

TEXAS

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THE
TRAVEL
MAGAZINE
OF TEXAS

Small-Town Texas Forever

SMALL
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SPECIAL
ISSUE



AUGUST 2020

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MEET OUR MAKERS

Hemlock & Heather

OLD PIECES OF WEATHERED WOOD find new life in wall hangings by Kris and Kelley Denby of La Grange. This husband-and-wife team founded Hemlock & Heather in 2012. They offer wall art in the shape of Texas, inset with strips of painted wood. Their handcrafted pieces are made entirely from reclaimed materials, effortlessly blending rustic with modern. The pair's use of repurposed wood and paint is deeply rooted in their brand's story. "When we first started, we had very limited funds and had to get creative. We would go around and pick up broken furniture, wooden toys, fencing, siding, and other miscellaneous items and break them down to use in our pieces," Kelley says.



Texas Wall Hanging
PRICES RANGE \$105 TO \$195

EDITOR'S
NOTE

Y'all Means All

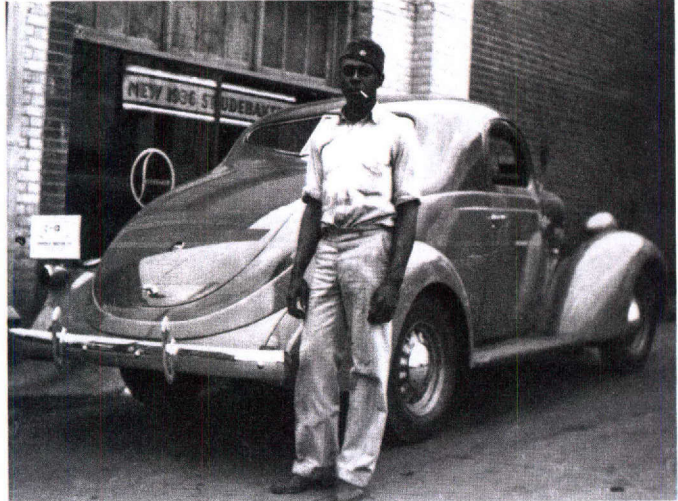
A few months ago our staff received an email from a reader seeking travel advice, a common occurrence for us. A recently retired teacher, she wanted to start dreaming up future trips to take once the state reopened—to see places she'd never been, learn more about the state's rich heritage, and support local businesses anxious for customers. But her note came with a deep concern:

"I'm really afraid because of the racism I've faced [as a Black woman] in this state. Is it possible for you to publish a guide detailing where people like me can travel in Texas and feel safe, valued, and welcomed?"

From 1936 to 1964, the National Park Service oversaw the Route 66 Green Book Project, an annual travel guide providing Black travelers with options for lodging and dining, and other information on safely traveling during the era of segregation. In 2020, a guide like that seems antiquated and unnecessary, or at least we want it to be. But the truth is, I've received emails from more than a few Black readers over the last couple of years talking about places they visited where they felt unsafe or unwelcome. Their experiences run counter to Texas' reputation for hospitality.

There are also encouraging stories of Texas towns that are passionate about ensuring that everyone who visits has an enjoyable and enlightening experience. In Palestine, local tourism leaders continue to focus efforts on highlighting the history of the many cultures that make up East Texas. "We have a diverse city, and we want to make sure we're reflecting the community as a whole," explains Mary Raum, who grew up in Palestine and leads the city's tourism marketing efforts. In the last 15 years, the town has become increasingly diverse, with nearly an equal percentage of white, Black, and Hispanic residents.

Four months ago, the city hired a heritage development coordinator to work on various tourism projects and provide an unbiased perspective on the history of Palestine and its residents. Tourism leaders are working with former resident Reggie Browne on refreshing and digitizing a 1997 guide on



As Palestine works to highlight diversity in its tourism initiatives, the town is looking back on its Black history. Here, R.D. Barnes, who was the first Black resident in Palestine to buy a Studebaker, shows off his 1936 purchase at the former car dealership at 106 W. Main St.

local Black historic sites. Browne, whose father was the second African American county commissioner in Texas, has also helped establish nine historical markers in Palestine along with 28 more throughout the state. "My experience has been very inclusive in dealing with the city [of Palestine]," Browne says. "I have felt very welcomed."

Similar efforts are underway across Texas, and we'll continue to highlight them in our pages and on texashighways.com. Our mission has always been to encourage travel within the state, and implicit in that mission is the ability for everyone to travel safely. Every Texan should have the freedom to explore and discover the great beauty and distinctive character of our state's natural treasures, historic sites, and small towns.

Emily R Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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 EIGHT11 PLACE

AUGUST

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Touch Down in College Towns

The state's biggest universities are packed with well-known football traditions, but towns with smaller football programs provide a sideline view of the culture surrounding Texas' favorite sport.

By Jason Boyett and Thomas Jones

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Enduring Spirit

COVID-19 has made small towns quieter than normal lately, but the pulse of these communities beats strong. Explore 10 charming, resilient locales, from Presidio to Sulphur Springs.

By Clayton Maxwell and Joe Nick Patoski


52

It's a Small-Town World, After All

The state's personality and distinctiveness are perhaps most apparent in its small towns. Our photographers, who routinely travel around Texas and shoot across the state, share images and thoughts on their favorite spots.



BOBCAT STADIUM in San Marcos hums with energy on a fall Saturday.

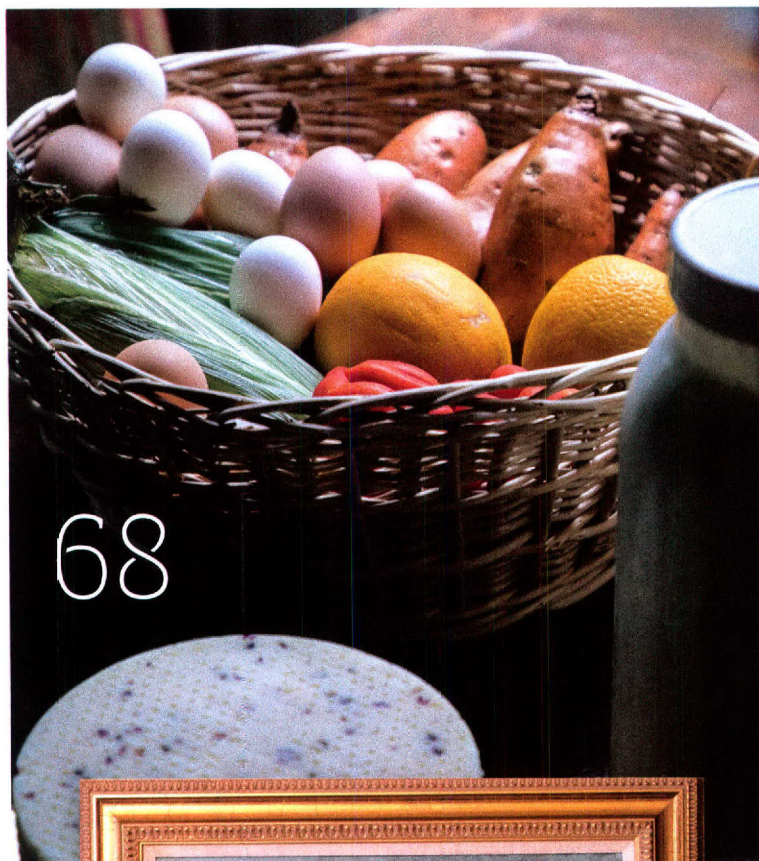
A dramatic landscape photograph of a canyon. On the left, a large rock formation is partially visible, with the sun setting behind it, creating a bright glow and lens flare. In the center-right, a tall, layered rock formation stands prominently. The canyon floor is filled with green vegetation, and the sky is filled with scattered clouds. The overall mood is adventurous and scenic.

Stay safe but dream big.

Better days are coming. So start planning, start dreaming, and get excited about discovering Texas all over again at ttia.org/lifesbetter.

 Life's better in a State of travel.

AUGUST



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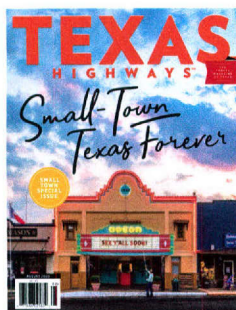
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Grammy winner Sarah Jarosz on her Hill Country upbringing

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Chickens for sale at Weatherford's Trade Days, 1939



ON THE COVER

Photo by Eric W. Pohl
Shot at the Odeon Theater in Mason

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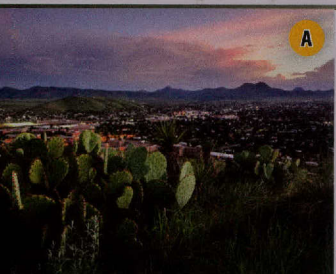
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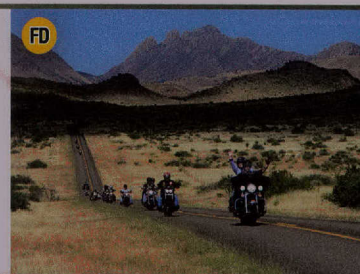
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Behind the Story



Dallas was starting to feel claustrophobic to *Texas Highways* writer-at-large Sarah Hepola, who traveled to Uncertain, population 59, for “We All Live in Uncertain” (Page 23). “There’s been a dread hanging over all interactions,” says Hepola, who has lived in big cities all her life. “I am such a road tripper, and I hadn’t gone anywhere in months because of the pandemic.” In Uncertain, which she describes as “dripping with mystery,” she felt relatively safe from COVID-19. “With the overlay of a global pandemic, I wondered if I would feel more ominous or more protected,” she says, “but I felt more protected.” Going to Uncertain during such, well, uncertain times, Hepola found the camaraderie she’d been craving. “This is a time when we’re scared of each other,” she says. “We’re scared of what we need, which is connection.”

Featured Contributors



Thomas Jones

The Austin-based journalist visits some of the state’s under-the-radar college football towns in “Touch Down in College Towns” (Page 32), which takes readers to schools from the Piney Woods to the Panhandle. “We know football is king in Texas, but the devotion goes way beyond the palatial stadiums found on some of our larger campuses,” he says. “The smaller football programs have just as much school spirit, if not more.” Jones has worked as an editor and reporter for the *Austin American-Statesman* for almost 20 years. He currently covers sports for the newspaper.



Eric W. Pohl

Along with the cover for this issue, Pohl photographed wineries for “Fruit of the Vine” (Page 63), captured small town life in Mason for “Enduring Spirit” (Page 40), and traveled to North Texas for both “Stay Inn and Eat Well” (Page 68) and “With Grape Power, Comes Grape Responsibility” (Page 76). “After our early morning shoot at Blue Ostrich Winery, I joined the harvesting team and learned so much about grapes and winemaking,” says Pohl, who is based in Dripping Springs. He has been a frequent contributor since 2013.

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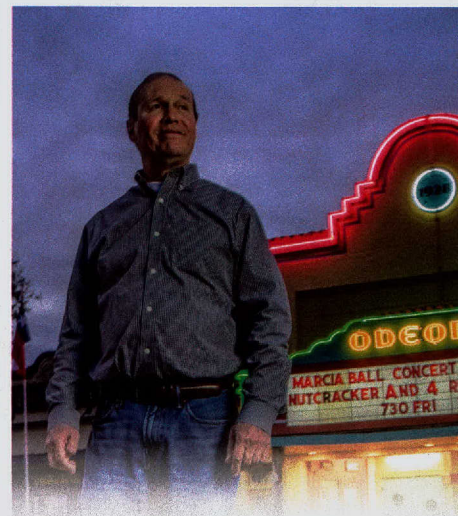
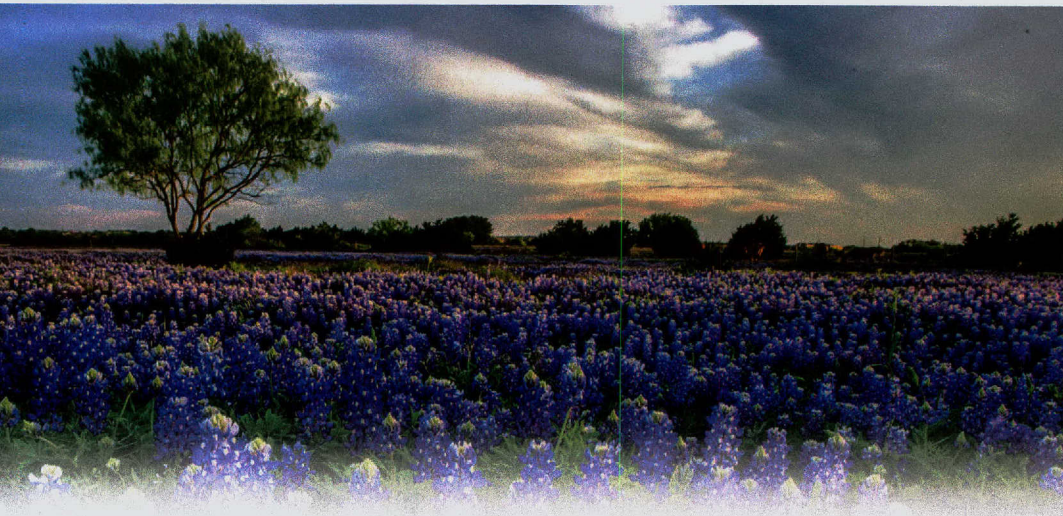
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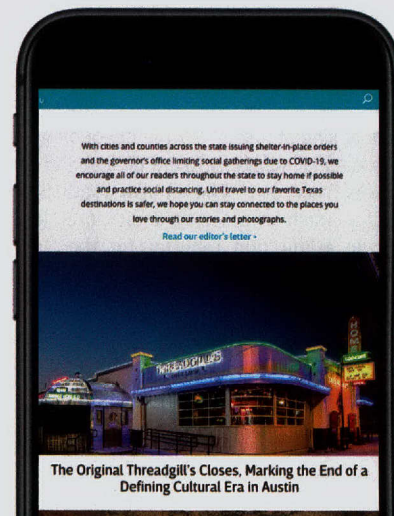
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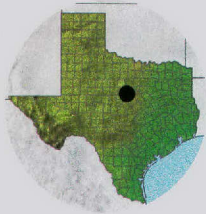


Knock, Knock

During a 2018 trip to Brenham, photographer Tom McCarthy Jr. wanted to capture the “antiquing vibe” of the town. He found what he sought with the color, shapes, and textures along an exterior wall of Today and Yesterday Antiques. “Brenham has those classic aspects, like the historic buildings and traditional town square layout around the art deco Washington County Courthouse,” he says, “but there are also pops of color from the antiques stores and many art murals.” McCarthy, who is based in Austin, says his travels around the state are always revealing. “With each town I visit, I feel like I have a better understanding of the people and places in Texas.”







Hamilton

After moving away, Kent Wenzel ultimately found his forever home in his old hometown

By John Lumpkin



KENT WENZEL opened Wenzel LoneStar Meat Co. in 2003.



TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

3,016



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

12



YEAR FOUNDED:

1858



NEAREST CITY:

Waco, 68 miles east



MARQUEE EVENT:

Hamilton County Dove Festival, Sept. 5



MAP IT:

Wenzel LoneStar Meat Co., 209 N. Bell St.

For the unhurried, US 281 is a popular north-south alternative to Interstate 35. Like pearls on a string, small towns enrich the route with their revitalized main streets, historic courthouses, and local restaurants. So it is with Hamilton—set in the northern Hill Country, equidistant between Fort Worth and Austin—home to Wenzel LoneStar Meat Co. Fans make 200-mile round trips from their big-city homes for owner Kent Wenzel's smoked pulled pork, featured on Pork Butt Fridays. Wenzel glides from table to table, offering tips for sightseers, along with sample tastes of green-chile bratwurst and sugar cookies. The seat of Hamilton County, Hamilton is rooted in ranching, farming, and hunting. A 2012 restoration of the celebrated limestone courthouse sparked a downtown revitalization, including the expansion of the Hamilton County Historical Museum. Adding to the Western flavor are the New Deal-era mural at the post office, *Texas Rangers in Camp*, and the nearby Circle T Resort, home to a bustling rodeo arena, steakhouse, and inn.

The Place to Be

"I moved to Dallas when I graduated from high school. I thought I'd seen enough of Hamilton, but after 10 years, I came back after growing up a bit. You get to know more about your hometown, especially your banker! Seriously, everybody feels like they are family. If your child is doing something wrong, they will tell you—not to be bad, but to be helpful. If you are sick, they help you. I wanted to get the hell out, and now I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. With the coronavirus going on this year, this is the best place you could be."

Open for Business

"When I came back from Dallas, I worked for my father during deer season, 10 to 12 hours a day, processing the deer, making sausage, and so forth. I thought maybe I could do this. But I had an idea about a meat market as well. When I opened my own business, I needed something to bring the customer in the front door. We put out signs that said, 'Come to Wenzel's and Bite my Butt'—our Pork Butt Fridays. 'The Mole,' I call him, a local businessman, he came to me and said the church women were sure upset with me. I told him they were the same ones who were coming in to get the sandwiches. We have a whole line of Bite My Butt products now."

The Reuben

"I try to get the best rye—the basic foundation, that's your bread. We add German-style sauerkraut and then our corned beef and swiss cheese. New Yorkers say it's got to be Thousand Island dressing for that. Down here in Texas, it's our Dusseldorf mustard."

Circle Around

"We go to Circle T to swim, get in the hot tub—it's an oasis out there. We went out there when there was a llama show—I would go out there if they had a rabbit show. For the solitude and the therapy you get, it's quite a place."

Good Hunting

"Hamilton used to be the dove capital of Texas, but now there's not maize and other food for them so a lot of them have gone elsewhere. We've still got places around here that have good deer. They are pretty healthy, depending on rainfall and having something to forage on. We process about 700 deer a season. We don't bulk process. You bring in your own deer, and you get your deer back."

Hamilton Health

"We've got one of the best hospitals, I think, in Central Texas. We've got a crew of doctors here who are wonderful. Some of them grew up here and came back, like me."

Pecan Creek Park

"We have a wonderful park right across from Wenzel's that people don't really know about. It goes from the south end of town to the north end. You can take a sandwich from Wenzel's or a Storm's hamburger over there. I would sure like for people to look in on our park, have a picnic out there, and walk the trails." 🐾



In the Belly of the Whale

A down-on-his-luck wanderer searches for answers on the lonely coastline of the Golden Triangle

By John Nova Lomax

B

By any standard, I should have been content. I had a prestigious magazine job. I was married to the woman of my dreams. My son, John Henry, was thriving in the Army, and my daughter was doing very well in junior high. And yet, I was drowning myself in alcohol. With every light on my instrument panel flashing red, in January 2019 I quit yelling at the ocean and consented to treatment. Emerging a month later with a diagnosis of acute, long-untreated PTSD, I blinked back at the wider world fully sober for the first time in a decade. I got in my 2003 Honda Accord and went off in search of something I would find along the way.

