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IN THE
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Featuring

**Southmost
Taco Trail**

BY JOSÉ R. RALAT

RGV Bootmakers

BY W.K. STRATTON

SEPTEMBER 2019

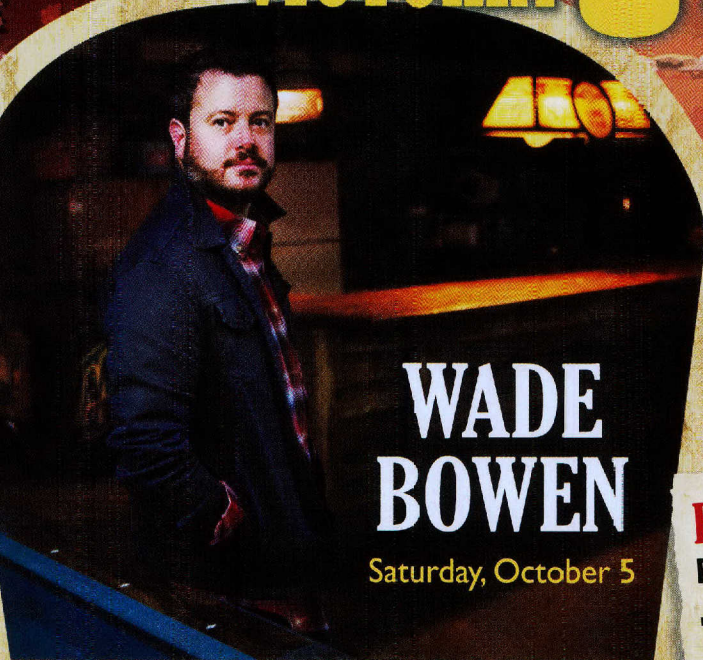
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VICTORIA  TEXAS



WADE BOWEN

Saturday, October 5

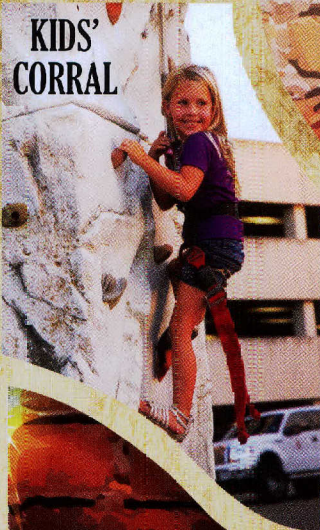


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EDITOR'S
NOTE



Henry Camargo, owner of Camargo's Western Boots in Mercedes, has been making cowboy boots for 45 years.

The World at Our Feet

Texas has always served as a cultural crossroads. Before it was the longest stretch of the United States' southern border with Mexico, it was a boundary between Spain and French Louisiana. Long before that, it was home to a number of diverse indigenous tribes. Our name, even, derives from a Spanish interpretation of a Caddo greeting meaning "friend." And the value of the state's most prolific commodities—cattle, cotton, and oil—has been dependent on links to the world at large.

For the past 300 years, people from all over the world have come to settle here. It's why Texas boasts the most ethnically diverse county and large city—Fort Bend and Houston, respectively—and is the second most diverse state in the country.

This issue offers many ways to experience the state's distinctive confluence of cultures. W.K. Statton heads to Mercedes and Raymondville, in the Rio Grande Valley, where master bootmakers carry on a multigenerational tradition that started with the Mexican vaquero and inspired the

American cowboy. José Ralat eats his way through the taquerias of La Southmost, in Brownsville, rendering the constant debate between which city in Texas has the best tacos—Austin, Houston, or San Antonio—beside the point. In Carrollton, we

visit a Russian bathhouse and restaurant where Chef Niyara Alieva serves up favorites from her native Uzbekistan; and in El Paso, we tour a Himalayan kingdom on the campus of The University of Texas at El Paso. The campus' Bhutanese archi-

tecture and artistic offerings represent the oldest connection between the U.S. and the remote Buddhist country between India and China. Each story weaves a unique thread into Texas' colorful tapestry and offers travelers the chance to experience something new.

**For the past
300 years, people
from all over the
world have come
to settle in Texas.**

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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Welcome to the Taco Capital of Texas

Follow the taqueria trail on Southmost Boulevard in Brownsville—home to the most uniformly excellent tacos in the state.

By José R. Ralat

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These Boots Are Made for Gawkin'

Two Rio Grande Valley bootmakers proudly continue their multigenerational tradition of craftsmanship.

*By W.K. Stratton
Photographs by Kenny Braun*

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Just outside Denton, visit the training grounds of some of the most elite equines in the world.

*By Dana Joseph
Photographs by Dave Shafer*

EAST ADAMS STREET in Brownsville's historic district at dusk.

