."

Sheriff Frost—surely with an anvil of foreboding pressing on his heart—mounted his steed, and rode the long trail south from Wallisville to Smith Point to confront and evict the poachers and squatters. He was never seen again.

Although all three men were brought to trial, Sheriff Frost's body was never recovered. His horse was found; the reins sliced. In a confession, one of the accused told the judge that they had cut off the bridle reins to strap Frost's body down with weights before tossing him in the bay. Even with this confession, no one was ever charged with this crime: no body, no conviction.

In 1904, a Woodmen of the World marker was dedicated in Frost's name at the Wallisville Cemetery, commemorating the sacrifice of this brave lawman.

Listen closely to the night winds rustling through the Spanish-moss-draped oaks, and you might hear a three-beat tempo—is it Sheriff Frost's steed, wild-eyed and galloping, still searching for its lost master?

And bring a cooler—Jeri's sits at the juncture of East Galveston, Galveston, and Trinity bays, which produce more oysters than any other single body of water in America.

Tonight I sleep at Smith Point's Spoonbill RV Park. Besides RV hookups, they have several trailers and a small, secluded cabin for rent. The cabin's porch, I find, is a front-row seat to sunset viewing over the bay. I see a passel of birders—binoculars close at hand—leaving their SUVs, ending a day of exploration at the annual Hawk Watch at nearby Candy Cain Abshier Wildlife Management Area.

As I return to Oak Island Lodge the next morning, the red-white-and-green sign of

Frascone Winery welcomes me. Jimmy Frascone greets me at his tasting bar, offering sips of his handmade wines. "I use a 120-year-old Italian wine press," he beams. Jimmy, who has been making wine for more than 50 years, delivers wine to passing boats in nearby Double Bayou, and also provides hayrides from the dock to boaters who wish to visit the winery. Along with cabernet sauvignons, merlots, zinfandels, and chardonnays, the winery produces wines made from apples, blackberries, peaches, and other locally grown fruit.

Fireworks and a Norther

THE AROMAS emanating from the kitchen greet my evening return to Oak Island Lodge. Artie's friend Andy is stirring a gargantuan pot of gumbo, redolent with shrimp and giant lumps of crabmeat, as he stuffs freshly caught flounder with a spicy Cajun crab mixture. Nearby, another volunteer deftly wraps teal breast halves around jalapeño slices, ensconcing each in strips of peppered bacon. The afternoon fishermen drift in, and new guests arrive for the evening's feast.

Weather, that most universal of Texas topics, is on everyone's tongues as we share our repast: Hurricane season in Texas runs from June through November, and the fall monsoons are just firing up. Which one will play the upper hand tonight is anyone's guess, as the oncoming rush of southern-born warm, moist air smashes against a relentless advancing cold front from the north.

From the safety of the deep-set porches, we watch the roiling heavens and brilliant yellow, magenta, and violet flashes of cloud-to-cloud lightning as the advancing norther thunders forth. The welcome rains follow, beating that sweetest of tattoos on the lodge's tin roof.

And tonight, on the wings of the north wind, throngs of migratory waterfowl and songbirds will conserve the energy in their tiny, feathered bodies, surfing the crest of the storm in atavistic instinct.

Tomorrow, they will rest and feed in the fecund marshes of Chambers County.

SUSAN L. EBERT is currently the associate publisher and editorial director of *Western & English Today*.

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September



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BECAUSE OF SPACE LIMITATIONS, we can't print every event we receive. Please note that dates sometimes change after we go to press. You may want to confirm a particular event by calling the number listed with the festivity or by contacting the local chamber of commerce or convention and visitors bureau.

FOR INFORMATION ON ANY DESTINATION IN TEXAS: Call 800/452-9292 toll-free from anywhere in the U.S. and Canada, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Central Time. A professional travel counselor at one of the Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Centers will answer your Texas travel questions, provide routing assistance, send brochures (including the official *Texas State Travel Guide* and map), and advise you of any emergency road conditions.



FOR A QUARTERLY, MORE DETAILED SCHEDULE OF events, write for a free copy of the *Texas Events Calendar*, Box 149249, Austin 78714-9249. For an online listing of events, with details, go to www.texashighways.com.