At the time, I was halfheartedly participating in Alcoholics Anonymous, and my choice of higher power

teetered between St. Francis of Assisi and my own ancestors. St. Francis eventually receded into the shadows as I committed to a crude form of ancestor worship. It seemed rational, scientific; we are, to some degree, who our genes command us to be. In knowing who I came from, in coming to know the ghosts who made me, perhaps I could find new strength and wisdom.

Chasing those phantoms took me as far as Mississippi and the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. But the search bore the most bountiful harvest very close to my Houston home, in the storm-wracked and lonely coastline of the Golden Triangle, framed by Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. There, the seafaring people of my maternal grandmother, Charlotte Ann “Susy” Plummer Taylor, settled back in the late 1830s. They’ve had an outsize influence on my life both by nature and nurture. To steep myself in their lore was key to understanding both who I had been before rehab and who I would like to be after.

To know this salty bunch better, I moved to the beach on Follett’s Island, just west of San Luis Pass. There, I lived sparsely in the Accord, sleeping in the reclined passenger seat next to a clump of salt cedars. I made that grove my own and established a routine, rising with the dawn and watching the sun ascend amber and purple from the Gulf waters. Then, I’d drive a mile or two down the beach, scattering sanderlings, gulls, and oystercatchers along the way to an access point for the Bluewater Highway. I’d grab a coffee and a taco and check myself into a cubicle at Freeport’s public library, where I’d work on magazine stories all day long.

By night, I saw myself as a high-tech Karankawa tribesman. As the moon rose and bathed the Gulf in glittery white light, I’d listen to the wind and waves as I conjured the ghosts of Plummers past via genealogy apps on my iPhone. Soothed by the unending subtleties of ocean power, it was easy to feel close to my Plummer folks.

I'd long been steeped in Plummer legend, thanks to my now 94-year-old grandmother Susy, the first daughter in four consecutive generations of ship captains. Susy would sit in her big four-poster bed in our rambling old home in Houston, dogs at her feet and a needlepoint canvas in her hands, and resurrect the salty phantoms of our heritage in her lilting, old-timey, coastal Southeast Texas accent. Her clan's lineage hung on the wall in a needlepoint sampler knitted by her maiden aunt, Julia Plummer, the longtime head librarian at Lamar University. Aunt Julia had lived some of these stories and heard others from her own Aunt Jessie, the first of the Texas Gulf Coast Plummer lady storytellers.

In the fullness of time, those picaresque tales came to resemble in my mind the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, only with the Golden Triangle as our Macondo and our

Those picaresque tales came to resemble in my mind the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, only with the Golden Triangle as our Macondo and our Plummer family its Buendías.

Plummer family its Buendías. My family's stories had it all: infidelity, pestilence, shipwrecks, war, incest, alcoholism, heroism, reversals of fortune, and harrowing nights of terror amid the roiling waters and howling winds of the Great Storm of 1900 and slightly lesser tempests.

One windswept night on Follett's Island, I decided that in order to better bring these stories in my head to life, I would have to go to my ancestors' old stomping grounds on the salt-crusted rim of the Golden Triangle.

I found little trace of the family's presence in either Beaumont or Port Arthur, the two cities they'd reluctantly settled in after the hurricanes of 1886, 1900, and 1915 finally chased them from the Gulf's very edge. My great-great-grandfather captain Fred Plummer's fine old home in Beaumont's South Park neighborhood was long gone. Dotted as that land is with grassy vacant lots, a boarded-up warehouse or two, and crumbling old homes, it was hard to recall the time when the neighborhood bustled with life spilling over from the Port of Beaumont mere blocks away. Aside from 39 Plummer graves in Magnolia Cemetery, about all that tangibly remains of my family in



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Beaumont is a reading room in Lamar's library named after Aunt Julia.

This absence goes double for Port Arthur and especially its city center, where the "A" now hangs crookedly from the lettering on the former *Port Arthur News* building. The paper, along with much of the rest of the economic life of the city, decamped north of State Highway 87 or to satellite towns such as Groves, Nederland, and Port Neches. Downtown was forlorn: On my first visit, trees grew out of the windows of the abandoned federal building's top floor.

This was not the Port Arthur captain Howard Plummer, my great-grandfather, had known, but it wasn't all suburban flight and urban decay. In the old part of town, a Baptist church had been repurposed as the Buu Mon Buddhist Temple. Refinery giant Motiva was transforming three of the city center's grand old edifices, including that federal building,

into office space. Add the city's splendid Museum of the Gulf Coast and you have the makings of a stunning turnaround.

"If you can save Port Arthur, you can save the world," said my friend Kevin Russell, a Beaumont native and Austin musician better known as Shinyribs. This was not long after he closed out a raucous summer 2019 homecoming show at Courville's Kitchen near the rice fields west of Beaumont with his lovely, seldom-played "Raining in Port Arthur." I had been rattling off to him many of the town's problems, among them coastal erosion brought on in part by global warming and the endless parade of evermore vicious storms blowing off the Gulf.

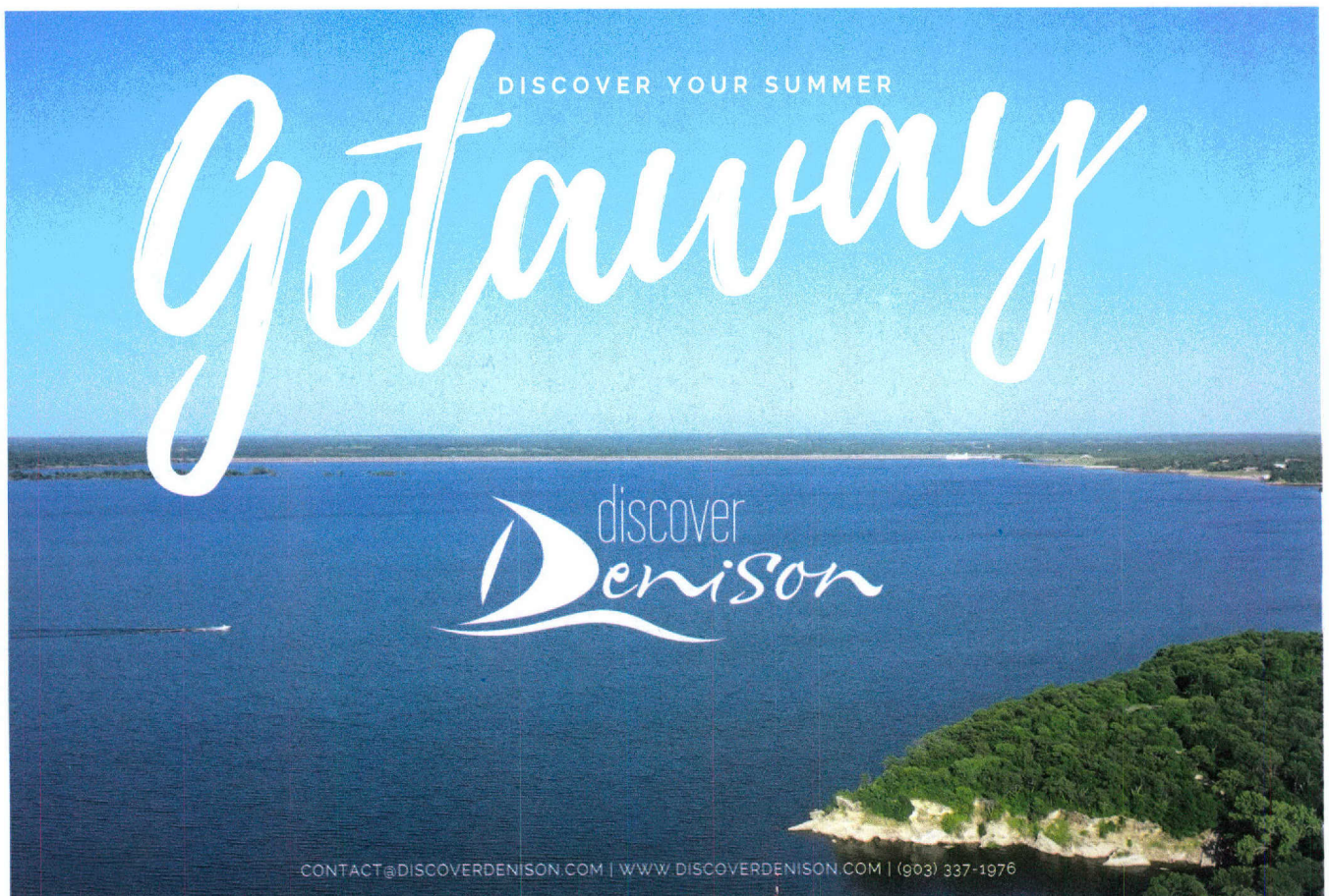
Save Port Arthur, save the world. If this was possible, I thought to myself, it was possible I could save myself.

When that epiphany hit me, I was standing on the levee close enough to Port Arthur's docks to hear the hypnotic

thrum of the idling engines of a tanker at anchor. This was very near the site of the Plummer family's grand triumph back in March 1910.

The story of the Port Arthur Moby Dick has been told and retold many times over the past century-plus, but likely never more skillfully than by Texan adventurer and writer Gayne Young. In a 2019 article for *Sporting Classics* magazine, Young described the "ghost gray hide ... worn from age and heavily scarred from decades of fights with deep-roaming squid and battles with rival males competing for breeding rights." Young went on about how an overzealous pursuit of a school of squid had mired the whale atop a shallow sandbar in the "Oil Pond," a huge natural oil slick of unknown origins that once floated off Sabine Pass before it mysteriously vanished shortly after absorbing the whale.

Near that muck, captain Cott Plummer,



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brother of my great-great-grandfather Fred Plummer, was at the helm of his steam tug dubbed Florida. Off in the distance, he saw a tremendous commotion—geysers of mud and water flying up from the Gulf waters. Thinking it was a ship in distress, Cott set course for the ruckus and found not a ship but a sperm whale, 63 feet long and weighing 65 tons.

Naturally, Cott had to catch it and tow it to port. But how? It turns out snaring a whale is not unlike roping a steer. After the whale snapped a series of smaller ropes, Cott tied a hawser—a giant rope used to moor tankers—around the animal's tail just above the fins and set the Florida on course for harbor. The whale had other plans. It fought back hard, at times yanking the Florida in reverse, despite the best efforts of the steam tug's 350-horsepower engine. Five hours later, they'd made the 8 miles to dock, and there the circus began.

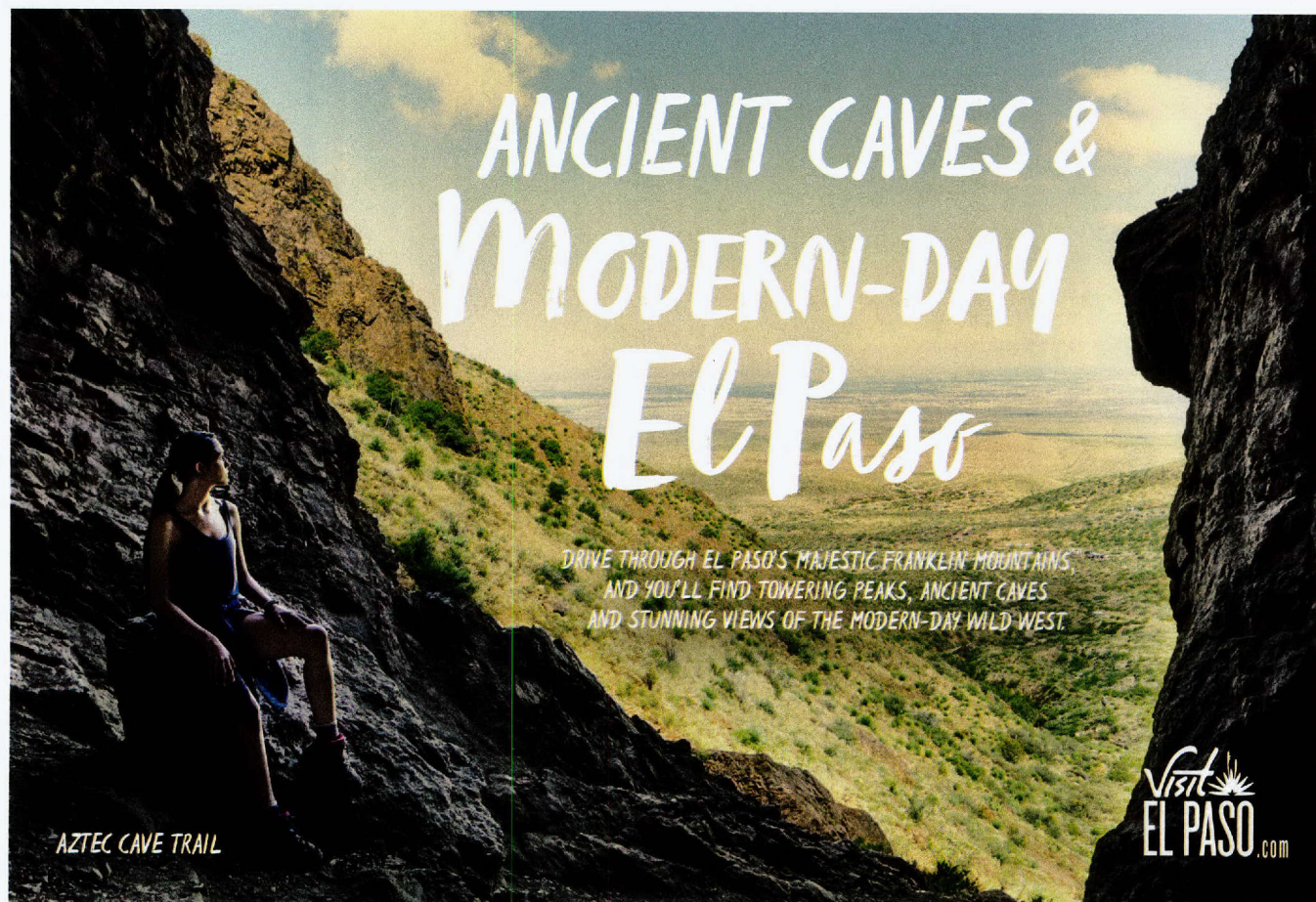
News of the leviathan crackled through telegraph wires coast to coast. Amazed locals jostled to be first in line to see the still-barely living monster of the deep.

News of the leviathan crackled through telegraph wires coast to coast. Amazed locals jostled to be first in line to see the still-barely living monster of the deep. Soon, the small town was overwhelmed with visitors from nearby towns. So, for ease of access to the public, the whale was towed to Port Arthur, but it died

along the way. Upon arrival, its carcass was hoisted out of the water and crudely embalmed. Crews of men shoveled ice into the whale's body cavity in an effort to stave off the inevitable, and the whale was tastefully illuminated.

The first day the whale was on display, about 400 people plunked down 50 cents to witness it. Special excursion trains jam-packed with curiosity seekers began to stream in from San Antonio, Dallas, and New Orleans. Crowds estimated at 100,000 were left stranded at faraway depots, waiting for trains that never came.

That was the story that had made the Plummers famous for a time, and if my own mother ever told it to me, I don't recall it. Instead, I'd heard it from my grandmother Susy because my mother, Julia Plummer Taylor, or "Bidy," was out of the picture for the last decade of my



FIELD GUIDE *to* BASTROP COUNTY

ISSUE
No 24



Bird Watching

BASTROP / ELGIN / SMITHVILLE

childhood. Her addictions to heroin, cocaine, and alcohol first caused her marriage to my father to end. Then the state took away her custodial rights when I was 8, whereupon she exited my life for 10 years.

That abandonment was the core of a grief I'd been trying to kill with alcohol for more than 30 years. Her leaving me stung more than her many other faults, such as attacking my father with a knife in my presence, setting my bedroom on fire with me in it, and enlisting me as a child accomplice on her felony-level shoplifting capers—all before I was in fourth grade.

But she wasn't all bad. She was a talented artist, a voracious reader, and the owner of an incredible sense of humor and an uproarious belly laugh. She was also the possessor of a sweet and low singing voice I can still hear crooning me to sleep with her favorites, like "Silent Night," "Waltzing Matilda," and "You Are My Sunshine."

As one of her hell-raising friends said of her shortly after her death and shortly before his own, "She was a great lady, in spite of herself."

Sadly, it was only through the course of my own addiction and journey toward rehabilitation that I came to know her better and, finally, to forgive her. Through my study of genealogy, I saw how the ghosts of the past create who we are today.

That brings us back to Port Arthur in 1951, which was where Susy's father, Howard, settled after World War II. There, he and his wife once looked after Susy's toddlers, Bidy and my Uncle Tom, while she and my grandfather spent a weekend alone in New Orleans.

Howard came home from the Anzio invasion in Italy a changed man. The minesweeper he commanded struck a mine there, injuring him and killing nine of his men. His casual drinking became ferocious: Where once he took a drink, now the drink took him. I have no way of knowing if Howard had been drinking the afternoon he decided to barbecue a turkey with my uncle and young mom tripping around his feet. But I do

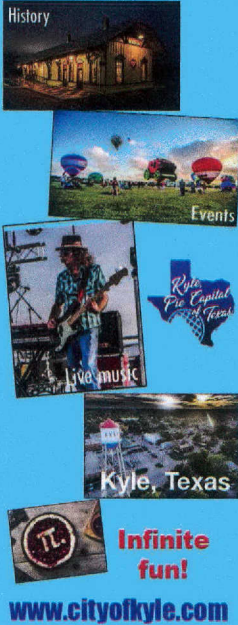


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At AA, I learned a life-changing maxim: Always remember that everybody is always doing the best that they can with what they have at any given moment.

know that when he turned his back for a moment, they tipped over a gas can and set themselves on fire.

My uncle's burns were confined to his legs and were deeper than my mother's, but hers were more widespread. "I think she felt like she thought she had died then and was living on borrowed time afterward," my father wrote me years later.

I can remember my mom pointing out scars invisible to me but red and raw in her mind. Worse, her brain's receptors had been rewired. After the accident, she'd spent weeks on a morphine drip. She could still feel it years later when she told me, "To be so little and to be so full of pain and then to get such relief from that needle. God, I still remember it."

It was the hippie era, and there was heroin about. My mother sampled her first courtesy of a small bundle sent from Vietnam by the GI brother of a friend. One snort, and she was off to the races. A year before she died, looking back on a life of maternal and marital failure, teetering on the brink of homelessness, her head bowed in shame, all she could say to me was, "I wanted life to slow down, to just dream. And it gave me relief—the same relief I had known in the burn ward."