Festivals, Fairs, Fun

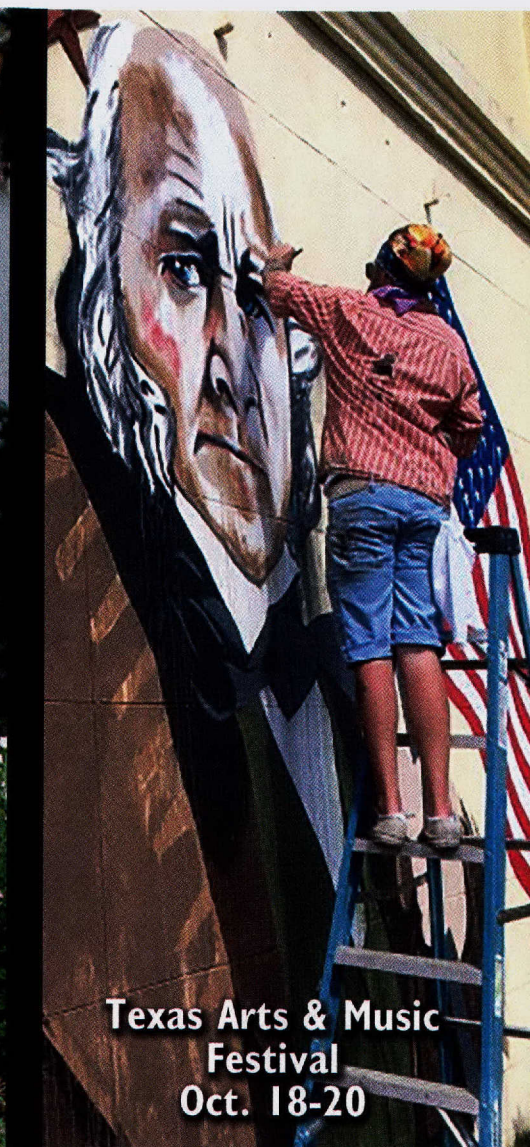
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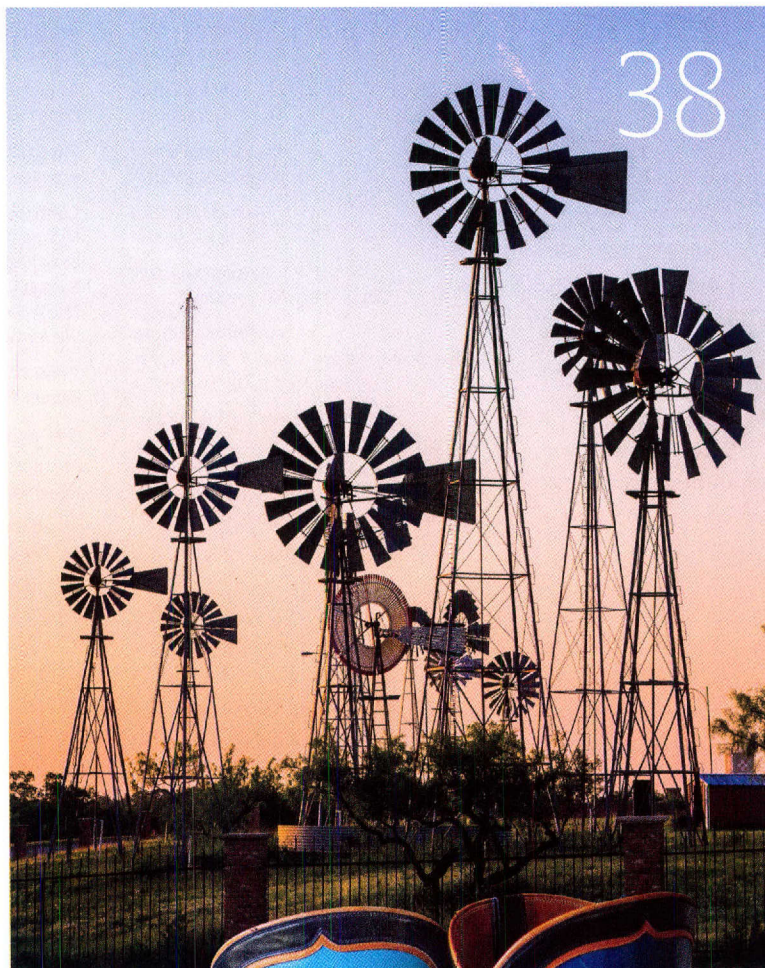
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Photo by Kenny Braun
Shot in Downtown McAllen

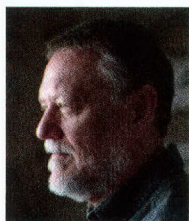
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Behind the Story



It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it. Normally when writer José R. Ralat explores a taco destination, he plans an itinerary that allows "at least a little time for the food to settle." But on Southmost Boulevard in Brownsville—featured in "Welcome to the Taco Capital of Texas" (Page 42)—the concentration of amazing taquerias was so dense "the trip nearly broke my spirit," he jokes. Ralat, the author of the upcoming book, *American Tacos: A History and Guide to the Taco Trail North of the Border*, says his Southmost experience outdid other memorable reporting adventures, including a weeklong trek through Denver, Phoenix, and Tucson that involved a surprise snowstorm, altitude sickness, and a lost wallet; and even an El Paso visit during which he tried 17 taquerias in one day. But Ralat hasn't been scared off Southmost forever. "I'd risk another breakdown," he says.

Featured Contributors



W.K. Stratton

The Round Rock-based writer drove to the Rio Grande Valley to be fitted by master bootmakers Armando Rios Jr. and Henry Camargo for "These Boots are Made for Gawkin" (Page 52). "I wanted some great boots but also to plug into the rich traditions and culture of the Valley," he says. Stratton is the author of the *Los Angeles Times* bestseller *The Wild Bunch: Sam Peckinpah, a Revolution in Hollywood*, and *the Making of a Legendary Film* and eight other books. His work has appeared in *Outside* and *GQ*, and he is a fellow of the Texas Institute of Letters.



Michael J. Mooney

Based in Dallas, Mooney visited a handful of the state's finest drinking establishments for "The Magic of a Hotel Bar" (Page 12). "I don't need much of an excuse to hang out at a hotel bar," he says. "It's a fascinating glimpse of humanity." He's a *New York Times* bestselling author whose work has also appeared in *GQ* and *ESPN the Magazine*. Mooney is also co-director of the annual Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Conference, held at the University of North Texas in Denton.

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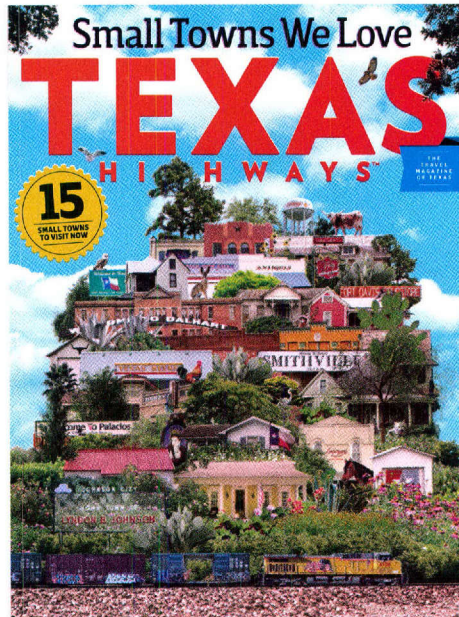
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James M. Bass

MERGE

I have traveled all over the world, and one of the best trips

I have taken was through rural Texas—from El Paso to Galveston. Sometimes it was so remote I couldn't get anything on my car radio. A great state.