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Labor Day Music Festival
409/951-5400
www.fordparktx.com
- BRAZORIA**
Labor Day Boat Parade
979/964-4402
- HOUSTON**
Baroque Favorites
281/373-3386
www.millerothdoortheatre.com
- SOUTH PADRE ISLAND**
Labor Day
Fireworks Over the Bay
800/767-2373
- 1-2**
FREEPORT
(began Aug 31)
Summertime Blues Festival
979/233-3526
www.freeportmainstreet.com
- ROCKPORT**
Fiesta en la Playa
361/463-7737
- 6, 8-9, 14-16**
HOUSTON
The Merry Widow
713/227-2787
www.houstonballet.org

- 7-8**
HOUSTON
Dominic Walsh Dance Theater
281/373-3386
www.millerothdoortheatre.com

- 8**
BEAUMONT
Art Museum of Southeast Texas'
20th Anniversary Gala
409/832-3432
www.amset.org
- LAKE JACKSON**
Brazosport Relay Triathlon
979/238-5037

- 9**
DACOSTA
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www.tuts.com

13-15
ROCKPORT
Hummer/Bird Celebration
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www.rockport-fulton.org

14-15
BAYSIDE
Fennessey Ranch
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14-16
ANAHUAC
Texas Gatorfest
409/267-4190
www.texasgatorfest.com

HOUSTON
Gulf Coast Film & Video
Festival
281/333-5804
www.gulfcoastfilmfest.com

14-22
VICTORIA
Neil Simon's Proposals
361/576-6277
www.theatrevictoria.org

15
BAYTOWN
Grito Fest
281/420-6597
www.baytown.org

BEAUMONT
Symphony of Southeast Texas
409/892-2257
www.sost.org

RICHMOND
Fiestas Patrias Celebration
281/342-6478
www.fortbendmuseum.org

15-16
TOMBALL
Centennial Fall Fiesta
281/351-3301
www.downtowntomball.com

20-23
GROVES
Pecan Festival
409/962-3631
www.grovescofc.com

20, 22-23, 28-30
HOUSTON
The Four Seasons
713/227-2787
www.houstonballet.org

21-23
LA PORTE
Fall Back Festival
832/771-7661
www.fallbackfest.com

21-24
SOUTH PADRE ISLAND
SPI Film Festival
www.spifilmfestival.com

22
GALVESTON
Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra
with Wynton Marsalis
409/765-1894 or
800/821-1894
www.thegrand.com