There in my car on the beach, I could see where we all snapped into place: the war-damaged man presiding over a horrific accident; the mangled little girl growing into a woman with a scarred soul and a mind wired for addiction; and me, doing my best to drink myself to

death over a mom damaged by a tragedy that happened almost 20 years before I was born.

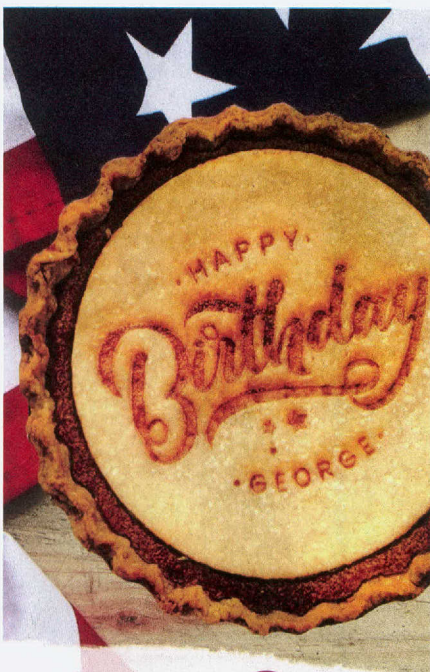
It was time for me to let it all go. On a trip back to Houston, I picked up mama's Talavera urn and took it with me to Follett's Island. On the 100th day of my sobriety, and in the 21st year after my mom's death, I dialed up a song she'd loved, "You Are Not Needed Now." Townes Van Zandt, her dear friend, had written it for a different hellion, Janis Joplin. As Van Zandt sang "Lay down your head a while/ you are not needed now," I waded out into the surf with the urn and gave mama's ashes to an outgoing tide.

I relapsed on the Fourth of July last year and reentered treatment a few weeks later. During that time, I learned a life-changing maxim: *Always remember that everybody is always doing the best that they can with what they have at any given moment.*

Mama did the best she could with what she had. So did my great-grandfather Howard. So did I. Sometimes what we have isn't much, so it's on each of us to do the hard work of figuring out how to heal ourselves. One balm for me is to spend more time on the coast. On a strangely cool, blustery May evening there, I tapped into that deep well of Plummer Zen and strength that has kept us on or near the coast for close to two centuries now.

Over the years, Grandma Susy had strongly hinted that the best place to find the essence of the Plummers was not in Beaumont or Port Arthur but in Sabine Pass, south of Port Arthur. Passes and points—that's where the Plummers were happiest. They wanted to be at the ends of the earth, surrounded, if possible, by the ocean on three sides. (I had unwittingly situated myself in just such a locale when I lived in my Honda on Follett's Island.)

If you look to the east in Sabine Pass, past the Cheniere Energy tank farms, chain-link fences, and shrimp boats,



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there remains the 1857 Sabine Pass Lighthouse, located just across the Sabine River on the Louisiana side. It's a survivor of storms and floods without number, and a reminder of my Plummer family's stubborn resilience. Back in 1862, Gowen Plummer, the Maine-born patriarch of the Texas branch, had been the keeper of that light. But owing to his fealty to the Union, he and his Cajun wife, Arthemise LaRiviere, along with their eight children, had to flee on a federal gunboat. Not too long after the war's end, he and most of his children returned, some to Sabine Pass, and he and LaRiviere to Port Bolivar. This coast had infected him.

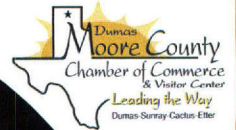
That disease was evidently hereditary because I have it, too. On an empty beach at Sea Rim State Park, I at last saw this coast as the Plummers might have seen it. Save for the boardwalk I'd just traversed, there was no sign of mankind in any direction. Heavy gray clouds were rushing from the north, almost low enough to touch, the winds bending the jade-green salt grass toward the wide expanse of the brown sands. From the calm Gulf came lapping wavelets pressing forward against the breeze. In that moment—with the scene set to the gentle music of wind, waves, and the plaintive cries of shorebirds—heaven, earth, and sea seemed to blend into one unitary mass.

Snapping out of this goose-bumped reverie, I scanned the empty beach for interesting flotsam. About 50 yards off, I spied what I believed to be the remains of a large fish or possibly a dolphin. Drawing closer, I could see it was in fact an almost brand-new name-brand rod and reel, albeit one sporting a heavy seaweed beard grown during its time in the waves.

My great-great-granduncle Cott mistook a whale for a ship, and here I was mistaking a fishing rod for a dolphin. A gift from the sea as pregnant with meaning as that, at a moment of revelation? Something or somebody out there had beckoned me to this coast for more than a visit. 🐬

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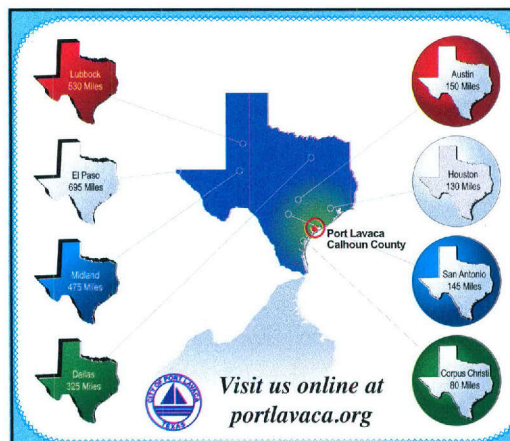
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DRIVE



THE EAST TEXAS
town of Uncertain
is full of gators of
all forms.



FISHING IS A WAY of life on Caddo Lake, where largemouth bass and crappie are popular catches.

We All Live in Uncertain

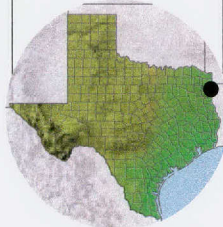
The handshake is alive and well in this East Texas town

By Sarah Hepola

“**T**hink of Caddo as a maze of lakes within lakes,” says John Winn, proprietor of Caddo Outback Tours, as the two of us settle into a small Go-Devil boat roped to a dock in Uncertain, on the border of northern Louisiana. For two decades, Winn has given tours of this lake, named for the Caddo tribe who settled in the area in the late 18th century, and he’s had to retrieve a number of people lost in the labyrinth of bayous, ponds, and narrow channels. “Boy, are they glad to see me,” he says, tugging his gray beard. I ask what could get them. “Nothing,” he says. But floating in the unknown spooks a person. Around 60 species of reptiles live in the swamp, and the night grows noisy with the screech and swish. Gators lurk in these waters. They won’t attack, but when the light of the boat shines on them, their marble eyes turn red, like taillights rising from the swamp.

The name is what drew me to Uncertain. It sounds like a thick novel, or one of those creepy noir films from the Coen brothers, but in the months since COVID-19 began dismantling the life we once knew, it has become a global condition. What will become of us? Who should we be? We are all living in Uncertain now. Of course, the 2018 census placed the town’s population a bit lower, at 59.

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It was a few days before Memorial Day, as Texas continued to creak open its doors after weeks of sheltering in place, and I was looking to escape but not flee caution. I’d visited Uncertain years ago, and I fell in love with a landscape that was peaceful and otherworldly, with many purported Bigfoot sightings in the area. I remember how I walked under the canopy of tall, thin cypress trees, gesturing as I told them my troubles; and while the trees were indifferent, they were also a bit kind. Spanish moss draping from the trees wafted in the breeze. In French Polynesia, they call Spanish moss “grandpa’s beard,” but to me the stuff looked like Ophelia’s hair, or the gauzy fabrics Stevie Nicks wore in her “Gypsy” phase. The trees were witchy like that—haunted maidens who never give away their secrets. Nobody knows for certain how Uncertain got its name, which seems exactly right.

On a late Thursday morning, I sling my beat-up green suitcase into the trunk of my car and head east from my home in Dallas,

Nobody knows for certain how *Uncertain* got its name, which seems exactly right.

two-and-a-half hours along Interstate 20 and into the Piney Woods of East Texas. The next 30 minutes take me along state and farm roads where my cell signal starts to disappear. I'm heading into the kind of rural emptiness where you double-check the gas level and rearview mirror. I'm outdoorsy enough to find all of this achingly romantic, but my less generous city friends might call it serial killer country.

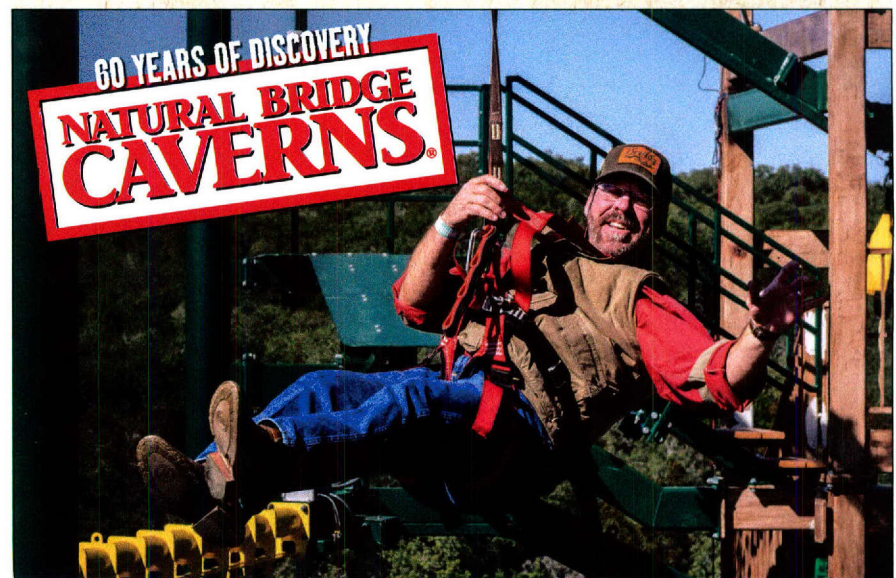
"*Uncertain* is not on the way to anywhere," says Sheriff Tom McCool of Harrison County in a 2017 documentary titled *Uncertain*. "You've got to either know where you're going or be lost to find it." The evocative film is a portrait of men lost in a more existential way (stream it on Amazon and Vimeo), though it barely scratches the surface of a town whose mysteries run deep. The fact that Netflix has not greenlighted a narrative series about *Uncertain* is evidence that even the golden age of television has blind spots, and that I should be hired by Netflix.

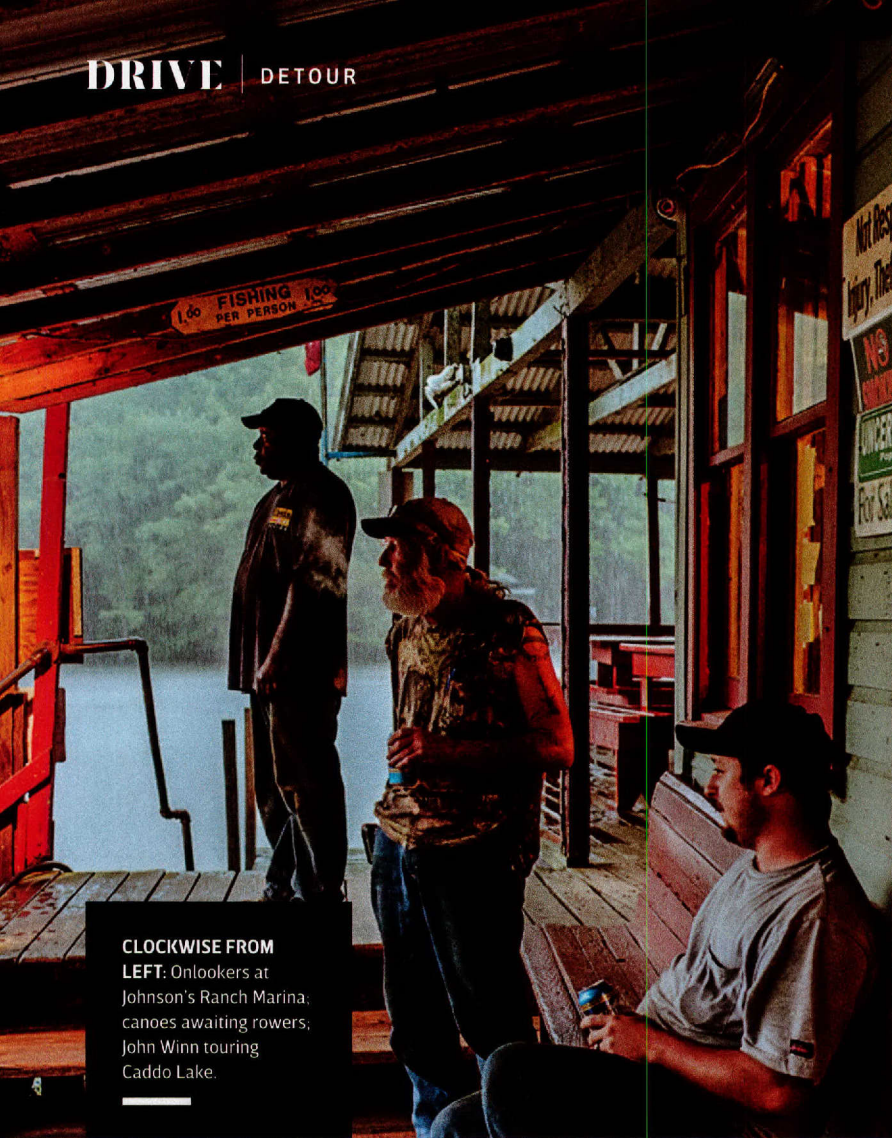
Uncertain is one of those places where every passing stranger feels like a character. The tiny woman with white hair and bright eyes who shows up on the porch of my cabin, dangling a cigarette, to collect money for my stay (cash preferred). The man with the mustache at the small grocery store buying a vial of pickle juice to pour into his beer (a new trend). The middle-aged couple outside a bar and grill called Lighthouse engaging in a friendly debate about whether a shirt bought at a Guns N' Roses concert should be worn after the concert (or does it lose value?).

Inside the Lighthouse, it's the first day back in business after lockdown, and things are a bit weird. A handwritten sign outside the door lists rules that include no sitting at the bar and no switching tables.



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CLOCKWISE FROM

LEFT: Onlookers at Johnson's Ranch Marina; canoes awaiting rowers; John Winn touring Caddo Lake.

"Dancing is discouraged," reads one, sounding more like the Bible Belt laws that inspired the classic '80s movie *Footloose* than the rules of a town that still allows smoking indoors. The wood-paneled, neon-lit bar is just starting to fill at 6 p.m., and the vibe is jokey but compliant. People squirt hand sanitizer into their palms as they enter. A woman sways near the jukebox, one arm outstretched like she's holding an imaginary partner. "This is my social distancing dance," she says.

Rules are a tough fit for a part of the state accustomed to being left alone. Winn told me in advance of my 90-minute boat tour that he only takes cash or check. "You know they aren't taking cash in Dallas at all these days," I told him, and he chuckled—a smoker's laugh. "Isn't that something?" he said. "The world's gettin' crazy."

Out on Caddo Lake, Winn revs the motor of his Go-Devil and we head into the maze, which at nearly 27,000 acres is one of the state's largest lakes. I have

a mask in my backpack, but we sit so far apart that the precaution seems moot.

"Most of the folks around here are seasonal," Winn tells me as we pass holiday boaters and a woman kayaking with a toy dog in her lap. Winn is part of the year-round crew. He grew up in Uncertain, born to a mother who left and a father who drank ("a happy alcoholic," he says). He taught himself to fish and dropped out of school in ninth grade. "Caddo raised me," he says. "Caddo fed me." He is something of a swamp creature, a peculiar breed adapted to this remote spot that is not quite Cajun country and not quite Lone Star State—a land lost in time.

He navigates the boat through a shallow channel, and we emerge into a part of the lake that is empty, gorgeous, eerily silent. For years, Caddo has been fighting the invasion of an aggressive giant salvinia plant kept in check with herbicides and weevils, a joint effort of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, scientists,

A woman sways near the jukebox, one arm outstretched like she's holding an imaginary partner. "This is my social distancing dance," she says.

and rock star Don Henley, among others. The waterways are clear today, though it's impossible to know how long Mother Nature can be tamed. Winn tells me he spent the past few months at home gardening with his wife. They own 9 acres about a mile from the lake. The only part of his job he never liked was the phone ringing constantly, but worse was the phone not ringing at all. A silent phone is scary for a small-business owner, but with sanctions

continuing to lift across the state, the phone is annoying him again. "People are champing at the bit," he tells me.

We float into a passage where trees rise up from the water all around us, and he threads the boat like an obstacle course. Winn guesses the trees are somewhere between 100 and 250 years old, and I'm reminded of a passage I read in Walt Whitman's journal. "How strong, vital, enduring! how dumbly eloquent!" Whitman wrote of the woods where he recuperated from a stroke at 54. "The qualities, almost emotional, palpably artistic, heroic, of a tree; so innocent and harmless, yet so savage. It is, yet says nothing." The poet who first declared that he contained multitudes was a master of contradiction, and this place, like our moment, had plenty to consider.

Nature can harm us, but nature can heal us. Winn once took a woman on the lake who worked in the wellness industry, and she pointed out the minerals in the plants and water, a muddy brown from tannins in the trees. "You should open a spa," I tell Winn. He jiggles his belly with his hand and asks, "Would you go to a spa run by this man?" He likes to watch newcomers discover this strange world. City folk often mistake the motion blur of an egret through the trees for a car, which tells you something about conditioning. We see what we know. Winn gives tours at night, too, and he loves when people really see the sky. "Stars," a man said to him. "We only have two of those at home."

I like it here. Something about disappearing into the middle of nowhere makes me feel centered. Something about floating on the water connects me to the earth, which can feel so far away in the cement wonderland of North Texas. Winn steers the boat into the dock again, and I step onto the wooden beams, readjusting to the solid ground.

"Do you shake hands?" he asks. "I never know anymore, but it seems most people around here, they wanna shake hands." I smile and slide my palm into his, though I drive away wondering if that was a mistake, and head back to my cabin for one more night in Uncertain. 🐾

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First-Class Murals

Post office artworks lifted spirits during the Great Depression

By Robyn Ross



In the 1930s and '40s, artists enlivened the walls of post offices across the United States with colorful murals depicting community life. These artworks, often mistaken for Works Progress Administration projects, were part of a separate New Deal initiative called the Section of Fine Arts. Unlike the WPA, the Section's primary purpose wasn't to put people to work. Rather, its mission was to create high-quality art and lift the spirits of people worn down by the Great Depression. Many of the roughly 1,400 murals nationwide portray resolute pioneers, productive labor, and proud moments in regional history.