Tom Jeffris, Janesville, Wisconsin



KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S TEXAS

I took my Hamilton High School students to Indian Creek. We sat by Katherine Anne Porter's grave and read one of her stories.

Donna Anglin, Hamilton

FRIO 101

I grew up in Texas but never made it to Garner State Park. Made my first trip this Memorial Day. It was fantastic, and the Frio River was so beautiful. The trip sparked an interest to rent a camper for our next trip in the fall.

Gina Bischoff Ferriera, The Woodlands

Small Town Talk

I was so excited that Orange made the list of small towns ["Small Towns to Visit Now," August]. We've lived here six years, and we love this little town! But I am confused why the article suggested the neighboring town for food instead of listing one of the many amazing locally owned cafés we treasure here in Orange: The Old Orange Cafe, Boardwalk Grille, Lucy's Cafe and Bakery, Spanky's, Robert's Meat Market and Steakhouse (that is still a genuine working meat market!), Guadalajara, Reel Cajun... These are all local gems.

Kimberly Murray, Orange

I have two nominations for small-town spotlights. I live in Amarillo, and my favorite drive is to Dumas, about 47 miles north. The Window on the Plains Museum details Moore County and has antique tractors, buggies, automobiles, and toys, plus an art museum with work by area artists. I also enjoy going to McLean, about 75 miles east of Amarillo. It has The Devil's Rope Museum, which covers barbed wire and its history. Plus, McLean

is home to the very first Phillips 66 station, which is still standing and makes a great place for pictures, especially if you're driving an antique automobile along old Route 66.

Debbie McDougal, Amarillo

Down at The Stampede

I was born and raised in San Angelo but have lived in the Midwest for more than 10 years. Mary Helen Specht's article ["Let's Waltz, Boys!" August] truly hit home for me. She writes wonderfully about the singular experience of coming from an out-of-the-way stretch of West Texas and the mixed emotions and sense of dislocation one feels after leaving such a place.

Tyler McGaughey, Chicago, Illinois

Mary Helen Specht does a great job capturing the essence of Big Spring and its musical heritage, but then simply cannot resist the temptation to cast race into the mix. She refers to country music culture as lily-white, a slap at great black artists like Charley Pride, Darius Rucker, Trini Triggs, Cowboy Troy, Kane Brown, and numerous others who've sung their way into fans'

hearts—both white and black.

Mark Greathouse, Fairfield, Pennsylvania

Nostalgic Nod

Thanks for the great article by Wes Ferguson on the Sabine River ["Ghosts of Pine Island," July]. It brought back so many memories of my childhood. I grew up in Port Arthur in the '50s, and my uncle had a camp on the river between Orange and Deweyville, a little community called Morgan's Bluff. We used to walk through the woods to a secluded little lake called Will Cooper. I caught my first bass there and also used to set trot lines across the Sabine. Simple, fun times for sure.

Roy Birkelbach, La Marque

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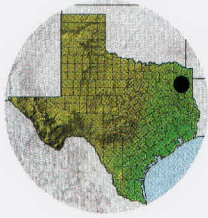






Take Refuge

At Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge south of Alamo, the Spanish moss dripping from the trees invokes a sense of tranquility—and a touch of otherworldliness—in a park created to protect migratory birds. While wandering the refuge's 14 miles of trails, keep an eye and ear out for resident birds like green jays, chachalacas, and great kiskadees, which are joined by migratory species in the fall and spring.



Kilgore

A true-blue Rangerette explains why there's more to this East Texas town than oil and the drill team

By John Lumpkin



SHELLEY WAYNE presides over a drill team summer camp at Kilgore College.



TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

14,862



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

16



YEAR FOUNDED:

1872



NEAREST CITY:

Longview, 12 miles north



MARQUEE EVENTS:

East Texas Oilmen's Chili Cookoff, Oct. 24;
East Texas Pipe Organ Festival, Nov. 10-14;
Rangerette Revels, April;
Texas Shakespeare Festival, June-July.



MAP IT:

Rangerette Museum, 1100 Broadway Blvd.;
East Texas Oil Museum, 1301 S. Henderson Blvd.

“People automatically associate Kilgore with oil and Rangerettes,” says Shelley Wayne, who should know. Wayne’s husband works in the petrochemical business, her daughter was a Rangerette, and Wayne herself was a member of Kilgore College’s world-famous drill team before becoming its choreographer. But she adds, “There is much more to this town.” Founded in 1872 by the Great Northern Railroad, Kilgore changed dramatically with the discovery of oil in 1930. Derricks soon crowded downtown, comprising the “World’s Richest Acre”—today a collection of restored derricks along a manicured downtown strip. Kilgore College opened in 1935, and in 1940, the newly formed Rangerettes took the field at halftime of Kilgore Rangers’ football games, establishing a precedent for drill teams and precision line dancing. After serving as captain of her high school drill team, Wayne arrived as a freshman in 1985. “Everything I am as a professional was shaped by my being here,” she says.

Rangerette Roots

“When I was in high school in Houston, I kept hearing about the Kilgore Rangerettes. My drill team director handed me several college brochures and pointed to the one for Kilgore. ‘This is where you belong,’ she said. I just completed my 26th year as the assistant director and choreographer.”