22-23
HOUSTON
Houston Hot Sauce Festival
281/558-3518
www.houstonhotsauce.com

LEAGUE CITY
Oak Tree Festival
281/332-3953
www.oaktreefestival.com

22-23
ORANGE
Showdown on the Sabine
Boat Races
409/883-1011

23
VICTORIA
Czech Heritage Festival
361/575-0820

26-29
ORANGE
Lions Club Carnival
409/883-3338

28-29
EL CAMPO
Fall Fest &
Barbecue Cookoff
979/648-2691

GALVESTON
Clint Black
409/765-1894 or
800/821-1894
www.thegrand.com

HOUSTON
Houston Grand Taiko
Festival
281/373-3386
www.milleroortdoortheatre.com

PORT ARANSAS
Conquer the Coast
Bicycle Ride
www.conquerthecoast.com

28-30
CORPUS CHRISTI
Bayfest
361/887-0868
www.bayfesttexas.com

KEMAH
Jazz Festival
281/334-9880
www.kemahboardwalk.com

28-Oct 6
ROSENBERG
71st Fort Bend County
Fair & Rodeo
281/342-6171
www.fbca.org

29
ROCKPORT
Hidden Gardens Tour
361/790-0103

HILL COUNTRY

1
AUSTIN
Trio Los Panchos
512/329-6753
www.oneworldtheatre.org

FREDERICKSBURG
Jelly Jamboree
803/997-7154
www.jelly.com

KERRVILLE
Rio de Vino Triathlon
210/695-6430
www.rogersoler.com

1-2
AUSTIN
BatFest
512/441-9015
www.roadwayevents.com

BANDERA
Celebrate Bandera
800/364-3833
www.celebratebandera.com

BOERNE
(began Aug 31)
Kendall County Fair
www.kcfa.org

STONEWALL
Grape Stomp
830/644-2681
www.beckvineyards.com

7-8
LUCKENBACH
Tex Americana Fandango
830/997-3224
www.luckenbachtexas.com

8-9
GRUENE
Texas Metal Arts
Festival
903/852-3311
www.texasmetalarts.com

14-16
AUSTIN
Austin City Limits
Music Festival
888/512-SHOW
www.aclfestival.com

15
BARTLETT
Friendship Fest
254/527-4060

MANOR
Manor Fest
512/272-4247

MENARD
Jim Bowie Days
325/396-2365

15-16
HONDO
Medina County Fair
830/426-5406
www.medinacountyfair.org

16
BURNET
Tri-Hard Triathlon
512/756-6640

22
GRANITE SHOALS
Fall Festival
830/598-8698

22
LAKEHILLS
Medina Lake Cajun Festival
830/751-3130

22-Nov 25
HONDO
South Texas Maize
830/741-3968
www.cornfieldmaze.com

29-30
AUSTIN
Pecan Street Fall Festival
512/443-6179
www.oldpecanstreet
festival.com

30
KERRVILLE
Symphony of the Hills
830/792-7469
www.symphonyofthehills.com

PANHANDLE PLAINS

1
COLEMAN
Dove Festival
325/625-2163
www.colemantexas.org

PLAINS
Yoakum County
Watermelon Roundup
806/456-3566

WINTERS
Dove Fest
325/754-5210
www.winters-texas.us

1-2
AMARILLO
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




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

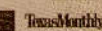
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







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1-2
BOYS RANCH
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Boys Ranch Rodeo &
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806/322-2635
www.callfarleysboysranch.org

3
BIG SPRING
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PAMPA
Chautauqua Celebration
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6-15
ABILENE
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325/677-4376

7-8
ABILENE
ACU Tennis Tournament
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GORDON
Antique Tractor Show
254/693-5818

8
BIG SPRING
Big Spring
Symphony Orchestra
432/264-7233
www.bigspringssymphony.com

GORMAN
Peanut Festival
254/734-4572

QUANAH
Fall Festival
940/663-2222

RALLS
Cotton Boll Fest
806/253-2342

WOLFORTH
Harvest Festival
806/866-4215

8-9
IDALOU
Apple Butter Festival
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or 781-1753
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11-15
WICHITA FALLS
Texas-Oklahoma
Fair & Livestock Show
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13
AMARILLO
Good Times Celebration
Barbecue Cookoff
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www.amarillo-chamber.org

SAN ANGELO
Acoustic Music Series
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13-15
HENRIETTA
Clay County
Pioneer Reunion & Rodeo
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SWEETWATER
TSTC West Texas
Sammy Baugh
Football Classic
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www.sweetwatertexas.org

14-15
HENRIETTA
1890 Jail Tours
940/524-3465

14-15
WICHITA FALLS
North Texas
Corvette Round Up
940/691-4536

14-16
BROWNWOOD
Reunion Celebration
325/998-4636
www.brownwoodtx.com

14-22
AMARILLO
Tri-State Fair
806/376-7767
www.tristatefair.com

15
ABILENE
Grace Museum Gala
325/673-4587

IOWA PARK
Whoop-t-do
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www.iowaparkchamber.org

15-16
SAN ANGELO
Greater San Angelo
Crafts Guild
Fall Festival
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21-22
EDEN
Fall Fest Celebration
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www.edentexas.com

21-23
ABILENE
U.S. Team Roping
Championships
325/677-4376

21-29
LUBBOCK
South Plains Fair
806/763-2833

22-23
WICHITA FALLS
Art Affair on the Square
940/767-2787
www.kempcenter.org

25-29
ABILENE
West Texas
Book & Music Festival
325/676-6328

26-29
BIG SPRING
Howard County Fair
432/268-9335
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28-29
LUBBOCK
Flatland Film Festival
806/762-8606
www.flatlandfilmfestival.com

WICHITA FALLS
FallsFest
940/692-9797
www.fallsfest.org

28-30
ABILENE
Big Country Balloon Fest
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www.bigcountryballoonfest.com

29
COLORADO CITY
Cowboy Breakfast
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29
GOODLETT
Country Music Fest
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Ranch Heritage Tour
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PINEY WOODS