"The Section wanted people in rural America to know that the federal government did not forget them," says Philip Parisi, who wrote the 2004 book *The Texas Post Office Murals: Art for the People*. These murals were often the first artworks residents of rural areas had ever seen in person. Although people are less reliant on the postal service in the age of the internet, post offices still serve as landmarks and community spaces. More than half of Texas' murals are still displayed in their original locations, quietly preserving an important era in American history.

The Texas Touch

Artists from across the country designed murals for Texas post offices, but three prominent native Texans contributed several murals each.

Jerry Bywaters

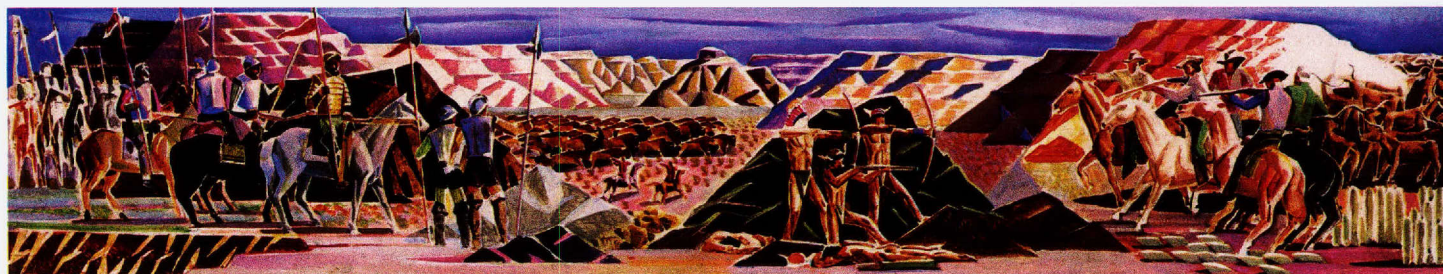
Bywaters, born in Paris, was a member of the Dallas Nine art collective, an art critic for the *Dallas Morning News*, and director of the Dallas Museum of Art. His murals include "The Naming of Quanah" (Quanah, 1938), "Soil Conservation in Collin County" (Farmersville, 1941), and "Lumber Manufacturing" (Trinity, 1942).

Tom Lea

Lea, born in El Paso, was an artist, a novelist, and a historian known for chronicling the Southwest and for his on-the-ground depictions of World War II. His murals include "Pass of the North" (El Paso, 1938), "Stampede" (Odessa, 1940), and "Comanches" (Seymour, 1942).

Julius Woeltz

Woeltz, born in San Antonio, was a landscape artist and professor at the University of Texas at Austin and Sul Ross State University, where he founded the Art Colony. His murals include "Texas Farm" (Elgin, 1940), "Disk Harrow" (Amarillo, 1941), and "Coronado's Exploration Party in Palo Duro Canyon" (Amarillo, 1941, below).



1937

Year the first mural appeared

106

Total number of Texas murals

\$700

Typical artist payment for a mural



AND THE AWARD GOES TO

Artists working for the Section of Fine Arts were chosen not on the basis of financial need, as with WPA projects, but instead through competitions. The largest was the 48 States Competition in 1939. More than 3,000 entries were judged, and the winners were placed in one post office in each state and included in the December 1939 issue of *Life* magazine. The winner in Texas was "Afternoon on a Texas Ranch" (mural study above), created by Ethel Edwards for the Lampasas post office.

The People's Art

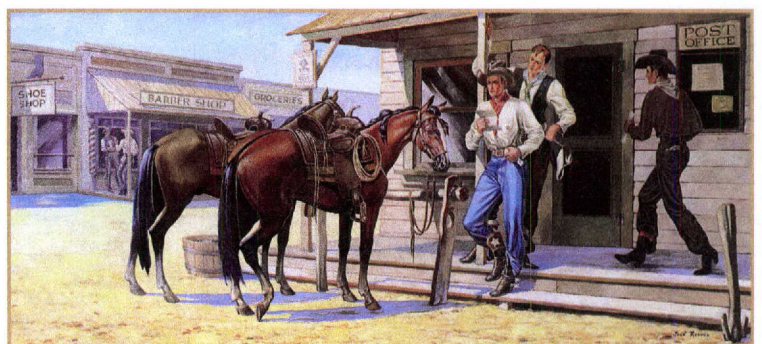
The Texas Post Office Murals: Art for the People, by Philip Parisi, is a handy guide to murals across the state, featuring 115 photographs and a locator map. To research the book, Parisi visited the National Archives to read New Deal-era newspaper articles and letters exchanged among the artists, local postmasters, and program administrators. He describes how the artists chose their subjects and how each mural was received by its community.

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The Section of Fine Arts chose artists based on their proposals, not where they lived. Many could not afford to visit the communities where their murals would be displayed, and even when they did, inaccuracies still cropped up.

Consider "Cowboy Dance" in Anson, depicting the Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball. Artist Jenne Magafan, who visited Anson for inspiration, was not informed the town was dry, and the liquor jug she painted at the feet of a musician caused a minor uproar.

Another example: "Big City News" (below) in Borger shows cowboys reading their mail on the porch of a wooden post office, their horses tied nearby. Artist Jose Aceves evidently didn't know that all the buildings on the original main street were brick, or that by 1926, when Borger was founded, cowboys were more likely to drive Model Ts and Model As than to ride horses to town.



Follow the Red Brick Road

A small-town enthusiast embarks
on the revitalization of
Bartlett in Central Texas

By Jac Darsnek



Robert Zalkin dares to dream small. Beginning in mid-2019, the native of the small town of Liberty, New York, began buying 15 buildings in Bartlett, a once-thriving cotton center 50 miles north of Austin on State Highway 95. He was drawn to Texas because of the welcoming people and economic feasibility of such a project. He intends to enliven the small town by preserving and repurposing its downtown, which he'll document on Instagram at @downtownbartlett. "I drove through quite a few Texas towns," Zalkin said, "but when I stepped out onto the red brick streets of Bartlett, it was magical. I felt the old ghosts and knew immediately this was the one."

Bartlett is named for John T. Bartlett, who along with J. E. Pietzsch donated the land for a townsite in 1881. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad reached the town in 1882, and it served as a shipping point for cotton, grain, livestock, and produce, reaching a peak population of 2,200 in 1914. Cotton prices declined in the 1920s and '30s, however, and Bartlett has seen lean times ever since. But the town's rustic allure remains: Many movies have been filmed there, including scenes from Richard Linklater's *The Newton Boys*, plus several episodes of the NBC TV show *Revolution*. Mostly, though, Bartlett has stood untouched and abiding.

I met Zalkin in Bartlett recently and he laid out his ideas. He said he wants to build "a community of artists and craftsmen, something that will benefit the people of Bartlett for a long time. A good barbecue place would be nice, too." He added: "Somebody said something like 'What Texas can dream, Texas can do.' That stuck with me, and being from a small town that has seen tough times, I've long had notions of revitalizing one." ■

Reimagining Bartlett

Over the next year, Jac Darsnek of *Traces of Texas* will chronicle the transformation of downtown Bartlett. Follow along at texashighways.com/bartlett.



TOUCH DOWN IN COLLEGE TOWNS



FOOTBALL FANDOM COLLIDES WITH SMALL-TOWN CHARM IN THESE FOUR DESTINATIONS

BY JASON BOYETT AND THOMAS JONES

EVEN THOUGH THE STATE IS

still deadlocked in oppressive summer heat, something in the air changes in August. College football fans know exactly what we mean. Around this time of year, they're perfecting their tailgate menus and purchasing new gear to sport their school's colors. While cities like Austin, College Station, Lubbock, and Waco boast high-profile programs, nothing beats the enthusiasm and warmth of small towns with under-the-radar football teams like those in Canyon, Denton, San Marcos, and Huntsville. While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may keep you from seeing your favorite teams live this year, we hope this guide will serve as inspiration for future trips.

WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, CANYON

LAST SEASON WAS AN AUSPICIOUS ONE for West Texas A&M University: Home games finally returned to campus, and the Buffaloes ended the season with an impressive 8-3 record, a turnaround from the team's 9-13 record during head coach Hunter Hughes' first two seasons. The opening of the new Buffalo Stadium in 2019 marked the first time since 1959 the West Texas A&M Buffaloes actually played home games on the university's grounds. Previously, home games were held at Kimbrough Stadium (recently renamed to Happy State Bank Stadium), north of Canyon. The new field brought a fresh wind of excitement back to Canyon and its Division II team.

The new stadium introduced new traditions. For every home game, WTAMU now closes down 26th Street—which bisects the campus and runs directly toward the stadium—to host the

university-sanctioned Buffalo Block Party. More than 60 businesses and vendors occupy the block, which opens to the public four hours before kickoff. Area banks cook hot dogs on enormous smokers, student organizations hand out noisemakers and T-shirts, and local bands provide live music beneath towering elm trees.

The festive atmosphere increases exponentially for homecoming weekend (scheduled for Oct. 16). The Canyon Chamber of Commerce hosts a citywide barbecue called the Canyon Chamber Chow-Down. This year, it will be held in the downtown square. A single admission price includes ribs and brisket. The evening pep rally features student-led chants and music.

During games, the university's mascot, a bison named Thunder XIV, hangs out on the field in a designated area. In the past, trained students would run the animal across the field after each touchdown, but that custom has ceased due to safety concerns. The live mascot tradition dates to

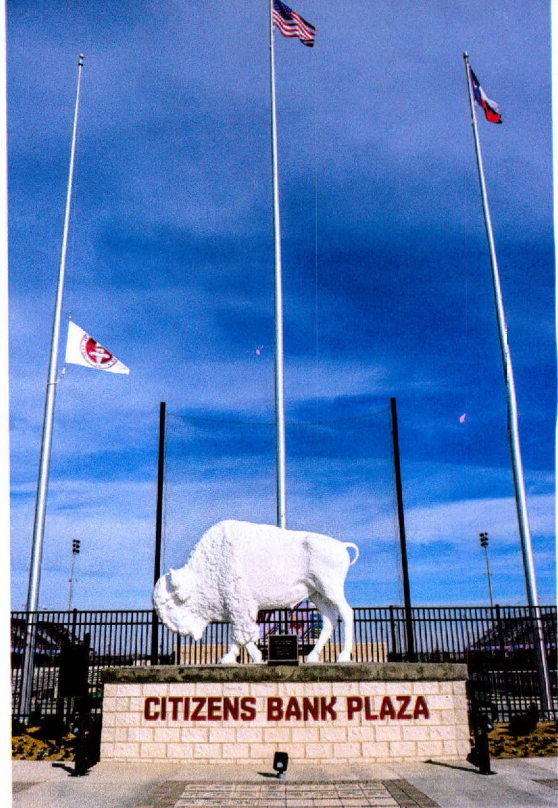
OPENING SPREAD: Boko the Bobcat gets the crowd going in San Marcos. **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Wind down at Bar Z Winery in Canyon; the white buffalo sculpture honors West Texas A&M's mascot; fans cheer on the team.



bison purchased in 1922 from Col. Charles Goodnight's historic herd.

Another monument to the school's mascot is the white buffalo sculpture, located in the middle of Citizens Bank Plaza near the southern entrance to Buffalo Stadium. The late Jack Hill, a local sculptor, designed and originally installed the 9-foot-tall, 1,800-pound landmark in 1967 at the old off-campus stadium.

With much more to explore around Canyon, visitors may want to cross campus to the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum on Fourth Avenue. It's the largest history museum in the state due



WHERE TO STAY

End your day at **Hudspeth House**, a bed-and-breakfast located between the campus and courthouse square. This property dates to 1909, making it around the same age as WTAMU and almost as old as the town itself. A former boardinghouse, it served the earliest students and faculty of the original West Texas State Normal College—including famed artist Georgia O Keeffe, who took most of her meals there during her tenure in Canyon. Staff maintain cleanliness during the COVID-19 pandemic by wearing gloves and wiping down furniture and counters after guests check out. Rates start at \$130 per night. 1905 Fourth Ave., Canyon. 806-655-9800; hudspethhouse.com



to its more than 2 million artifacts, and has been a jewel of the university since the 1920s. Guests can easily spend a Saturday afternoon exploring its collections, from the fossilized bones of saber-toothed cats to firearms that belonged to Texas legends like Goodnight and Comanche chief Quanah Parker.

Of course, no trip to Canyon is complete without visiting its namesake Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Located 12 miles east of Canyon on State Highway 217, this nearly 28,000-acre geological wonder is known for its spectacular views and hike-and-bike and horse trails.

Less rustic diversions may prove more tempting for some. Bar Z Winery is located just 10 minutes north-east of the campus. Owned by Monty Dixon and Amber Dobler-Dixon, this winery partners with vineyards in the High Plains to produce award-winning vintages like its 2016 pinot noir, which earned a gold medal in the 2018 *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition. The Bar Z tasting room offers a relaxing place to unwind and take in a gorgeous autumn sunset. —Jason Boyett

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS, DENTON

WHEN VISITING DENTON FOR A UNIVERSITY of North Texas football game, pack plenty of green. The color of the university's official team moniker, "Mean Green," proliferates across this college town. The color also represents UNT's reputation as an environmental beacon on the rolling prairie about a Hail Mary from the outer fringe of the Dallas-Fort Worth suburbs.

UNT's 30,000-seat Apogee Stadium is the first college football stadium in the country awarded a Leadership in Energy

and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certification, which measures a building's sustainable design. The stadium grounds also include three wind turbines, a visual testament to UNT's environmental consciousness. According to school officials, UNT is the first university in Texas to have wind turbines placed on campus property and one of the first universities in the U.S. to integrate renewable technology into an athletic complex and football stadium.

Fans gather on the hills and greens surrounding the stadium to tailgate and rally for the Division I program, which is in its

104th year and had its string of three consecutive bowl games snapped with last season's 4-8 campaign. About 30 minutes before each home game, the Green Brigade—UNT's marching band—struts its stuff through the tailgating area. The good vibes extend into the stadium, according to 2020 graduate Sarah Shirley, who performed as the school's mascot, Scrapy the Eagle, since her freshman year.

"The student section is so respectful of other schools," says Shirley, a Denton native who earned her degree in rehabilitation studies. "Everyone is there to relax and have a good time. I've been at other schools that



WHERE TO STAY

Just east of town, the Old Irish Bed and Breakfast offers a home base complete with a replica Irish pub and a pack of curious alpacas. At this time, breakfast is served in guests' rooms. Everything is sanitized, including hot tubs and furniture. Rates start at \$99 per night. 3030 N. Trinity Road, Denton. 940-323-1011; oldirishbb.com



weren't like that at all. I've seen and heard things that wouldn't fly at UNT."

As for casting aside the Scrapy costume, Shirley says she'll miss mingling with young fans the most. "I'll really miss meeting kids," she says. "They love Scrapy. Everyone wants to take pictures and get hugs. For some of them, meeting Scrapy is like meeting a superhero."

When you've had your fill of pomp and tradition, retreat to the courthouse square to take in the town's other attractions. LSA Burger Co. offers juicy patties alongside an impressive selection of locally crafted beer, and colorful murals by area artists dot the square. The Courthouse-on-the-Square



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Bobcats take the field; Texas State's San Marcos campus shows off its fall colors; The University of North Texas parades its signature green; Mean Green pride is visible in Denton's courthouse square.

Museum gives a solid primer on the town's frontier history.

A quick drive to the surrounding countryside reveals one of the primary industries currently operating in the North Texas prairie: horse farms. With prearranged tours, guests can get a glimpse into the processes of breeding, developing, and training the country's top race horses.

While Denton may not tout itself as a live music capital, no town in Texas punches higher above its weight class when it comes to musical talent. UNT's College of Music produces an array of artists that play everything from jazz to punk and experimental riffs that can't

be classified. Dan's Silverleaf is a reliable music venue and dive bar, while Andy's Bar hosts an eclectic mix of live music in one of the oldest buildings on the square.

After a Mean Green win, there's a different kind of music that floats through the air. As throngs march in celebration to McConnell Tower, which tops the Hurley Administration Building in the heart of campus, they sing the school song, "Glory to the Green," and watch the tower light up—yup, you guessed it—green.

—Thomas Jones

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

EVEN THOUGH AUSTIN AND ITS SURROUNDING communities comprise the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the nation, nearby San Marcos remains, unapologetically, a college town. Students lounge along the San Marcos River, sip coffee at The Coffee Bar or Cafe on the Square, and tap their feet to tunes at Showdown and Cheatham Street Warehouse. The frenetic energy of Austin seems more like 30 years away than 30 miles.

But don't think this relaxed nature pertains to Saturday afternoons in autumn. Texas State has earned its reputation as a school that likes to have a good time, and a football game offers a rowdy tailgating scene complete with lots of eating, drinking, and dancing.

The university's football program started in 1904. Today's Division I team has had just one winning season since joining the Sun Belt Conference in 2013. Even if a bowl game trophy might not be in sight, the band, cheerleaders, and spirit groups add to the pageantry of any home game—and few schools can match the history of Texas State's Strutters. The dance team, the first and largest such squad of any four-year college in the nation, celebrated its 60th season last year and has become a can't-miss part of the halftime show at Bobcat Stadium, which completed a major remodel in 2012.

"I always remind the Strutters that the Strutters before them are so proud of this organization," says Director Tammy Fife, a university faculty member since 1996. "I tell them, 'Everyone in the crowd cannot wait to see you perform. These are the best times of your lives. Cherish these memories, have fun, and entertain the crowd.'"

The Strutters aren't the only thing Texas State is nationally recognized for—a stroll through the quad leads visitors to the likeness of the school's most famous graduate. In the heart of campus is a statue of

the late U.S. President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who in 1930 graduated from the university then known as Southwest Texas State Teachers College. Johnson returned several times to the campus to address graduates at commencement. It's also where he signed the Higher Education Act of 1965, which increased federal money given to universities, created scholarships, gave low-interest loans to students, and established the National Teacher Corps. The statue portrays the future political titan as a young student, with paperwork tucked under his left arm while his right arm stretches up. Campus lore says that touching his hand leads to good luck, especially during final exams. Those interested in learning more about his legacy can visit the nearby LBJ Museum of San Marcos.

Other points of interest surrounding the campus include the San Marcos River, an ecological oasis that bubbles up from the Edwards Aquifer in Spring Lake. Visitors can relax in City Park or Rio Vista Park and enjoy a picnic or a swim in the 72-degree crystalline waters. Another option: Grab gear from Lions Club Tube Rental and float. If it's too nippy for water activities, Texas State's Meadows Center for Water and the Environment offers a tour of the river in a glass-bottom boat.