Taking the Field

“Our founder, Gussie Nell Davis, was trained as a pianist. In the late 1930s, Miss Davis was sought out by Kilgore College President B.E. Masters, who told her, ‘I want something to keep people in their seats at halftime of football games.’ What Miss Davis created was precision dance, now a worldwide phenomenon. In the past two summers, we’ve been invited to Switzerland and Italy for performances. Our history is on display at the Rangerette Museum on campus.”

College Life

“Kilgore College is not just the Rangerettes—absolutely not. Our photo journalism department is top notch, led for years by O. Rufus Lovett. Raymond Caldwell was director of the Fine Arts Division when he founded the Texas Shakespeare Festival, which has the only professional theater company in East Texas. Our football team has won the national junior college championship twice, and Evelyn Blalock coached women’s basketball for 20 years, winning three national titles.”

World’s Richest Acre

“The first things you see coming into Kilgore are the oil derricks. My husband is in the downstream side of the petrochemical industry—working the refineries and chemical plants—so he’s usually not affected by the ups and downs of the upstream side of the business, where they pull raw crude and natural gas out of the ground. For the longest time, Kilgore’s economy was driven solely by the upstream side—great for two years, just okay for a while, then two years of no hope. Though it’s not as big as it was in the 1930s to ‘50s, oil and education are still the two biggest portions of our economy, so much so that our campus includes the East Texas Oil Museum.”

Culturally Speaking

“A lot of it goes back to oil. The annual Pipe Organ Festival is quite an event. We have beautiful pipe organs in our largest churches, and oil fortunes were part of that. On our campus is the Van Cliburn Auditorium. Van Cliburn’s father was in the oil business and his mother was a piano teacher when they moved here when he was 6. He graduated from Kilgore High School.”

J.R.’s for Short

“Our favorite restaurant is J.R.’s—that’s Jack Ryan’s Steak and Chophouse—but we shorten names in Kilgore. The owners are culinary geniuses. They trained in the big city and brought ‘upscale’ home to East Texas. There’s also The Back Porch close to campus. It brings in singers like Ally Venable, who is going to be somebody, from right here in Kilgore.”

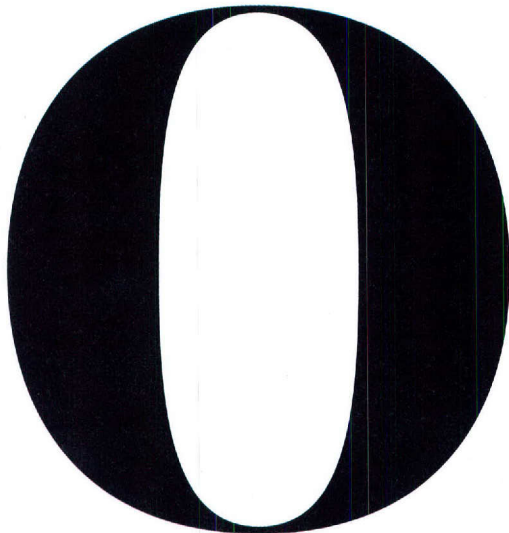


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The Magic of a Hotel Bar

Some stories you can only share with a stranger

By Michael J. Mooney



Outside, the night is humid and flat. But inside, it feels like the setting of a Raymond Carver story. Standing by the stone archway entrance to the bar, like two cylindrical centurion guards, is a pair of 10-foot rusted tanks. They face a hotel lobby full of old-fashioned leather chairs and couches and checkered tile mixed with exposed industrial beams and pipes and valves. Through the archway is a huge Castilian chamber, a sort of steampunk-chic bar and lounge with tall cement pillars, an arched cement ceiling, an unfinished wooden floor, and a faintly glowing brick fireplace.

In the corner, a man in a pink polo shirt talks quietly into his phone. Two other men, still wearing their golf clothes, share cocktails and laughs on the couches by the entrance. Behind the bar, the two bartenders on duty are recounting a few of their favorite stories about the place: how the building used to be the Pearl brewery and this room was the bottling room, how the chandelier was made with the brass wheel from the old bottle-labeling machine, how a certain lead actor from the *Lonesome Dove* miniseries likes to come in and sit in a corner upstairs, away from the crowd. As soon as the bartenders see the actor, they start making his margarita.

This is the Sternewirth Tavern & Club Room at Hotel Emma, in San Antonio. The bar's name comes from the "Sternewirth Privilege," an

1800s tradition that entitled employees of breweries to free beer during the workday. It's the kind of place that shows up on all sorts of Best Hotel Bars lists, understandably. On top of the celebrity sightings, custom cocktails, and modish décor—some of the giant brewery tanks have been converted into booths—you can also take your drink to one of the leather chairs in the massive, two-story, 3,700-volume library.

This is the first stop on my three-day journey to hang out in a few *destination* hotel bars in Texas, to commune with strangers and hear fantastical stories, to experience the fascinating interactions that tend to occur in the tomorrow-be-damned atmosphere a great hotel bar conjures. After two hours on a stool at the end of the bar, though, I unfortunately don't have much.

A few small groups come and go, but it's been a slow, quiet night—that is, until a voice behind me says something along the lines of: "You are holding my possessions hostage!" And, "I'll be forced to turn the matter over to the police!"

When I turn around, I see a man in his 40s, wearing tennis shoes, exercise clothes, and a baseball cap, and he's ranting into his phone—leaving a message for someone.

He puts his phone down, exasperated. Seeing that the bartenders and I have taken notice, he tries to explain. He's from Orange County, California, he says. He's in town visiting his girlfriend. They had a fight, he left and came here, and now she's not answering her phone. He's not completely sober and doesn't get into much detail, but he's worried about work meetings he has back home tomorrow afternoon, worried about his computer and his clothes, worried about his whole relationship.

He orders me a drink, and one for himself, and he asks if anyone can help distract him.

"Tell me a story," he says. He's tense, trying not to look at his phone.

I'm sure I can come up with something, but before I get the chance, the barback, a barrel-chested man in his 20s,

declares, "I have a story."