1
LINDEN
Richard Bowden
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www.musiccitytexas.org

1, 7-9, 14-15
CONROE
My Fair Lady
936/441-7469
www.crightonplayers.org

8
TYLER
East Texas
Symphony Orchestra
903/526-ETSO
www.etsso.org

8-9
TEXARKANA
Quadrangle Festival
903/793-4831
www.texarkanamuseums.org

11
TEXARKANA
Texarkana Symphony
Orchestra
903/792-4992

11-15
LONGVIEW
Gregg County Fair
903/753-4478
www.greggcountyfair.com

14-15
NACOGDOCHES
Do Dat Barbecue
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Sandyland Bluegrass Reunion
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www.sandylandbluegrass.com

14-22
TEXARKANA
Four States Fair & Rodeo
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15
COLDSPRING
Arts & Antiques Festival
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TYLER
Festival on the Square
903/593-6905
www.festivalonthesquare.com

15-16
HUNTSVILLE
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www.tmbra.org

19-23
LUFKIN
Texas State Forest Festival
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20-29
TYLER
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21
THE WOODLANDS
Dave Matthews Band
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21-22
MAGNOLIA
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& Fiddlers Contest
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22
MONTGOMERY
Historic Montgomery
Wine Trail
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www.montgomerywinetrail.com

22-23
GLADEWATER
Arts & Crafts Festival
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22-Oct 31
HUGHES SPRINGS
Scarecrow Row
903/639-2351
www.hughesspringstx.net

27-29
HENDERSON
PRCA Rodeo
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29
LONGVIEW
Longview Symphony
903/236-9739
www.longviewsymphony.org

WOODVILLE
Ghosts of Texas Past
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www.heritage-village.org

30
TEXARKANA
Ten Tenors
at the Perot Theatre
903/792-4992
www.trahc.org

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

1
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Dove Festival
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www.hamiltontexas.com

LEWISVILLE
Western Day Festival
972/219-3401
www.visitlewisville.com

1-2
LINDSAY
Antique Tractor &
Farm Machinery Show
800/689-7861

1-16
ARLINGTON
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www.sixflags.com

**1-2, 7-9, 14-16,
21-23, 28-30**
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2
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2
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3
WACO
Sorghum Festival
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7-9
FORT WORTH
Zest Fest 2007
817/392-7469
www.zestfest2007.com

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National Championship
Powwow
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www.tradersvillage.com

7-16
IRVING
Carousel
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www.irvingartscenter.com

8
BRENHAM
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www.brenhamfineartgallery.com

CALDWELL
Kolache Festival
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HILLSBORO
Barbecue Cookoff/
Cotton Pickin' Fair
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MORGAN MILL
Arts & Crafts Fair
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8-15
SULPHUR SPRINGS
Hopkins County Fall Festival
903/885-8071
www.civiccenteronline.com

9-19
LULING
Reflections of Texas Art
Show
830/875-1922
www.oilmuseum.org

10
FORT WORTH
Trisha Yearwood
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www.basshall.com

11, 18, 25
LEWISVILLE
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Fall Concert Series
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www.visitlewisville.com

13-16
COLUMBUS
Colorado County Fair
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14-15
ELGIN
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www.roundupcowboygathering.com

SULPHUR SPRINGS
Lone Star Heritage
Fall Festival Quilt Show
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14-16
DALLAS
Fall Home & Garden Show
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800/654-1480

FORT WORTH
Symphonie Fantastique
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15
BUFFALO
Stampede
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www.buffalotex.com

15
CARROLLTON
A.W. Perry
Homestead Museum:
150 Years Celebration
972/466-6380

GATESVILLE
SpurFest Celebration
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www.coryellmuseum.org

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Rally Round Greenville
903/455-1510
www.greenvillechamber.com

HAMILTON
Antique Tractor
& Machinery Show
254/386-3862
or 386-8752

McGREGOR
Founders Day Festival
254/840-0123

SPRINGTOWN
Wild West Festival
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www.springtownchamber.org

SULPHUR SPRINGS
Hopkins County Stew Contest
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www.sulphursprings-tx.com

19-22
BRENHAM
Washington County Fair
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www.washingtoncofair.com