WHERE TO STAY

The Crystal River Inn, a cozy bed-and-breakfast located just west of downtown and the Hays County Square, is walking distance from Bobcat Stadium. The staff is using hospital-grade disinfectant in rooms and common areas. Cooks are using gloves and masks. Rates start at \$140 per night. 326 W. Hopkins St., San Marcos. 512-396-3739; crystalriverinn.com



Another natural attraction in town is the family-owned Wonder World Cave and Adventure Park. This destination, now in its 120th year, serves as the oldest commercial cave tour in Texas. Amateur spelunkers can explore the state's only fault-line-formed cave, as well as climb an observation tower that rises 120 feet. For a more relaxed activity, take a train ride through the pocket-size wildlife park filled with exotic animals such as four-horned sheep, axis deer, and emus.

In the hills west of San Marcos is the Devil's Backbone, a majestic drive for motorists and cyclists alike. Starting on Ranch-to-Market Road 12, the route winds along a loop through Wimberley, Blanco, and the north shore of Canyon Lake. Highlights include the shops and art galleries in Wimberley, barbecue at Old 300 in Blanco, and a round of cold beers served with ghostly tales at the historic Devil's Backbone Tavern.

The lit star atop Jackson Hall, the tallest building on campus, guides travelers back to San Marcos. The star, once used to mark the holidays, is illuminated whenever the Bobcats win a football game. In the 1930s, the star disappeared and the ritual stopped until—as legend states—a night watchman found the light in 1942 and returned it. After a victory, Bobcats fans can look up at the star and tip their caps to that watchman. —TJ

SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY, HUNTSVILLE

MOST TEXANS ASSOCIATE THIS SCENIC TOWN on the western edge of the Pine Curtain with the state's original penitentiary. But there's much more to the community than its infamous prison. One point of pride is Sam Houston State University and its Bearkat football team. In the shadow of Bowers Stadium sits "Bearkat Alley," Sam Houston State's official tailgating area. Enjoy a game of cornhole, grab some complimentary tacos from one of the tailgate sponsors, and get a selfie with Sammy the Bearkat, Sam Houston State's mascot for more than 60 years.

The school's athletic teams have been referred to as Bearkats for almost 100 years. School historians say it has little to do with the kinkajou, a small South American mammal in the raccoon family also known as a bearcat. Rather, the mascot likely originated from a then-popular local saying that a formidable foe "was tougher than a bearcat," according to Sam Houston State's "Musings From Sam Houston's Stomping Grounds" podcast series.

One can't talk football in Huntsville without mentioning Nacogdoches, the town



WHERE TO STAY

For football fans, Sam Houston University Hotel, located a half-mile from the stadium, is ideal. At press time, the hotel was set to reopen on July 31. COVID-19 measures include cleaning public areas every half hour and offering sanitation stations on every floor. Rates start at \$109 per night. 1610 Bobby K Marks Drive. Huntsville. 936-291-2151; shsuhotel.org

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A Sam Houston statue looms large over Interstate 45 in Huntsville; the Bearkats' matchup against Stephen F. Austin University is one of the most anticipated games of the season; Sammy the Bearkat shows school pride with the "Eat 'Em Up Kats" symbol.

located about 100 miles northeast and the home of bitter rival Stephen F. Austin University. The two schools have squared off in what's known as "The Battle of the Piney Woods" since 1923, which makes it the third-longest ongoing football series in the state. The game outgrew both campuses—Bowers Stadium seats 12,953—and now takes place at NRG Stadium in Houston, including this year's matchup on Oct. 3. "Sam," as SHSU is often referred to, has won nine consecutive games in the series.

"It's Sam's marquee game, and it's a great atmosphere," says Josh Criswell, the sports editor at the *Huntsville Item* newspaper. "With the large alumni base in Houston, the stadium, and a partnership with the Texas Bowl, it's a perfect storm to have it at NRG." SHSU started its football program in 1912 and hasn't had a losing season since 2009. The school has long been a powerhouse in the Football Championship Subdivision, a Division I subset of the Football Bowl Subdivision, in which the University of North Texas and Texas State compete alongside the nation's largest and most well-known football programs. FCS schools don't award as many athletic scholarships as FBS teams, and they have no attendance requirements to compete in their collegiate division. The annual grudge match for East Texas supremacy regularly draws more than

20,000 fans. The crowd at the 2016 game numbered 27,411—the largest in the series' history and the largest ever for a Bearkat game against an FCS opponent. "I don't want to take a shot at the FCS in any way," Criswell says, "but the game has an FBS feel." About a mile north of campus, Oakwood Cemetery offers a serene final resting place for the school's namesake. Sam Houston, the first president of the Republic of Texas, was interred amid the towering pines and sprawling oaks in 1863. A solemn stroll around the grounds reveals the tombstones of lawmakers, soldiers, philosophers, and enslaved people.

The winding trails and hidden crannies in Huntsville State Park just south of town give visitors a sense of the vast and deep pine forests that once blanketed all of East Texas. Birders will enjoy the blind at the end of the Coloneh Trail, anglers can while away the day on Lake Raven, and hikers can explore one of the most pristine swaths of pine left in the state. "The cool thing about Huntsville is that we have something for every interest," Park Superintendent Kody Waters says. "I like to say we have all the '-ings.' You can go hiking, swimming, biking, canoeing, kayaking, fishing—any outdoor activity."

Pines tower over much of Huntsville, but they don't quite measure up to Houston himself, whose likeness looms 77 feet above Interstate 45 near the entrance to the state park. Completed in 1994 by Huntsville native and acclaimed sculptor David Adickes, *A Tribute to Courage* honors the hero of the Texas Revolution. At the end of every fall semester, the university hosts its Tree of Light celebration, which features performances by the school's choir and dance team, as well as a canned food drive. This year's event is scheduled for late November or early December, which football fans hope will coincide with the school's first playoff run in three years. Even if the Bearkats miss the playoffs, beating their biggest rival is still the ultimate mark of success. "The playoffs are big," Criswell admits, "but I don't know if anything is as important as winning against SFA." —TJ

10
OF OUR
FAVORITE
SMALL
TOWNS



FROM LEFT: Barber Jim Moore at the Comfort Barber Shop; a border landscape near Presidio.



ENDURING SPIRIT

TIGHTKNIT AND VIBRANT, SMALL TOWNS ACROSS TEXAS ADAPT AND FLOURISH

BY CLAYTON MAXWELL AND JOE NICK PATOSKI

It's

a beautiful thing to hear a small Texas town wake up. First a quiet concert of songbirds, then church bells, and finally, the salutations of locals as they converge on the square for breakfast at a café or a trip to the courthouse. As the sun rises higher over the square, so does the hum of everyday life.

These days, COVID-19 has subdued that hum as residents adjust to new safety measures. Courthouse squares are quieter, and some storefronts have closed. But the pulse of these towns beats strong. More often than not, locals know one another—their stories, celebrations, and heartaches. During these challenging times, the denizens of Texas' small towns are protecting their health while improvising new ways to sustain their economies.

Consider Mason, a town of about 2,300 residents nestled on the edge of the Hill Country, 9 miles north of the Llano River. On a Sunday in April, my husband and I walked the empty town square, where handwritten notes in shop windows listed phone numbers for placing call-in orders. Murphy Creek Cellars, a Texas wine shop and tasting room, was open for takeout, including an expanded menu of frozen dishes to diversify its offerings during quarantine.

Mason's empty square felt unusual. Typically, shops and restaurants buzz with locals, and, increasingly, tourists, many visiting from nearby Fredericksburg for the day.

"People who say there's nothing to do in a small town don't know Mason," says Lisa Ruthven, owner of Murphy Creek Cellars. "But it's the people that make it—the families that have been here four generations or more, ranchers and farmers, and schoolteachers. Those who grew up here, moved away, and then came back. And then there is this infusion of new people coming in, also wanting to keep Mason special. One thing we have in common is that we all love Mason."

The town has plenty to love. It's one of the few remaining places where shop owners still post funeral announcements in their windows. When the Mason High School Punchers play, the whole community shows up for





Mason
POP. 2,404

CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT: The Odeon
Theater in Mason; Fort
Mason historical site,
Andy Smith at Lea Lou
Co-Op and 21 Club.

pep rallies to cheer on the football team named for the area's cowboy heritage. For such a small town, Mason's got big spirit.

Although the number of Texans living in small towns has dwindled—according to the Texas Demographic Center, only 15% of us live in non-urban areas—the spirits of towns like Mason persevere. A common thread among them is the loyalty of residents old and new: They relish their town's histories and want to keep their stories alive.

In Mason, locals are quick to note their county voted against secession by the highest margin in the state before the Civil War (along with neighboring Gillespie County). The Germans who settled this area, having just arrived in the United States, were not gung-ho about leaving it. Also, Masonites proudly claim Fred Gipson as one of their own. The author made the surrounding Hill Country the setting for his classic 1950s

children's book, *Old Yeller*. And residents love to recount how, back in 1935, Mason High School tennis player Steve Latham hitchhiked to the state championship game in Austin because he didn't have a ride—and won!

Small armies of steadfast locals keep Texas towns moving. In Mason's case, two women from old German ranch families, Patsy Zesch and Barbara Pluenneke, kick-started a revitalization in 1985 when they spent their own money to spruce up the faded town square, color-coordinating facades and installing planters. When the town's beloved Odeon Theater, the oldest continuously running theater in West Texas, faced closure in 1994, locals formed the Odeon Preservation Association and kept the doors open. And now, a team of locals is restoring the Seaquist House, a Victorian marvel of hidden stairwells, stained glass, and 15 fireplaces.

"Mason is magical," says Andy Smith, who moved from Fredericksburg in 2014 and transformed an old hardware store and lumberyard into the Lea Lou Co-Op and 21 Club, a restaurant, bar, and lodge. In 1858, Smith's great-great grandmother, Anna Mebus Martin, came over from Germany at age 16, "barefoot and broke." Martin would eventually amass cattle and land, and become the first woman in the area to open a bank.

"There are common threads here," Smith says. "The shared German immigration stories, the cattle and cowboys, a love of the outdoors and rivers. Sometimes a bunch of us get together, maybe on the Llano or at one of the town's wine bars, and we laugh, 'Wow, it's another magical moment in Mason.'"

Here, we take you on a tour of 10 small towns that are keeping their magic alive. —Clayton Maxwell



COMFORT

POP. 3,000

If Comfort seems like the ideal Hill Country town, there are reasons for that. Set on the banks of Cypress Creek, Comfort was founded in the 1850s by German freethinkers, idealists, and intellectuals who championed cooperatives but opposed local governments, slavery, and the Confederacy. More than 150 years later, Comfort remains unincorporated, and its compact seven-block downtown is full of 19th-century buildings. The limestone storefronts house cool shops, such as The Tinsmith's Wife for knitting and crocheting supplies, and eateries like Comfort Pizza. The legacy of Comfort's founders is honored by the Treue der Union monument and burial site, a tribute to local abolitionists who were killed for their beliefs when the Civil War broke out.

—Joe Nick Patoski

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: High Street in Comfort; South Llano River State Park in Junction; Hotel Faust in Comfort.





JUNCTION

POP. 2,404

You won't see many tree-huggers walking Main Street in downtown Junction, not yet anyway. But this ranching and hunting center perched on the western fringe of the Hill Country, where the landscape opens up and the Chihuahuan Desert awaits, could be on the cusp of an ecotourism boom.

Local promoters have dubbed their town the "Land of Living Waters," a superlative derived from the more than 300 miles of flowing spring-fed streams in Kimble County. No other county in Texas can claim that many. With its natural beauty, minimal industry, and a declining population, Junction is reinventing itself as a recreational destination.

The South Llano River anchors the outdoor scene with swimming, tubing, fishing, and paddling opportunities in town and in the hilly outskirts at South Llano River State Park. The dark-sky park also offers camping and miles of secluded hiking trails. It's popular with birders, who are likely to spot a few deer, armadillo, and porcupine among the wild turkeys and painted buntings.

Texas Tech University's Outdoor Learning Center hosts students and teachers for hands-on adventure courses in the great outdoors, and Tech's Llano River Field Station is leading the way in research of the local watershed and riparian habitats. For a beautiful overnight stay among the springtime wildflowers, the Native American Seed Company rents cabins along the Llano.—JNP



La Grange

POP. 4,677

When Hurricane Harvey struck in 2017, the Colorado River rose more than 50 feet and submerged the streets of La Grange. The flood destroyed hundreds of homes, and some residents lost everything. But the community of this Central Texas town rallied. Churches fed the newly homeless, City Hall organized donations, and a local thrift store, Second Chance Emporium, morphed into a relief center to distribute aid.

Today, downtown La Grange reveals no vestiges of that calamity. The lawns around the 1891 Fayette County Courthouse—the first designed by noted architect J. Reilly Gordon—make an inviting spot to marvel at the building's carved details. Grandmother's Flower Garden, adjacent to the Texas Quilt Museum, is well-tended and open to anyone. Restaurants like Bistro 108 kept busy when the pandemic closed dining rooms and eating out meant curbside orders delivered by face-masked servers.

"La Grange people are kind, and they have time for each other," says Martin DuWors, who recently moved to the outskirts of La Grange from Cape Cod. "When my John Deere needed some TLC, the lawnmower guy in La Grange, whenever I had a question, he'd sit down and talk me through it. People are like that here; they help out." —CM





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
The Texas Quilt Museum
in La Grange; Fayette
County Courthouse;
Goldthwaite's Legacy
Plaza; Farmer's Market
at The Jersey Barnyard in
La Grange.



GOLDTHWAITE

POP. 1,851

Some road-trippers overlook Goldthwaite as a pass-through town on US 183 somewhere between Abilene and Austin. But for the pecan farmers and goat ranchers who call Mills County home, Goldthwaite is a hub of local history and community.

Nowhere is this more evident than at Legacy Plaza, a garden and visitor center on Fisher Street (US 183's name as it passes through town). The plaza—a meticulous recreation of the surrounding land as it might have been 10,000 years ago—interprets the area's nature and archeology with native plants and an outdoor classroom for demos of prehistoric life, such as flint-knapping.

Across the street is the Goldthwaite Theater, a community group launched in 2017 by Kay Bouse, a retired Mills County extension agent. "My husband and I love live theater and used to travel to other towns to see it," Bouse says. "And we thought, 'Why not open up a theater here?' Although everything is on hold right now because of the virus, the support from the community has been great. We've got talent in Goldthwaite." —CM



Photos: Tom McCarthy Jr., Will van Overbeek (Goldthwaite)



MINERAL WELLS

POP. 16,700

Now's the time to check out Mineral Wells' revival-in-progress before the crowds arrive. Anticipation centers around what's to come for this North Texas town, which rose to fame in the 1920s as a health resort drawing on its alkaline well water.

The seven-story Crazy Water Hotel—built in 1927 and redeveloped into luxury apartments, short-term rentals, and an events center—is scheduled for completion by the end of the year. Nearby, the Baker Hotel, after decades of sitting vacant, is finally in the midst of a \$65 million restoration, due to be completed in 2022. In the rolling hills west of town, the 4,400-acre Palo Pinto Mountains State Park may be the most highly anticipated new state park in decades. The state hopes to open it to the public in the next five years.

While the future is bright, the town today offers a sunny escape. Start at the iconic "Home of Crazy" sign (a replica was erected this year thanks to a community fundraising effort) and follow Oak Avenue past brick storefronts to the Famous Mineral Water Company headquarters. Here, visitors can drink Crazy Water at the Crazy Well, buy "Crazy" tchotchkes, or enjoy a mineral bath at the Crazy Bath House. Many visitors, drawn to town to "take the waters," also find worthy stops at the Brazos Market and Bistro (sandwiches, pizza, and wraps) and Market at 76067 (a collection of over 100 vendors). Want to get outside? Five blocks south is the trailhead for the 20-mile Lake Mineral Wells Trailway.—JNP



VEGA

POP. 924

Nostalgic travelers of the Mother Road will find what they're chasing in Vega. Old Route 66 passed through the heart of this High Plains farming town, while its replacement, Interstate 40, bypassed it to the south in the 1970s. What's left are restored icons, such as the 1926 Magnolia Station and a surprising number of vintage Route 66 establishments that are still open for business—the Hickory Inn Café and the Vega Motel tourist court to name a couple. At a marker noting the end of a section of Old Route 66, Dot's Mini Museum showcases relics of the famed highway. No wonder some call Vega "the Route 66-iest town in Texas."—JNP



FROM LEFT: The Baker Hotel, now under restoration, in Mineral Wells; the Milburn-Price Culture Museum in Vega; Hopkins County Courthouse in Sulphur Springs.



SULPHUR SPRINGS

POP. 16,234

Bring a courthouse square back to life and the people will come. At least that's what happened in Sulphur Springs, a town nestled among the lakes of Northeast Texas. They now come for dining, the cinema, the Saturday outdoor market, and the Celebration Plaza splash pad. The spirit of bonhomie cultivated by a downtown that's been refreshed over the past 15 years shines brightest at the

town's annual Independence Day celebration, when the square hosts a fireworks show. On the Saturday of Labor Day weekend (Sept. 5), another downtown fireworks show features the local symphony. "It's such a heartfelt evening," says Linda Galligher, president of the Sulphur Springs Symphony League. "It's like a Norman Rockwell painting, a beautiful picture of small-town Texas." — CM



LULING

POP. 5,954

Luling resides in that old Texas sweet spot where farming, ranching, oil, and a marquee community celebration have kept the town rolling into the 21st century. (This past June, the town canceled its Watermelon Thump for the first time in 67 years.)

Considering the verdant prairie surroundings, it's no surprise Luling is known for its native cuisine—smoked meats. “This is a great area for growing hay and hay storage,” says Ron Mathis, who has farmed and ranched east of town for more than 40 years. “There are probably more cattle per acre than just about anywhere else in Texas.”

Hit either City Market or Luling Bar-B-Q on a Saturday and you'll see peak Luling: locals visiting on the sidewalk; homemade pies for sale in front of City Market; and people stocking up on fresh produce at the open-air farmers markets, which have adapted to social distancing.

First-timers can be forgiven their double takes when they spot one of the nearly 200 oil wells in town; many of them are whimsically decorated as fairy tale characters and animals. (The Chamber of Commerce provides maps for a pump-jack tour.) The Luling Oil Museum explores the history of the industry locally, while a different kind of ode to petroleum sits nearby on Interstate 10—Buc-ee's first mega-travel stop. —JNP



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
The Luling Oil Museum; a
Presidio landscape; Fort
Leaton State Historic Site
in Presidio; a decorated
pump jack in Luling.