The barback says a few years ago he dated a woman he met at the gym. She was 18 and had a young kid and no car. Pretty soon this guy was driving his new girlfriend everywhere she needed to go. At some point, he explains, he had some sort of seizure and ended up in the hospital.

"Oh no," says the man from Orange County.

"That's when she ended it," the barback says.

"Right there in the hospital?" Orange County asks.

The barback takes a breath.

"Over the phone," he says.

The man from Orange County grimaces and finishes his beer. Soon, though, he's back on his phone, sending his girlfriend a series of frantic texts. It's five, then 10—a mix of insults and threats to call the police or their mutual friends. Then he calls

again, leaves another angry message. Then more texts.

At least three people are watching now.

"What do I do?" the man asks.

His computer! His clothes! His meetings!

"It could be worse," the barback says.

"You could be in a hospital getting broken up with over the phone."

This seems to calm the man from Orange County. He quietly pays his tab and disappears into the night. The most interesting story of the evening turns out to be a truncated, unresolved excerpt.

OFTENTIMES, A GOOD HOTEL BAR has soft lighting, unobtrusive music, and delicious drinks. It's populated by a collection of travelers: everyone in the middle of their own adventure, all crossing paths by happenstance. Some of them are in town for work, some for vacation,

some for reasons nobody could guess—and now they're all trying to unwind from something. All of that, plus alcohol, makes the patrons of a hotel bar more congenial than they might be otherwise, more likely to open up about the most interesting parts of their lives.

The conversations at a hotel bar, between total strangers, are as real as a puff of smoke. As soon as the wind blows, it's almost like they never existed at all. The people here probably won't meet again. And even if they do, they may never again acknowledge what was said over an untold number of cocktails with a stranger.

There's something magical about that. It's a chance to understand your fellow humans in new ways, with the freedom of anonymity. It's a chance to confess to someone you'll never see again. I travel a lot and end up in a lot of hotel bars, which

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means I've listened to strangers tell me things their best friends and closest family didn't know. Ambitions. Predilections. Personal failings.

A hotel bar is also an opportunity to be anyone you want for a few hours. If you're usually loud, maybe now you're quiet. If you're usually reserved, maybe now you're lively. Maybe you're not someone worried about a big project at work or an argument at home or what's in the bank. Maybe, just for a moment when it doesn't matter, you're the best, funniest version of yourself. Maybe, among strangers, you're someone who's already accomplished some of the things the real you wants to do in life.

At least one time, I did that and it came true. I was 24, an aspiring but mostly unpublished magazine writer, sitting in the bar at the Worthington Renaissance Hotel in Fort Worth. The granite bar and wood paneling and perfume-scented air made me feel like I'd somehow stumbled into a private club. I remember a bartender telling people that a certain *Indiana Jones* star came in there often, something about parking his plane somewhere close.

Conversation among the four or five strangers brewed in the way it almost always does in a hotel bar, and soon there were short introductions and explanations of why we were all there. One young man said he was an officer in the Air Force, in town for a meeting. One woman said she was in Fort Worth on vacation with her family and needed a few minutes away.

I was there because it was my birthday and my then-girlfriend splurged on a discounted room and subsequently fell asleep before 10 p.m. For some reason though, I didn't say any of that. Instead, I said I was there because I'd won a writing award. Which wasn't true at all. When the vacationing mom asked what I'd written about, I mumbled something cringeworthy about "documenting the downtrodden." A few people congratulated me.

I might have forgotten about that night, and that strange lie, except a year later I was in a different hotel bar, and I had just won an award (and a check!) for



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my writing. It was for a story about the lives of struggling people living in the margins of society. It felt like, in the magical perfumed air of that swanky hotel bar in Fort Worth, I'd somehow conjured my own future.

Another time, at a hotel bar in Washington, D.C., a bartender saw my beard and long hair and asked if I was a musician. I have absolutely no musical talent, but for basically no reason I lied and explained that yes, I was "not Mumford, but one of the Sons." I wasn't too familiar with the band's catalog, so I was hoping there wouldn't be any follow-up questions. A few years later, at a different hotel bar in a different city thousands of miles away, I started talking with a stranger who happened to be working security at a concert the next night. He asked if I'd be interested in free tickets. The band: Mumford & Sons.

That's the kind of magic I had in mind when I set off on this trip. Three nights, three cities, three hotel bars with that behind-the-velvet-rope vibe—and three chances to bond with my fellow travelers. Trying to convince a man at Hotel Emma not to escalate a domestic dispute is a modest start.

THE SECOND BAR I VISIT IS AT THE Driskill Hotel in downtown Austin. In the lounge, the head of a gigantic long-horn steer hangs above the fireplace, looking over a sea of soft leather couches, a bronze tin-stamped ceiling, and an 8-foot-wide sculpture of an Old West scene. The Driskill is probably the most famous hotel in Texas. Opened in 1886, the entire building has that unmistakable frontier feeling—the barstools are even covered in cowhide. One of the bartenders informs me of the legend that the lobby

was the site of a gunfight between two attorneys in the early 1900s.

Tonight the couches and tables are filled with business travelers eating dinner and watching basketball. There are a few pockets of 30-somethings but the crowd leans more toward older men in slacks and polos. At the bar, a few couples stop in for a pre-dinner drink. A woman in a red sweater is sipping a martini and reading *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. A man two seats down from her, wearing jeans and boots, eyes the game on TV while drinking his bourbon. A business woman, scrolling through her phone, has a glass of rosé and a dinner of Brussels sprouts and french fries.

I notice several lamps around the bar are made of old revolvers. The woman with the Brussels sprouts and a couple in their 40s sitting to her left all listen in as one of the bartenders explains that the



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guns are all Colt 8-shot revolvers from the 1850s, made for the U.S. Navy but sold to and used by the Texas Rangers.

Soon the Brussels sprouts woman asks if anyone wants some of her french fries; then there's some vague discussion of aging and how being an adult is one big mix of sprouts and fries and wine. After two or three glasses, she asks the bartender if she can just take the rest of the bottle up to her room. Before she leaves—and I'm not sure how the conversation got here—she announces to anyone within a small radius: "If I finish that bottle, I'll end up naked, but I will make my 8 a.m. meeting!"