CLARKSVILLE
Red River County Fair
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20-23
ADDISON
Oktoberfest
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www.addisontexas.net

ENNIS
NHRA O'Reilly Fall Nationals
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979/878-2641
www.visitennis.org

21-22
BONHAM
Autumn in Bonham
Bike Rally
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www.bonhamchamber.com

21-23
COMMERCE
Bois d'Arc Bash
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Music & Arts Festival
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22
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NAVASOTA
Bubba Can Cook
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22-23
COMANCHE
Comanche County Powwow
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www.comanchechamber.org

23
SERBIN
Wendish Fest
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24-28
DENISON
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Competition
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28-30
DALLAS
Greek Food Festival
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28-Oct 21
DALLAS
State Fair of Texas
214/565-9931
www.bigtex.com

29
HALLETTSVILLE
Kolache Fest
361/798-2662
www.hallettsville.com

HILLSBORO
Elm Fest
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www.hillsborochamber.org

29-Oct 6
HEMPSTEAD
Waller County Fair & Rodeo
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SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

1
WESLACO
Breakfast with the Birds
956/565-3919
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13
SAN ANTONIO
Pachanga del Rio
210/227-4262

14-15
ALICE
Hispanic Heritage Festival
361/664-3454
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14-16
SAN ANTONIO
Quilt Show
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15
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Celebration
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16
WESLACO
Diez y Seis de Septiembre
Celebration
956/973-3172

21-22
KARNES CITY
Lonesome Dove Fest
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www.lonesomedovefest.com

29
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TIPS FROM OUR READERS

MICHAEL AMADOR

THERE IS a wonderful restaurant in Junction called **Sunshine Cafe and Bakery**. For only \$5.95, you can enjoy a three-quarter-pound hamburger with all the trimmings on a fresh-baked bun. In fact, two hungry people can enjoy this huge hamburger! I'm quite sure that the rest of the menu items—and all the bakery products—are equally delicious. My husband and I never order anything else but the hamburger.

BILLY LOUVIERE, *Sugar Land*

Sunshine Cafe and Bakery is at 1907 N. Main St.; 325/446-2497.

I RECENTLY stayed at **Shiner Country Inn** in Shiner. The restored motel [from the '50s], owned by Hubert Novak and his family, is furnished with antiques. It is extremely attractive, and the Novaks are most welcoming and very friendly.

MAURINE GRAY, *Beaumont*

Shiner Country Inn is at 1016 N. Avenue E;

I HAVE been meaning to write for some time to suggest a visit to the town of **Corsicana**. It's a fun place. Don't miss the beautiful **Pearce Collections Museum** at **Navarro College**. Of course, Corsicana is also home to the famous **Collin Street Bakery**. The town is a great place to visit!

TOM AND JAN CROWELL,
Fort Worth

The Pearce Collections Museum is at 3100 W. Collin St.; 903/875-7642; www.pearcecollections.us. *Collin Street Bakery* is at 401 Seventh St., with an additional location at Interstate 45 and US 287; 800/292-7400; www.collinstreet.com. For more information on Corsicana, call the *Corsicana Chamber of Commerce* at 903/874-4731; www.corsicana.org.



The Pearce Collections Museum houses more than 15,000 items dating from the Civil War, as well as works of Western art.

361/594-3335; www.shinercountryinn.com.

I LOVE **Tom's Tabooley** in Austin. This cozy Mediterranean café serves excellent mocha lattes, espressos, cappuccinos, chai teas, frappés, and specialty sodas, as well as a tasty menu of tabouli, hummus, dolmas, falafel,

baba ganoush, Greek salad, and gyros with tzatziki! My favorite is their wonderful baklava.

C. CARMIZANO, *Austin*

Tom's Tabooley is at 2928 Guadalupe St.; 512/479-7337; www.tomstabooley.com.

AS A Texan living in Virginia, I have been a subscriber to your great magazine for many years and have used your "Readers Recommend" page for ideas when I am lucky enough to be back in Texas. I recently stumbled across a Web site for a place [based in **Wills Point**] that you should include: **Sweet Virginia's Fine Candies & Coffees**. The coffees they sell are the best, and they also have toffee that is to die for.

RILEY WIESE, *Concord, Virginia*

For more information on *Sweet Virginia's Fine Candies & Coffees*, call 214/577-2248; www.sweetvirginias.com.