PRESIDIO

POP. 3,894

The earthy aesthetic of weathered adobe. A winding river road with sweeping views of Mexico. A border cultural blend all its own. This is Presidio. "It has everything," says Adele Jancovici, an art curator from Paris, France, who is transforming a 1924 adobe grocery store into a gallery expected to open this fall. "Presidio has its own beauty, it has infrastructure, you're a 5-minute walk to Mexico, and the people here know how to enjoy life." With Big Bend Ranch State Park about 30 miles away and the nearby Chinati Mountains State Natural Area scheduled to open in the next few years, Presidio is a down-to-earth outpost for desert lovers who crave the middle of nowhere. —CM



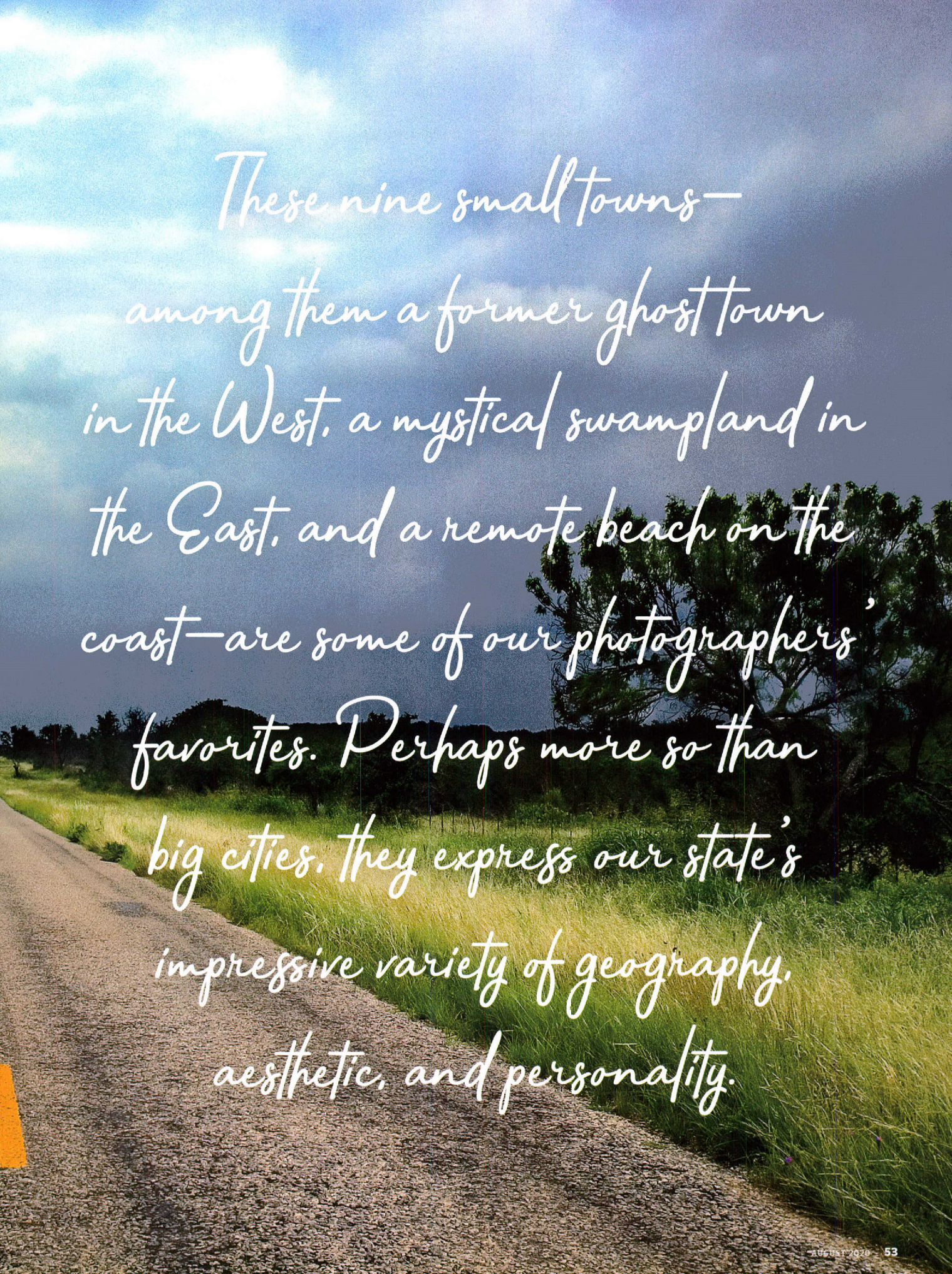
A person wearing a cowboy hat and riding a brown horse is seen from behind, traveling down a long, straight gravel road. The road is flanked by tall, golden-brown grasses on the left and a line of dark green trees on the right. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall scene is peaceful and rural.

It's a Small-Town World, After All

E. Dan Klepper,

BRACKETTVILLE

Brackettville cowboy Pedro Serrano rides up Ranch Road 674 on his horse, Reyna. Brackettville has something for everyone: the 600-acre Alamo 4 solar farm, Kickapoo Cavern State Park, and Fort Clark Historic District. "Brackettville was my home for much of the 1990s," Klepper says. "It prepared me for small-town living, so when I decided to make Marathon my permanent home, I knew what to expect from a rural, remote kind of lifestyle."



These nine small towns—
among them a former ghost town
in the West, a mystical swampland in
the East, and a remote beach on the
coast—are some of our photographers'
favorites. Perhaps more so than
big cities, they express our state's
impressive variety of geography,
aesthetic, and personality.

Matthew Johnson, MARFA

"The thing I've always found most interesting about Marfa is the mystery of the place," Johnson says. "After many trips there, I still only feel like I know what's going on half the time. Is this an open business, a façade painted on a long-abandoned wall, or some sort of art installation? In Marfa, I find the answer is always surprising."





Nathan Lindstrom,

CARTHAGE

(LEFT) Chase Dawson sits behind the ticket window at the charming Esquire Theater downtown. The renovated movie theater hosts a number of country music concerts, as well as movies, stage productions, and comedy acts.

(BELOW) The Main Street Cafe is a popular hangout for the locals. "Aside from the good breakfast menu and coffee cups that can't be emptied," Lindstrom says, "it's worth visiting just to listen to the waitstaff dish it back to their cantankerous customers."





Tom McCarthy Jr., SAN YGNACIO

The Treviño-Urbe Rancho, a National Historic Landmark, features a courtyard within its walls and dates its construction to circa 1830. Its founder, a wealthy landowner named Jesús Treviño, built the structure to protect his friends and neighbors from Native American raids. "I enjoy San Ygnacio's quiet atmosphere of historical architecture mixed with secret courtyards, public art installations, and a bird sanctuary nestled right along the Rio Grande," McCarthy says.

Kenny Braun, UNCERTAIN

At Johnson's Ranch Marina on Caddo Lake, the men in the foreground finish pumping gas into a boat while another boat returns from a successful fishing excursion. The old shack on the other side of the lake was featured in the HBO vampire show *True Blood*. "Uncertain has a friendly, laid-back, and unpretentious vibe," Braun says, "while at the same time being a timeless, eccentric, and remote slice of Americana."



Theresa DiMenno, JAMAICA BEACH

In early December a few years ago, Austin resident Laura Albrecht and her dog, Sam, visited the beach with DiMenno. "I've experienced some of my most poignant memories and quiet reflections along Jamaica Beach," DiMenno says. "I've camped, strolled the coastline, rented beach houses, partied with friends, baked in the sun, and scattered portions of my parents' ashes there."



Dave Shafer, SAINT JO

Walter Smith, proprietor of Windmill Grill, makes an old-time hamburger—fitting considering Saint Jo was part of the famed Chisholm Trail and saw millions of cattle driven through it. "The town of Saint Jo is unique—with Texas history, talented artists, and shopkeepers," says Shafer, whose wife is from the area, "but it's a ranching community, after all, and that sets the course in hard work and honest folks—Texans through and through."

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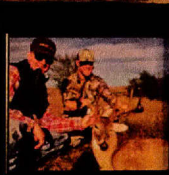
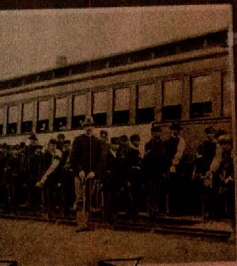
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Sandy Carson, TERLINGUA

"Prickly and hot, yet sweet and salty" is how Carson sums up Terlingua, a former ghost town turned tourist hot spot between Big Bend's national and state parks. "They say everything is bigger in Texas," Carson says. "Well, if they're talking about the size of the skies and the locals' hearts, then I'd say they hit the rusty nail on the head."

Sean Fitzgerald.

GRANBURY

The historical red brick building next to the Harley-Davidson is formerly the Hood County State Bank, built in 1905. Now, it's a boutique called Red on the Square. "Granbury mixes small-town Texas with art and artisans who would fit well in any hip urban neighborhood," Fitzgerald says. "I could hop from an old-school skating rink to a Broadway musical to an award-winning artisanal distillery in one evening." **L**



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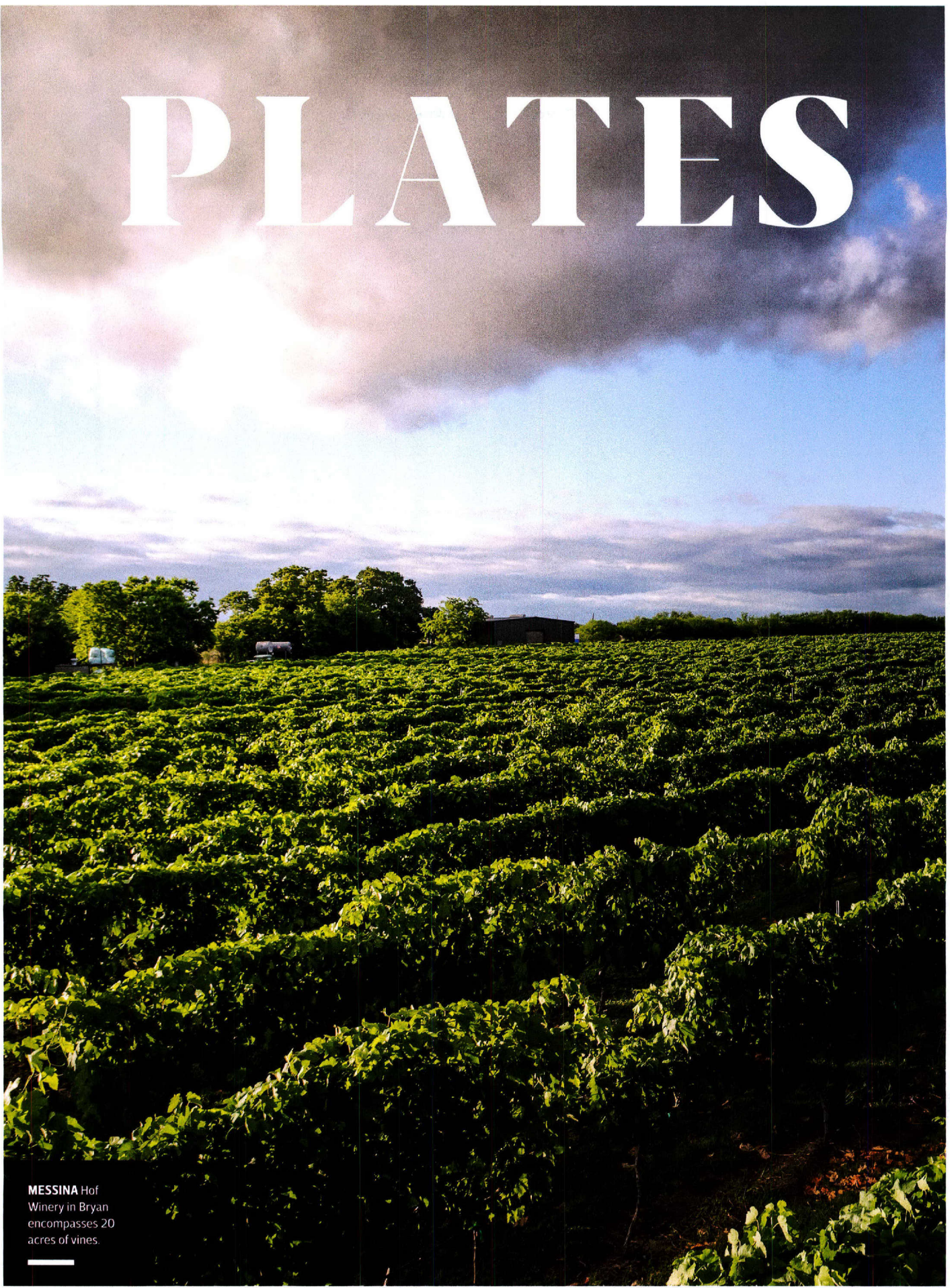
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PLATES



MESSINA Hof
Winery in Bryan
encompasses 20
acres of vines.



Fruit of the Vine

Grape-harvesting events give oenophiles plenty of ways to celebrate Texas wine

By Julia Jones

BECKER Vineyards in Fredericksburg has hosted many grape harvest events.

The farmland and clear skies in rural Bryan make for a serene and sunny late summer drive to Messina Hof Winery for its annual Harvest Festival. It's early morning, and my grandmother and I are ready to start picking grapes. Fifty or so people, grouped in families or couples, line up to receive their vine cutters before orientation begins. July through September, vineyards and wineries across Texas invite guests to experience the most fundamental parts of winemaking.

The day starts with the morning harvest, where the early-to-rise congregate at the vineyard, built in the 1970s by Paul and Merrill Bonarrigo. The current owners, the Bonarrigos' son Paul Mitchell Bonarrigo and his wife, Karen Bonarrigo, give an introduction to the history and process of winemaking before leading us in song—"Pick, pick, pick the grapes" to the tune of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." Off we go to wander the rows of grapevines, looking for dark purple orbs to pluck off and taste.

"Wine, to us, is really about celebrating life and having a lot of fun," Paul Mitchell says. That mindset is evident during many events of the daylong Harvest Festival, including a talent show, demonstrations, and tastings, which sparkle with the informality of a close family gathering.

The Harvest Festival started in the '70s when a group of German students from Texas A&M University came to the vineyard one summer asking if they could help with the harvest. In their home country, according to Karen, it was customary for the whole village to participate in the harvest. The next year, they brought more of their friends. "It naturally evolved into this community-centric opportunity," Karen says. "From there, [Paul and Merrill] said, 'This is a great opportunity for us to be able to have other people participate and see it as well.'"

Around the same time, the winery added a restaurant and eventually the on-site Villa Bed & Breakfast. Harvest Festival events at Messina Hof include

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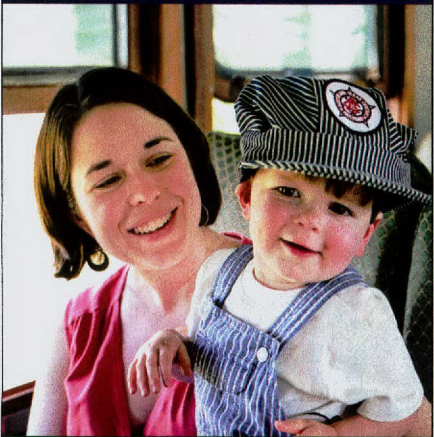
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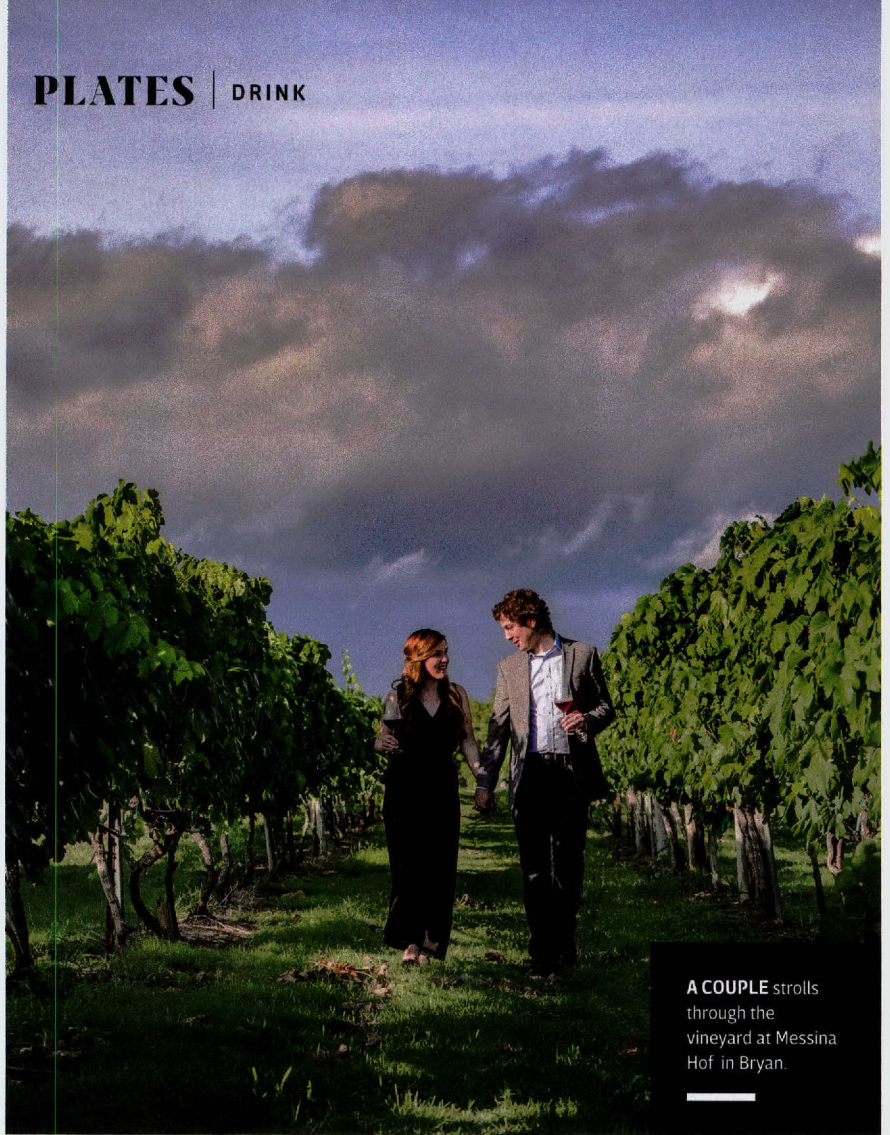
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PLATES | DRINK



A COUPLE strolls through the vineyard at Messina Hof in Bryan.

daylight and moonlit harvests as well as barbecues and murder mystery dinners.

“Hopefully the Harvest Festival makes a connection between what you see when you pass by a vineyard and what is in the glass and how it gets there,” Karen says.

At Becker Vineyards, established in the Hill Country town of Fredericksburg in 1992, one highlight of its annual harvest events is a theatrical grape stomp. There’s no need to purchase a wine-tasting ticket to witness the excitement of the “Lucy and the Italian Woman” Contest.

Taking inspiration from an iconic episode from the ‘50s sitcom *I Love Lucy*, costumed competitors lob crushed grapes at each other for the chance to win a gift basket and, of course, bragging rights. It’s a food fight worthy of prime-time television.