She adds, as she walks away, "Have a good life!"

Within a few minutes there's a new group: two women and a man, all in their late 20s or early 30s. They order three Aperol spritzes. Then three vodka

martinis (called "batinis"). One of the women explains that her friends grew up Mormon and didn't drink for most of their lives. Now they do, and while they're in Austin she's helping them try different mixed drinks to see which ones they like. Neither of the former teetotalers finish their martinis.

I've been at the bar for about two hours, watching people cycle in and out, when a young woman walks in wearing 5-inch heels and a long dress. She sits two seats away from me, tells the bartender she'll have what she usually has, and receives a glass of white wine. She pays from a roll of one-dollar bills. She introduces herself, says she's a student at the University of Texas who lives downtown. Her major: the very vague-sounding "business administration."

In a hotel bar, I remind myself, everyone has secrets. Some people are

working. Some are out for adventure. For some, it's both.

I watch her make conversation with the man in jeans and boots. She's quiet, but I hear her mention that she likes Miami and Las Vegas. Then she starts a conversation with another man, sitting on the other side of the bar. Then, after half an hour or so, she finishes her glass of wine and heads toward the hotel lobby, off to look for magic elsewhere.

THE FINAL NIGHT OF THE HOTEL bar tour is at the Adolphus in downtown Dallas. As I drive up Interstate-35, replaying the faces and stories from the last two nights in my head like an imaginary podcast, I start thinking more about why I like hotel bars so much. I understand that it's about the taste of luxury,

continued on Page 102



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DRIVE



THE COSTUME on display inside the Lhakhang, a structure on UTEP's campus, was worn by Bhutanese visitors who performed festival dances.

Bhutan in a Border Town

Visit the Himalayan country without a passport at the University of Texas at El Paso

By Robyn Ross

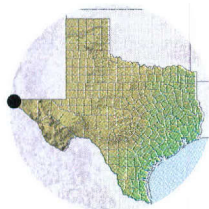
MURALS IN THE
Lhakang tell the life stories of the Buddha and Guru Rinpoche, who introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighth century.

In 1914, *National Geographic* published an article about the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, a remote Buddhist country tucked between India and China. El Paso resident Kathleen Worrell, who was married to the dean of the college that became the University of Texas at El Paso, was intrigued by the photographs of Bhutanese fortresses and monasteries. She also noted a resemblance between the rugged Himalayas and the Franklin Mountains that soar over El Paso. Three years later, as the college's new campus was being built in the Franklin foothills, Worrell saw an opportunity. She asked her husband: Why not construct those buildings in the Bhutanese style?

More than a century later, her idea is reflected in almost all of the buildings at UTEP. Their sloping walls are accented near the roof with lines of brick and mosaic designs called mandalas—Sanskrit for “circles.” The roofs themselves extend far over the edges of the buildings. Even the parking garages follow the style: Bands of dark-red brick run along the top of their cream-colored walls, and the stairwell towers are capped with cantilevered red roofs.

A deeper relationship between UTEP and Bhutan was forged in the late 1960s, when Dale Walker, editor of the university magazine, then called *NOVA*, started corresponding with the queen of Bhutan about the school's Bhutanese architecture. These letters appear to have introduced the Bhutanese royal family to the fact that UTEP was styled after Bhutanese public buildings. The first student from Bhutan enrolled at UTEP a few years later.

This connection was elevated when former university President Diana Natalicio took office in 1988. Natalicio began traveling to Bhutan and inviting