IF YOU KNOW OF A NOTEWORTHY LONE STAR ATTRACTION, RESTAURANT, EVENT, OR PRODUCT, WRITE OR E-MAIL: Readers Recommend, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. E-mail: letters05@texashighways.com. Space constraints prevent us from publishing every suggestion we receive. We reserve the right to edit items. Because we're unable to check out every item, and because hours vary and details can change, please call ahead for more information.

Texas Highways

Travel Blog

FOLLOW noted travel writer **June Naylor** on her treks across Texas.

SHARE your comments on June's travels, or chime in with your own favorite haunts and jaunts.



Join us at www.texashighways.com

Next month... We'll go for the old at **Antiques Week** in **Round Top** and surrounds, uncover the coastal riches of **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge**, explore small-town Texas in **Snyder** and **Comfort**, and feature fabulous photography, from **football** to **fall flora**. Join us!

Where in Texas Are You?



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NAME THE PARK AND YOU COULD WIN A BIG BEND GETAWAY (see contest rules at right).

The contest winner will receive:

TRANSPORTATION

- ★ Two round-trip airline tickets to Midland International Airport from any city served by Southwest, courtesy of Southwest Airlines (www.southwest.com)
- ★ Rental car for six days, courtesy of Enterprise Rent-A-Car (www.enterprise.com) and the Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau

ACCOMMODATIONS (for two)

One night at each of the following:

- ★ Clarion Hotel & Conference Center, Midland, www.choicehotels.com

- ★ Lajitas Resort, www.lajitas.com
- ★ Chisos Mountains Lodge, Big Bend National Park, www.chisomountainslodge.com
- ★ Gage Hotel, Marathon, www.gagehotel.com
- ★ La Posada Milagro, Terlingua Ghostown, www.laposadamilagro.com

DINING (for two)

- ★ Dinner at Lajitas Resort, Chisos Mountains Lodge, and Gage Hotel
- ★ Dinner at the Starlight Theatre, Terlingua Ghostown, www.starlighttheatre.com

SIGHTSEEING

(for two)

- ★ Daylong river trip with Big Bend River Tours, www.bigbendrivertours.com
- ★ Half-day horse ride with lunch from Lajitas Stables, www.lajitasstables.com
- ★ Half-day jeep trip from Far Flung Outdoor Center, www.farflungoutdoorcenter.com
- ★ Guided mountain-bike tour from Desert Sports; www.desertsportstx.com



VISIT **BIG-BEND**



Our thanks to Visit Big Bend, the Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Southwest Airlines for putting together this choice prize package. *Texas Highways* readers love Big Bend!

For Big Bend travel information year round, contact Visit Big Bend at 877/BIG-BEND; www.visitbigbend.com. For more on Midland, contact the Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau at 800/624-6435; www.visitmidlandtx.com.

■ To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.magazineprints.com.

WIN
a Five-night
GETAWAY to
Big Bend!

TEXAS
HIGHWAYS
CONTEST

CONTEST RULES

(no purchase necessary)

1. Only one entry per person. Entries must be on postcards. To be eligible for the drawing, each entrant must include on the postcard the correct answer (judges' decisions are final), as well as his/her name, mailing address, and daytime phone number.
2. Entrants must be 18 years of age or older. (Rental-car driver must be 21 or older.) Current employees of the Texas Department of Transportation and their immediate families are not eligible.
3. Send entries to: *Texas Highways* Contest, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. All entries must be postmarked by September 21, 2007. *Texas Highways* is not responsible for late, lost, or misdirected entries.
4. The winning card will be drawn on September 28, 2007. We will attempt to notify the winner the same day. If we cannot contact the winner directly by 5 p.m. on October 3, 2007, another card will be drawn.
5. Prizes not transferable and may have an expiration date. Some additional expenses, such as taxes and tips, are not included in the package. Lodging and transportation certificates are subject to availability; reservations required.
6. Meals, unless specifically noted here, are not included.
7. Reservations for all activities must be made at least two weeks prior to arrival. Spring-break dates for Texas schools blacked out.
8. The winner is solely responsible for any income taxes incurred.
9. By entering the contest, contestants agree to the above rules and regulations.