Before and after the chaotic battle, anyone can walk up and test their footing in the barrel of grapes. White T-shirts

are for sale, ready to be stained with dark purple footprints as a souvenir.

Nichole Bendele, the winery’s tasting room coordinator, started the event in 1996 to celebrate the harvest and to signify the start of the wine season in Texas and across the Northern Hemisphere. Intense heat can shut down the fruit’s natural ripening processes, and the cold can prevent growth, so vineyards in the state harvest in late summer and early autumn.

“Every farmer that puts in a crop, to be able to harvest it and utilize it—it’s always very exciting,” Bendele says. “As a farmer, you know you’re going to get through the year. For us to know that we got through harvest, that’s an indicator of how the rest of our process will go.”

Participating in these events puts the hard agricultural work into perspective, I realize while biting into a small lenoir grape used in Messina Hof’s dessert wines. The Bryan vineyard encompasses 20 acres, but it doesn’t

even scratch the surface when it comes to Messina Hof's total production. Each year, the business produces 130,000 gallons of wine, including 75 different varietals—33 of which are grown in the Texas High Plains. That takes approximately 1,200 tons of grapes, some of which we just picked.

We grab white T-shirts on our way indoors to watch the Big Kahuna talent contest. To enter, you have to find a bunch of grapes that looks like whatever your imagination says it looks like: a sea horse, for example, or the state of Florida. After performances from 10 or so contestants, an energetic child takes the crown for his spirited dance. Then we all take off our shoes and wait in line to step into one of the three bins.

The feeling of the soft fruit being crushed underfoot is exactly like what you would imagine it to be—sticky, oozy, highly giggle-inducing—but so much more enjoyable. I step out of the bucket onto the white T-shirt to memorialize the feeling in dark purple imprints.

With all the picking and stomping, it's easy to lose sight of the delicious end result. After settling in on Messina Hof's cozy patio at the end of the eventful day, a glass of its cabernet franc reminds me what it's all about. 🍷

HARVEST EVENTS

Messina Hof Winery Harvest Festival takes place July 24-25, July 31-Aug. 1, Aug. 7-8, and Aug. 14-15. 4545 Old Reliance Road, Bryan. 979-778-9463; messinahof.com/harvest

Messina Hof also holds harvest events at its Hill Country location Aug. 21-22. 9996 US 290 E., Fredericksburg. 830-990-4653

Becker Vineyards has canceled its harvest events for this year. For updates and more information, call 830-644-2681 or visit beckervineyards.com



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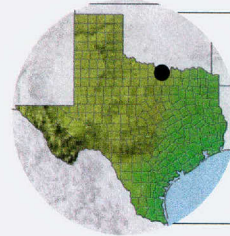


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At Elm Creek Manor, an inn just outside the North Texas town of Muenster, guests have the opportunity to work for their supper.

Sometimes that means joining co-owner Brad Scarbrough on his midmorning rounds to collect eggs from the henhouse, gather produce like figs and tomatoes, or milk goats named Cafe and Cinnabar. Even the various animals on the property contribute in their own ways: May and Calypso, the miniature Mediterranean donkeys, ward off coyotes; and Brennan, a Yorkshire herd dog, shoos the chickens out of the vegetable patch.

"Everyone has a job here," Brad says with a smile.

But the reward is worth the work, as guests discover when they sit down for a supper prepared by Marcia Scarbrough, co-owner, chef, and Brad's wife. On Saturday evenings, the Scarbroughs serve dinner in the candlelit dining room of the main manor house. (Guests have the option to dine in their rooms.) As the dishes are presented, visitors (overnight guests and others who make dinner reservations) soon see why Elm Creek is nationally recognized for its culinary delights. Entrees may include rosemary-braised pork loin accompanied by roasted zucchini and *pasta al forno cachta*, pasta laced with sun-dried tomatoes and baked in a creamy sauce; or au gratin potatoes spiked with Czech cheeses and roasted carrots, potatoes, green beans, and acorn squash. Desserts are French- and Italian-inspired, like a chèvre custard with goat-milk caramel and an amaretto-raspberry reduction.

Stay Inn and Eat Well

This bed-and-breakfast does more than just serve farm-fresh meals; it invites guests to participate in the process

By John Lumpkin


On Elm Creek's tree-shaded, 16-acre property, the couple raises goats, chickens, tilapia, and rabbits.

Almost all ingredients are sourced from Elm Creek or the Scarbroughs' ranch in Whitesboro, 30 miles east. On Elm Creek's tree-shaded, 16-acre property, the couple raises goats, chickens, tilapia, and rabbits. The grounds also harbor an organic garden, orchard, and even a greenhouse that grows citrus fruits and other produce year-round. Pineapples, oranges, and cantaloupes harvested on-site make their way into breakfast, which is delivered to the guests' quarters. The morning meal may also include Brad's Italian sausage, Spanish-style eggs with salsa, and zucchini bread with honey drizzle—once again, mostly sourced from Elm Creek.

It's hard to imagine, with all its delicious gifts, that Elm Creek was originally intended as a private residence for Brad and Marcia. They built a house and added windows, doors, stairways, and beams from an 1860 colonial farmhouse in New Hampshire.




Then came a devastating fire in 2003 and, out of the ashes, a plan to restore the place and open it as a bed-and-breakfast. "I was a defeatist," Marcia recalls. "I was ready to move on, but Brad said, 'If we build it, they will come. We will be the destination.'" Rooms at Elm Creek Manor were sold out the weekend of its debut.




The couple had traveled extensively in Europe, and they wanted to bring a bit of the continent's culture and style to their property, so they furnished the main house with Old World European décor. In the reinvention, the couple added five guest houses to the property, all inspired by different European getaways, includ-





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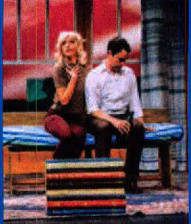
This program is made possible in part through the Hotel Tax Revenue funded from the city of College Station through the Arts Council of the Brazos Valley



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OPENING SPREAD: Elm Creek Manor's main house. **CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** owners Marcia and Brad Scarbrough; asiago pepato cheese made by Marcia; Eggs are gathered from Elm Creek's chickens daily.



ing a Tuscan villa and a quaint Alsatian cottage. Amenities include a swimming pool, outdoor games like giant chess and pétanque (a French lawn bowling game), and gardens for strolling and relaxing. The Austrian Imperial Haus, Elm Creek's signature accommodation, features a spa area with chaise lounges, twin open showers, and an infrared sauna. A short drive from Elm Creek leads to the Red River and reveals surprising topography that boosts call the "North Texas Hill Country." The town of Muenster is known for authentic German cuisine, and Blue Ostrich Winery offers live music on weekend afternoons.

The crown jewel of all activities is Marcia's two-day cheesemaking course, offered monthly. Using Roman methods, she leads students in making cheese using Elm Creek's goat's milk and cow's milk sourced from a nearby raw dairy farm. Three kinds of cheese are made during the course: a hard-pressed cheese like cheddar or asiago; chèvre, a goat's-

milk cheese; and ricotta. "Most chefs just buy their own cheeses," she explains. "We make it like it was made 400 years ago."

Elm Creek's from-scratch methods are rare, and dispatched with the utmost care. Some days, when Brad goes to collect fresh eggs, a hen remains seated, determined to incubate a potential chick. No matter—Brad moves the hen and egg to a separate coop. Eggs or no eggs, Elm Creek continues to feed and serve according to a sign posted on the coop: "No Fowl Moods Here." 🐔

CREEKSIDE QUARTERS

Rates run from \$279 to \$379 per night. If you're not staying at the inn but want to attend the Saturday dinner (\$69 per person), call to make a reservation. The cheesemaking course is \$899 for two students, with \$229 for each additional person. Public areas at the inn are being sterilized many times each day.

THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Tyler

Everything's coming up roses

BY CHET GARNER



If you need a sweet-smelling escape, there is a place out east where flowers bloom and pines tell some of the oldest stories in Texas. Though every rose has its thorn, a day trip to the Rose City does not. With a world-class zoo, a candy factory, and lots of delicious eats, Tyler guarantees a vibrant and colorful day.

Tyler Rose Garden

A tripper must stop and smell these roses. What started as a living catalog for Tyler's blooming rose industry in the 1950s is now a pink, red, and yellow masterpiece with thousands of petaled varieties. After you mosey through the garden, step into the Tyler Rose Museum on the garden grounds to see an exhibit on the Tyler Rose Festival, featuring dresses worn by past festival queens. One of them has a 16-foot train.

Stanley's Famous Pit Barbecue

While most barbecue aficionados love the so-called "Texas Trinity" (brisket, sausage, and ribs), in the world of East Texas barbecue, chopped beef reigns supreme. Stanley's has served up one of the best chopped beef sandwiches in Texas since the 1950s. I recommend getting it piled extra high with hot links and cheese for the epic "Brother-in-Law." Or try the "Mother Clucker," a sandwich with a smoked chicken thigh, fried egg, and candied bacon.

Tyler Candy Company

Tyler is well known for its pink blooms, but not many know of its other rose-colored delicacy—pink peanut patties, a treat made of pink candy and peanuts.

This small, unassuming factory in South Tyler turns out more of the sweet and nutty treat than anywhere else in the world. Visit the store to stock up on road trip snacks, including pecan logs, old-fashioned peanut brittle, and, of course, peanut patties.

Caldwell Zoo

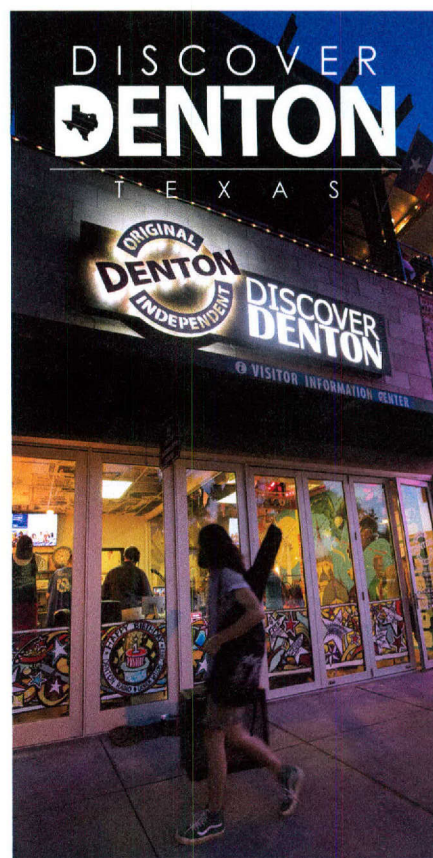
It may not be as huge as big-city zoos, but Caldwell Zoo has more than enough exotic animals to make for a wild visit. With white tigers, flamingos, rhinos, lions, and lemurs, it's a true East Texas safari. The Penguin Encounter program, which is open by reservation, invites visitors to have an up-close experience with the curious birds.

ETX Brewing Co.

You may think beer made with noodles, Lemonhead candy, or a fruit smoothie would be weird. Maybe it should be, but the folks at ETX Brewing Co. know how to make these crazy concoctions go down as smooth as an East Texas sunset. When you get hungry, step into The Porch at ETX, located next to the brewery, for a creative burger as delicious as the beer. Who knew mac and cheese and pulled pork were such great burger toppings?

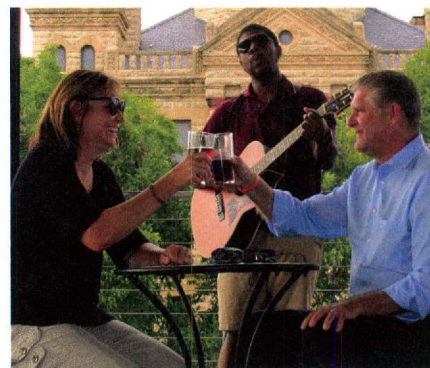
**So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path,
I hope to see you on the road.**

*Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® travel show on PBS.
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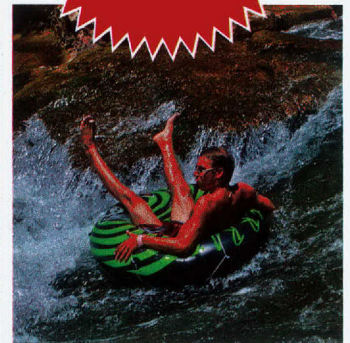
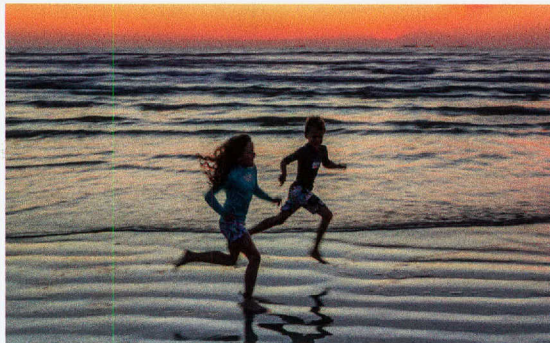
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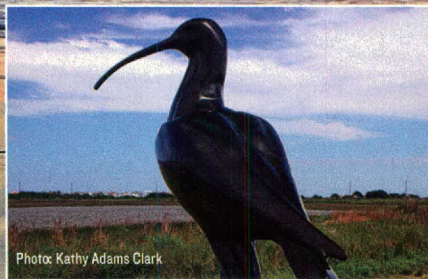


Photo: Kathy Adams Clark

Bronze Birds Beckon Outdoor Adventure

Visit Galveston's striking new Eskimo Curlew sculpture and others like it for a unique art and natural history experience! A 6-foot bronze curlew and an exhibit of extinct birds, all part of The Lost Bird Project, are now in Galveston Island State Park and The Bryan Museum gardens. The Eskimo Curlew was last seen on Galveston's west end. The museum's 5 large statues represent the other permanent Lost Bird Project sculptures throughout North America. Exhibit partners are Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council, Houston Audubon, and The Bryan Museum.

GalvestonNatureTourism.org



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Located in the heart of Downtown Galveston at 25th & Strand, The Galveston Railroad Museum has 5 acres of trains that you can explore and a 20,000 square foot restored 1932 Art Deco Depot that was once the home of the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad. The museum offers train rides most Saturdays, weather permitting.

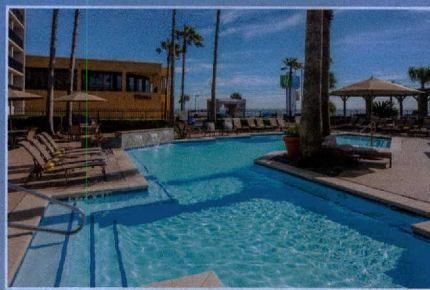
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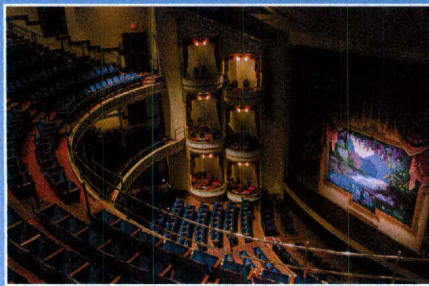
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so many restaurants on property, The San Luis Resort promises a dining experience for every whim. Enjoy a leisurely breakfast at Blake's Bistro, indulge in authentic Italian cuisine at Grotto, or escape to the award-winning restaurant, The Steakhouse. In addition to sumptuous amenities, enjoy an endless variety of events and entertainment perfect for couples, families and groups! Experience the very best in style, elegance and comfort at The San Luis Resort.

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Moody Gardens

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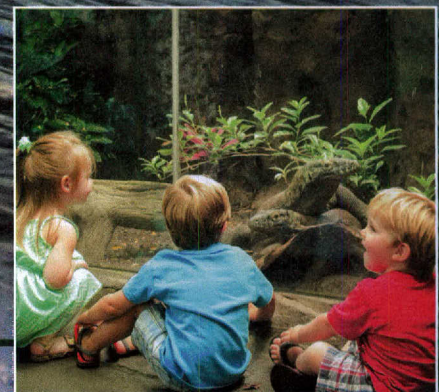
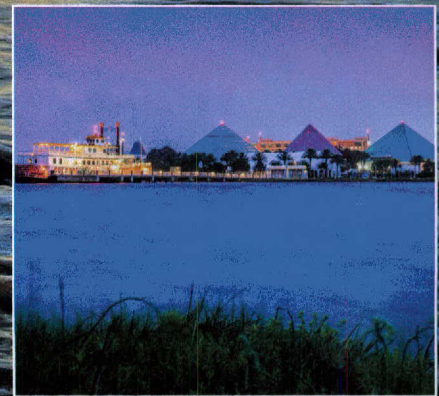
Your Best Summer Break Awaits at Moody Gardens, Galveston Island

Relax and cruise down to Moody Gardens and enjoy a fun-filled and memorable Summer Break for the entire family. No need to rush. Just take your time and make the most of your visit. You can easily spend a couple of days enjoying the Moody Gardens attractions at the new *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea Interactive Adventure*, *Aquaman 4D* or the new films *Expedition Chesapeake* or *Ancient Caves*. Unique experiences await as you encounter plants and animals from Asia, Africa and the Americas at the Rainforest Pyramid as well as the penguins, seals, sharks and other tropical fish at the Aquarium Pyramid. Enjoy the thrill

of the Zip Line and Ropes Course or relax and cruise aboard the Colonel Paddlewheel Boat with even more to explore as you venture out around Galveston Island.

Make the most of it with an overnight stay at the Moody Gardens Hotel that offers even more activities for the kids with casual dining and fine dining options. Be sure to set aside some special for mom and dad at the Moody Gardens Hotel Spa. You can also set your tee time at the Moody Gardens Golf Course, one of the top 10 public courses in Texas offering breathtaking island views and five tee sets creating diverse challenges for all levels of play.

MoodyGardens.org
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TEXAS

With Grape Power, Comes Grape Responsibility

The story of T.V. Munson, the 'Grape Man of Texas'

By Matt Joyce

When leading tours of Blue Ostrich, a winery and vineyard near Saint Jo, winemaker

Patrick Whitehead likes to share the story of Thomas Volney Munson, a horticulturist from nearby Denison. Though many wine connoisseurs have never heard of Munson, wine historians consider his 19th-century research to be among the biggest influences on the beverage as we know it.

"I like to imagine that Munson rode right through the valley on horseback," Whitehead says, looking over his leafy vineyards and a sweeping view of the Red River Valley. "I don't know if he really did, but it's not out of the realm of possibility. So many of our guests come from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, and they're always educated people, but they've never heard the story. And it happened right here in North Texas."

In short, Munson helped save the

French wine industry from a vineyard blight in the 1880s by sending Texas grapevines to fortify the Old World vineyards. It's a story that resonates with contemporary challenges of globalization, disease, and science. It's also a story with enduring ties to Texas, where the wine industry grows bigger by the year; and to Munson's hometown of Denison, where Grayson College trains vineyardists and winemakers at its T.V. Munson Viticulture and Enology Center & Memorial Vineyard.