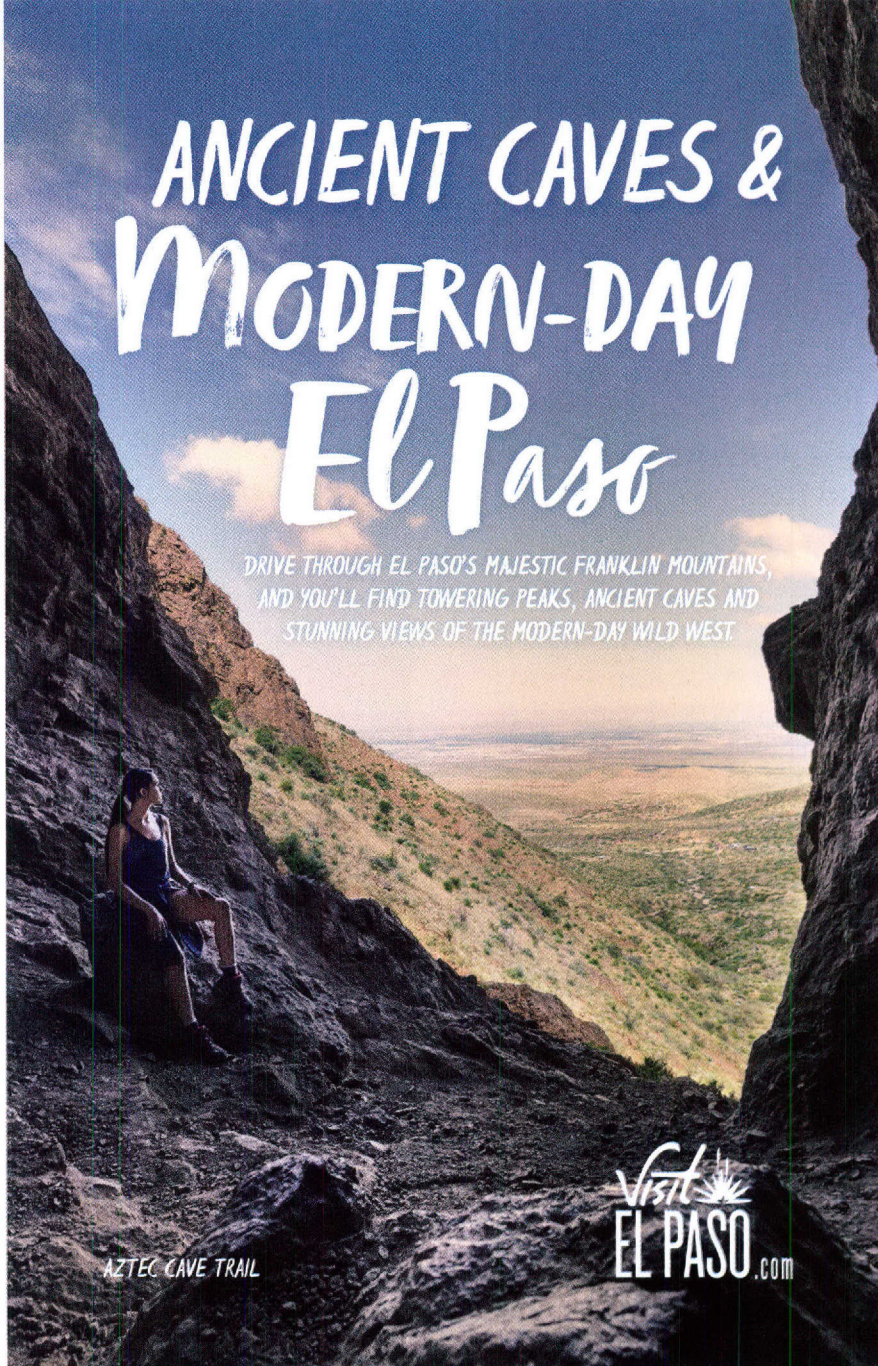



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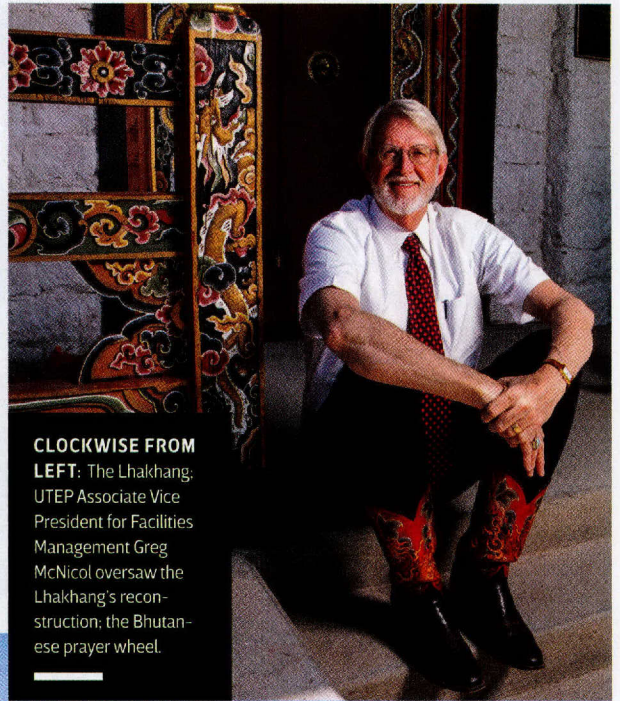


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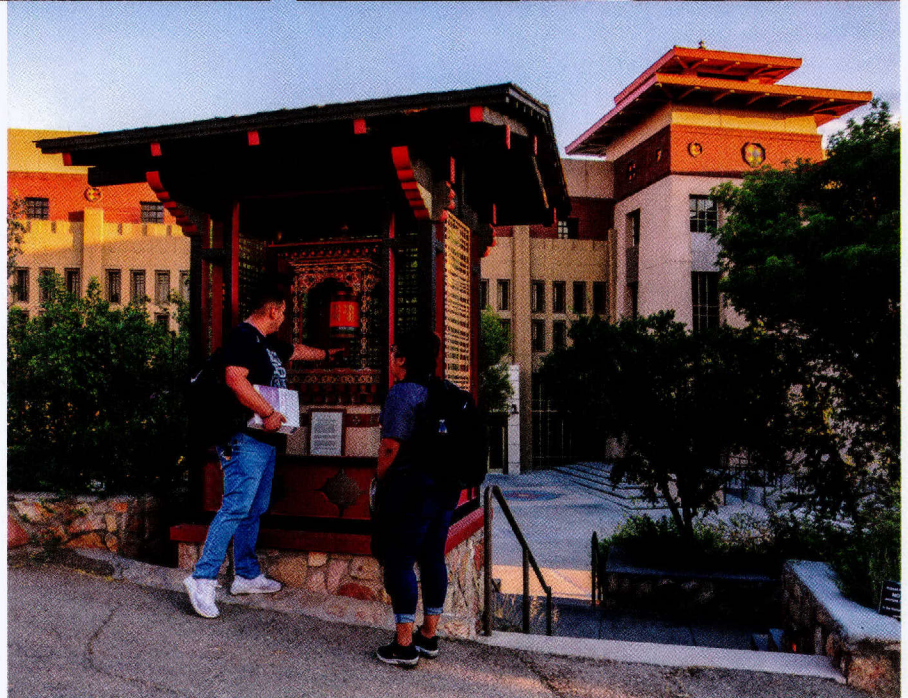


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Lhakhang; UTEP Associate Vice President for Facilities Management Greg McNicol oversaw the Lhakhang's reconstruction; the Bhutanese prayer wheel.

“It’s exactly the same—how people value family, and they really value their culture. It’s just a different environment.”

Bhutanese performers and artists to El Paso. In 2008, as part of the university’s Bhutan Festival, members of the Bhutanese royal family visited El Paso. “Your connections with Bhutan are not just the oldest in the United States,” Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck told an audience of several thousand, “they are among the oldest in the world.”

Today, the university enrolls around 40 Bhutanese students. Most return to Bhutan after graduation out of a desire to see their country advance. The former monarchy has recently transitioned to democracy and, since the 1970s, has prioritized “gross national happiness,” a philosophy that balances economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation. Still, most of its citizens work in agriculture, and television and the internet have only been allowed since 1999.