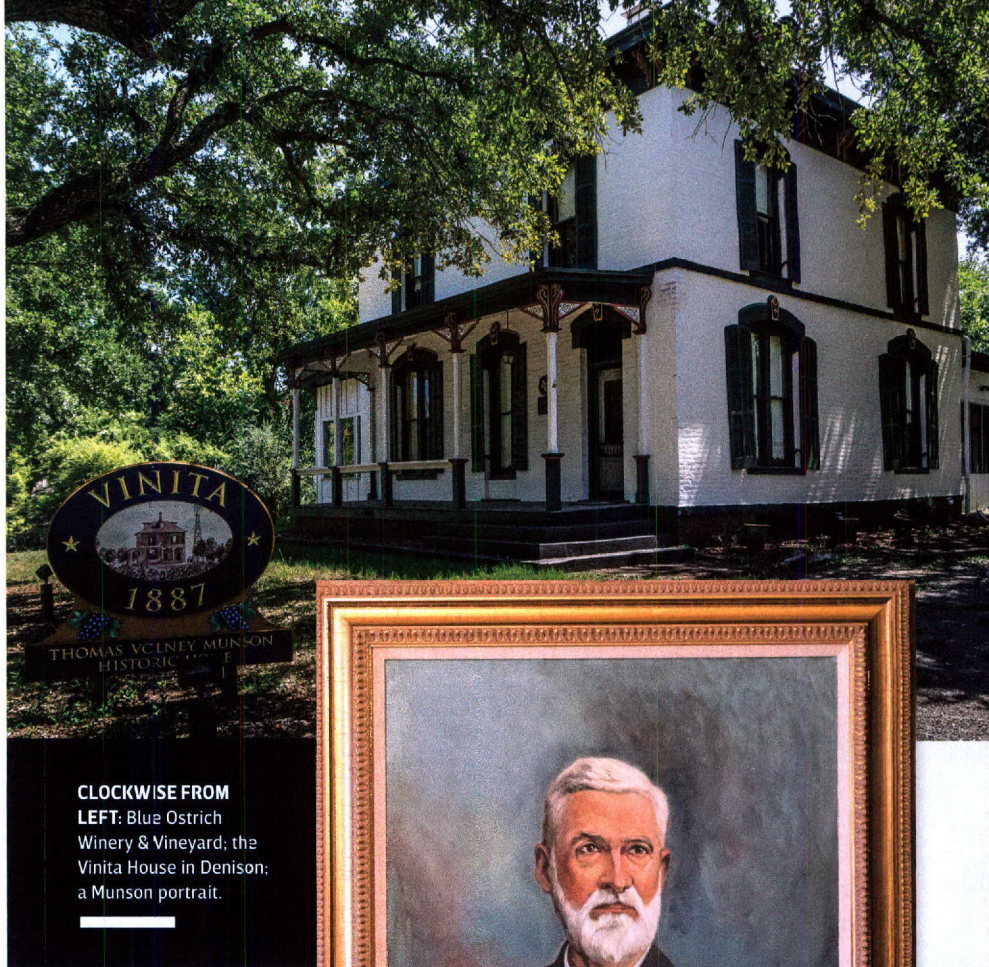
In the mid-19th century, French wine was an international phenomenon and big business, accounting for more than 15% of France's federal tax revenue. But in 1865, a root louse called phylloxera began wiping out the country's vineyards. Desperate for a solution, the French reached out to American botanists, including Munson, who was known for his pioneering documentation of native grapevines in Texas and the Southwest.

Munson found and sent specific disease-resistant grapevine cuttings to France, where farmers grafted their grapevines to the Texas roots—literally binding the two together—and crossed them with local plants. The tactics stemmed the tide of phylloxera and saved a range of delicate French grape varieties, including cabernet, merlot, pinot noir, and chardonnay. Even now, 135 years later, France grows wine grapes rooted on the descendants of Texas native plants.

"In Europe they know more about Munson than people over here do, but their livelihood was dependent on those vines," says Roy Renfro, the retired founding director of the T.V. Munson Center and co-author of the biography *Grape Man of Texas: Thomas Volney Munson and the Origins of American Viticulture*. "Even the young people today still know about him. They have carried on the story, and when their parents and grandparents take them into the vineyards, they show them the vines."

Born in Illinois in 1843, Munson grew up on a farm and attended college in Kentucky, where he became interested in the idea of improving grapes. As Munson wrote in his 1909 book, *Foundations of American Grape Culture*, he began his life's work of experimenting with grape hybrids "so as eventually to supply every use and every season with this most beautiful, most wholesome and nutritious, most certain and profitable fruit."

Munson and his wife, Nellie Bell Munson, moved their young family to Denison in 1876 at the urging of Munson's brother. W.B. Munson was a lawyer and land speculator who helped establish



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Blue Ostrich Winery & Vineyard; the Vinita House in Denison; a Munson portrait.

Denison with the arrival of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad in 1872. He trumpeted the region's agricultural potential, and when T.V. arrived, he discovered eight wild grape varieties growing on the Red River's banks and bottoms. "I had found my grape paradise!" he later wrote.

Munson opened a commercial nursery, and each fall he would set out across the country in an effort to document every species of wild grape he could find. He scoured Texas, Indian Territory, Mexico, and nearly every state, collecting cuttings and sending them back to Denison by train. By his own estimate, he traveled

some 75,000 miles on these expeditions.

"One of the things that I was struck by most in researching him was his absolute dedication to what he was doing," says Sherrie McLeRoy, an Aledo-based historian and writer who co-authored *Grape Man of Texas*. "Fortunately he had a very understanding family who weren't bent out of shape every time he disappeared into the woods or across the country hunting for more grapes."

Munson's fame grew in the field of horticulture as did his business, Denison Nursery, which expanded into one of the largest in the South. The nursery shipped to customers across the country—everything from fruit trees to Munson's patented "diamond scuffer hoe."

"In Europe they know more about Munson than people over here do, but their livelihood was dependent on those vines."



Grape Times

Blue Ostrich Winery & Vineyard,

5611 FM 2382 in Saint Jo, opens its tasting room and pavilion Thu-Sun. Call first: At press time, reservations were recommended as the winery reopened from the pandemic shutdown. Blue Ostrich welcomes the public to help handpick grapes during the annual harvest, held in late August or early September, depending on conditions. 940-995-3100; blueostrich.net

The T.V. Munson Center & Memorial Vineyard,

9356 Grayson Drive in Denison, offers tours by appointment. 903-415-2653; grayson.edu/pathways/viticulture-and-enology

The Vinita House,

530 W. Hanna St. in Denison, offers tours upon request. 903-463-8621

By that time, the phylloxera blight had brought European grape growers to their knees. The pest would eventually destroy two-thirds of the continent's vineyards, including the majority in France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany. Remedies such as pesticides and field floods proved ineffective or impractical. Initial efforts to introduce American rootstock had failed because the new varieties withered in French soil. That added to skepticism among the Europeans, who were already wary because, decades earlier, American imports had introduced phylloxera in the first place.

Nevertheless, desperation drove the French to turn to the United States, where native grapes evolved to tolerate phylloxera. When a French delegation visited Munson in Denison, the Texas grape expert identified a few species of grapes found in Central Texas, especially the Bell County area around present-day Fort Hood, where the limey soil is similar to that of southern France. The Frenchmen who visited Munson covered 10,000 miles in their research trip across the country, collecting

vines along the way. But ultimately it was the cuttings from the scrubby limestone hills of Texas that turned the tide of the vineyard blight.

While Munson's renown has faded with time, his legacy remains front and center in Denison. Through the efforts of Renfro and the W.B. Munson Foundation, Munson's 1887 home, dubbed "Vinita," has been restored. Munson lived with his wife and seven children in the 10-room Victorian Italianate home until his death in 1913. Visitors can see the cellar where Munson made his own wine and kept preserved foods, as well as the second-floor windows opening to a roof where the family slept on unbearably hot nights.

At Grayson College's West Extension campus, the Munson Memorial Vineyard preserves 65 of the 300 grape varieties Munson developed. (The other 235 have been lost to history.) The vineyard gets about 100 calls a year from grape growers across the country who request cuttings to grow their own Munson vines.

Just up the hill from the vineyard, the college's Viticulture and Enology Program instructs students in growing grapes (viticulture), making wine (enology), and distilling. Munson photographs and awards adorn the walls, including a replica of the French Legion of Honor medal that was presented to Munson in 1888.

Whitehead, at Blue Ostrich, is among the many Texas winemakers who have attended Grayson College's program over the years. He notes that Munson's work informs the science that goes into planting a vineyard and choosing the best rootstock for the local conditions. Like most Texas wineries, Blue Ostrich grows Old World grapevines that have been grafted to rootstocks native to this country.

"Munson thought there was something special about the grapes here in Texas, and low and behold, we are growing Old World grapes very successfully here in Texas," Whitehead reflects. "If you think about it, we sent that Texas rootstock over to Europe to help with their grapes, and now we have their grapes growing here in Texas." 🍷



Where She's From

Sarah Jarosz reflects on her Texas roots and returning to the stage

By Clayton Maxwell

When she was a student at Wimberley High School, bluegrass prodigy Sarah Jarosz was already mesmerizing audiences across the country with her nimble mandolin playing, honey-rich voice, and down-to-earth demeanor. Today, the 29-year-old carries the landscapes and spirit of the Hill Country with her, touring the world as a solo Americana artist and as a founding member of I'm With Her, a progressive folk trio with Sara Watkins and Aoife O'Donovan. Jarosz's fifth album, *World on the Ground*, released this summer, reverberates with characters and imagery spun from Jarosz's memories of growing up in Wimberley. Although she has lived in New York City since 2013

"There's this wealth of memories and experiences from my childhood in Texas, and I want to write about it."

and counts three Grammy Awards among her achievements, Jarosz says her creativity still draws on the hills, rivers, and songs of Texas.

Q: *World on the Ground* is different from your other records in that it digs into your Texas roots. What helped you make that turn back to Texas in your songwriting?

A: It started out as just a conversation about songwriting in general with John Leventhal, the great producer I worked with on this record. He was urging me to get outside of myself in the way that I wrote songs, and to think about being more of a storyteller, and even writing from a character

perspective. And I asked myself, “What is the music that I’m most connected to in my life right now and want to try to emulate and learn from?” It’s the Texas singer-songwriters that I grew up hearing. My parents were playing their records around the house; people like Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Nanci Griffith, Shawn Colvin—the list is long.

Q: *And they brought you back to Texas?*

A: In a way. I love how in music, when you’ve had an experience with a song, even if it was a long time ago, and it seeped into you, you are then able to rediscover it on your own terms later, maybe with different life experiences. You hear the words in a deeper way. That’s what was happening to me with all of those Texas writers who I mentioned. I think that realization made me think, “Oh, I’ve never written about where I’m from.” It just seems so simple to say to you now, but I did have that realization of like, “Oh, my gosh, there’s this wealth of memories and experience from my childhood in Texas, and I want to write about it.”

Q: *I saw you play at Fischer Fest in 2008, when you were still in high school. Guy Clark and other Texas music legends were playing, too. How do you look back on those days?*

A: I have vivid memories of driving down Fischer Store Road to get to the Rice Festival [now called Fischer Fest]. I’ve been touring around the world for a long time now, and that stretch of road is still one of my favorite places to drive. It’s a magical feeling the way it winds down through the hills and trees, over the creeks and rivers, and ends up at Fischer Hall, a magical Texas dance hall. I think it took me moving away from Texas to be able to realize how magical those experiences were.

Q: *In a lot of these songs, the characters are torn between a desire to leave their hometown and the comfort of staying*

put. How does that play out for you? Did you ever experience that tension?

A: Yes. I wouldn’t call it tension on my part because I am very fortunate to have had a wonderful family and upbringing, and I loved so much of my life in Texas growing up. I had a very positive experience. It was just the normal adolescent feeling of being from a very tiny town and feeling that there was much more out there I wanted to experience. I was fortunate because I was a musician, and I was able to go to camps in the summer to study music. I had tastes of travel. Those experiences intensified that feeling of, “Oh man, there’s so much more than this. I want to leave so that I can figure out what that is.”

Q: *Tell me about the cypress trees—such a big presence on Hill Country rivers. Did the cypresses along Cypress Creek in Wimberley inspire your song “Orange and Blue”?*

A: Yes, they did. They also show up in “Eve,” the first song. I wound up co-writing four songs with John Leventhal; he really likes to be a part of the writing process, which was a big part of why I wanted to work with him. For “Orange and Blue,” he had the piano melody written already and actually recorded about half of it because we still had to figure out the form. It was this new experience for me. He was like, “Oh, here’s the music. Now you write the words.”

Q: *How did that work out?*

A: When he played me that beautiful piano melody, I can’t even describe it. It was just a flood of images of the cypress trees. It was this instantaneous vision of being transported back, and I really do specifically think of Cypress Creek that runs through the middle of Wimberley. I also think about Blue Hole. I think you have to have a reservation to go there now, but you could just go whenever you wanted when I was a kid. I almost envisioned this dreamlike state of digging into the dirt beneath those cypress trees

in Blue Hole. That’s the place I’m imagining when I wrote that song. As soon as I had the image of the cypress trees, the rest of the words came flooding with it, which as a songwriter, those types of gifts for songs are few and far between. They do feel like little gifts. Every time I sing it, now even, it feels like a little box that I get to open up and appreciate what’s inside.

Q: *I know no one can tell the future right now, but when you’re allowed to start playing concerts again, do you plan to play these new songs in Texas?*

A: 100%. There’s no way to know when, but the idea of doing a special concert in Wimberley, or even out at Fischer Hall, is thrilling. I definitely have dreams with these songs and their connection to that landscape, and so many of the people there. I greatly look forward to when I can play anywhere again, but especially in Texas.

Q: *I’m sure you miss that energy of playing for a live audience.*

A: Oh, yes. I miss it so much right now. Everybody is doing their best to try to replace it with all these livestreams and everything, but it really doesn’t come close. It doesn’t compare. At least for me, I feel like on a performance front, it’s a very unnatural, strange thing to play into a screen. We don’t know when, but I know that we’re going to have to get back to live music. I look forward to that day. 🎸

Find more about Sarah Jarosz, including future performances and links to her music, at sarahjarosz.com.

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VINTAGE

BY TRACES OF TEXAS



For A Poultry Sum

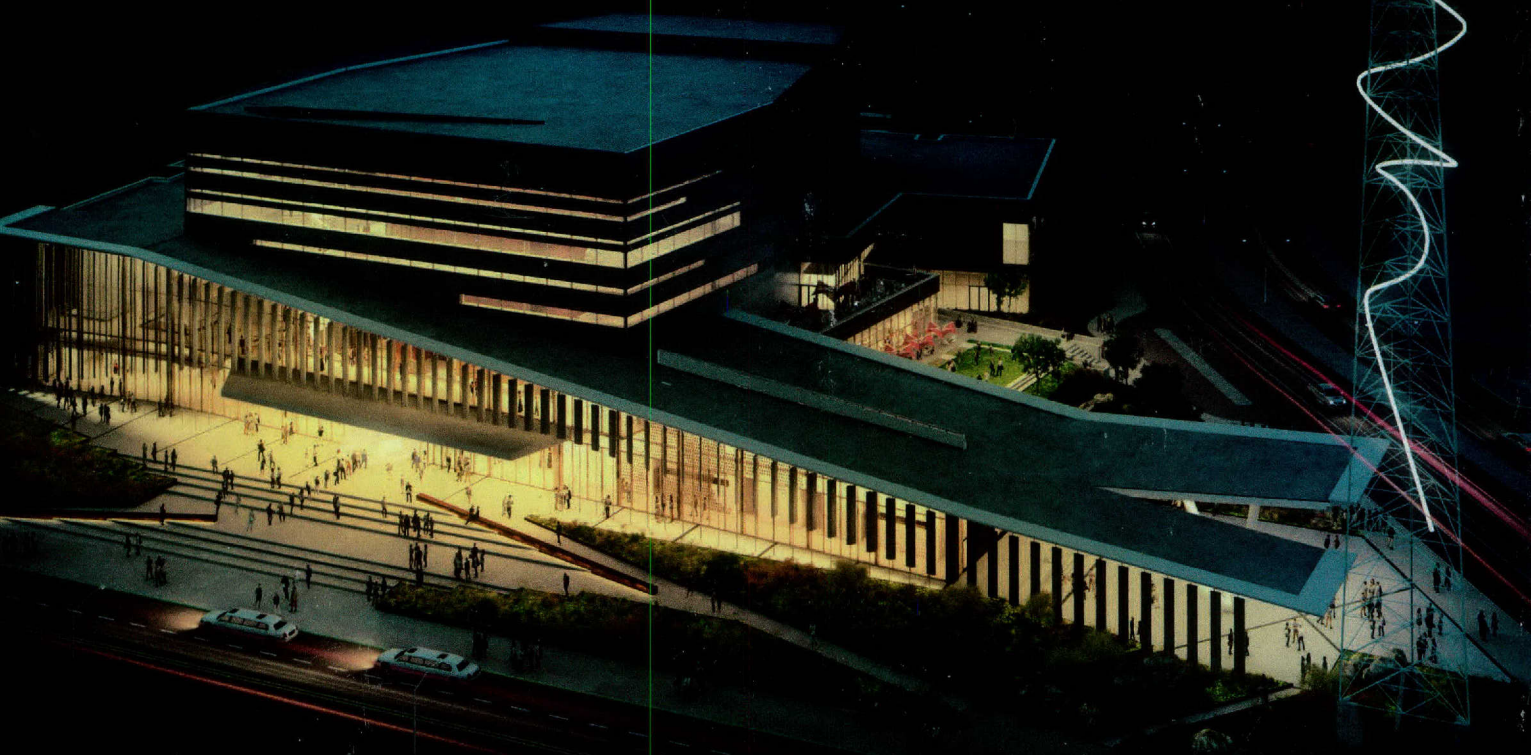
WEATHERFORD, 1939

Weatherford's First Monday Trade Days began in 1900 when merchant A.H. Gernsbacher first advertised "Stray Day" bargains. Vendors gathered monthly at the courthouse square to sell produce, hay, and livestock (stray or otherwise). In 1939, the market caught the attention of photographer Russell Lee, who took this picture of a woman selling chickens as he traveled the country to document the Great Depression for the Farm Security Administration. Stray Day eventually became known as First Monday Trade Days or, more commonly, First Monday. In the 1970s, the market moved from the courthouse square to the old Santa Fe Railroad yard. These days, as many as 8,000 people attend the weekend market, where vendors sell everything from rabbits to artisanal soap to the occasional yak. 🐔

Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com.

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