College life in bustling El Paso, which has close to the same population as Bhutan (roughly 700,000), is a dramatic change for students like accounting major Chimi Wangchuk. Wangchuk grew up enthralled by American movies and learned about UTEP from another Bhutanese student. When he decided to attend college in the U.S., he’d envisioned a modern American campus.

At UTEP, he was initially disappointed to see buildings that looked exactly like his high school. But he realized UTEP’s familiar architecture was accompanied by a critical mass of Bhutanese students, as well as American students who likely could find Bhutan on a map and were curious about it.

“El Paso and UTEP are a second home, thousands of miles away from home,” he

says. "It's exactly the same—how people value family, and they really value their culture. It's just a different environment."

Visitors to UTEP can experience the Bhutanese influence at the Lhakhang, a small building in the center of campus in the style of a Bhutanese Buddhist temple. The Lhakhang is a cultural artifact rather than a religious space. The interior is, like Bhutanese temples, covered in intricate paintings that tell the life story of the Buddha and of Guru Rinpoche, who

The Lhakhang is open to the public the first Sunday of the month from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The library is open most days.

Find general visitor information at sa.utep.edu/futureminers/visitutep.

introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan in the eighth century. The structure was a gift to the U.S. from the kingdom of Bhutan and was first assembled by Bhutanese craftsmen on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for the 2008 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. It was later rebuilt at the center of UTEP's campus with the help of a Bhutanese architect, a carver, a painter, and a carpenter.

Behind the Centennial Museum, near the Lhakhang, visitors can spin a Bhutanese Buddhist prayer wheel, a metal cylinder containing rolls of thin paper printed with sacred texts. Each clockwise spin is the equivalent of reading the prayers. The University Library contains more artifacts, including a bow and arrow, alongside a brightly painted target, to represent Bhutan's national sport of archery.

In the library's atrium, an intricately

carved Bhutanese altar sits beneath a giant, rainbow-colored tapestry called "The Four Harmonious Friends." Based on a Bhutanese folktale about cooperation, it depicts an elephant with a monkey, a rabbit, and a bird balanced like a tower of acrobats on its back. The story explains how the animals combine their talents to plant and cultivate a tree, and when the tree bears fruit, they work together to ensure everyone can reach it.

These objects and the campus buildings constitute one of the largest concentrations of Bhutanese artistic expression outside Bhutan. They make El Paso, already a portal between two countries, a gateway to a much more distant land at a key moment in that country's development. As Bhutan transforms, visitors to the UTEP campus can learn about what made it special in the first place. **L**

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BOXCAR HOUSE

Slithering in Sanderson

In snake country, the Outback Oasis Motel celebrates its surroundings

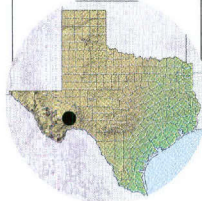
By Asher Elbein

A GILA MONSTER from the Outback Oasis' collection of reptiles in Sanderson.

The hills outside of Sanderson teem with snakes: long-nosed snakes with rusty stripes; rock rattlers and diamondbacks; tiny, cat-eyed nightsnakes; and coachwhips like swift red racers. Walk the right roadside bluff at the right time, and you might see the most sought-after prize of all: the gray-banded kingsnake. The West Texas town is a treasure trove of desert reptiles, and the Outback Oasis Motel holds many of its finest jewels.

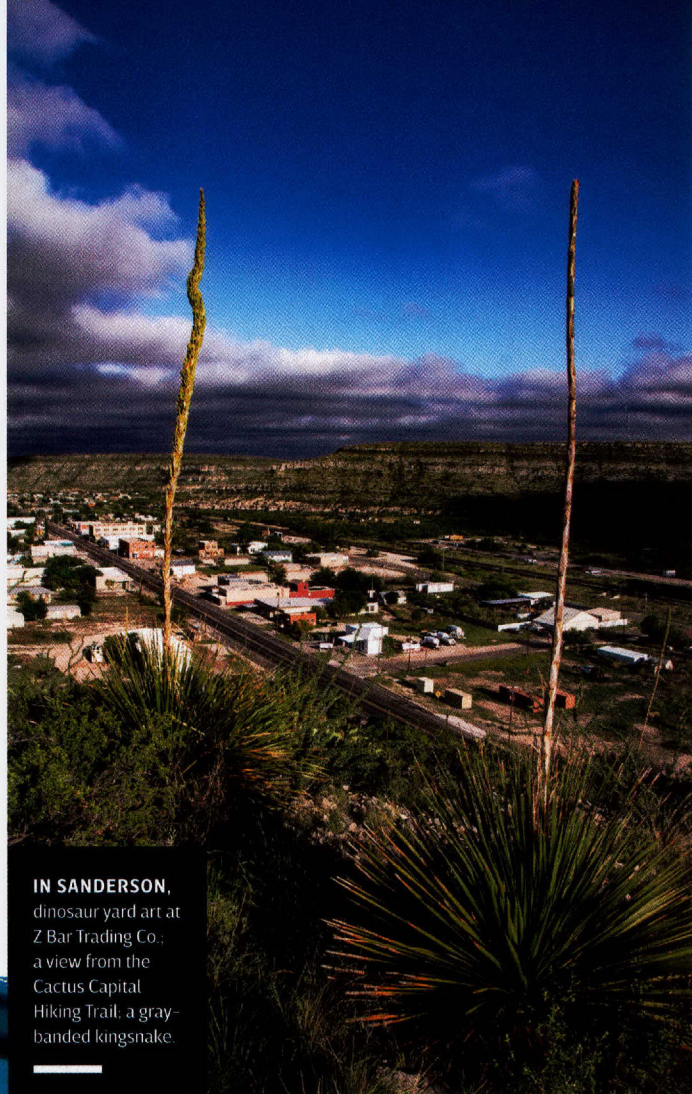
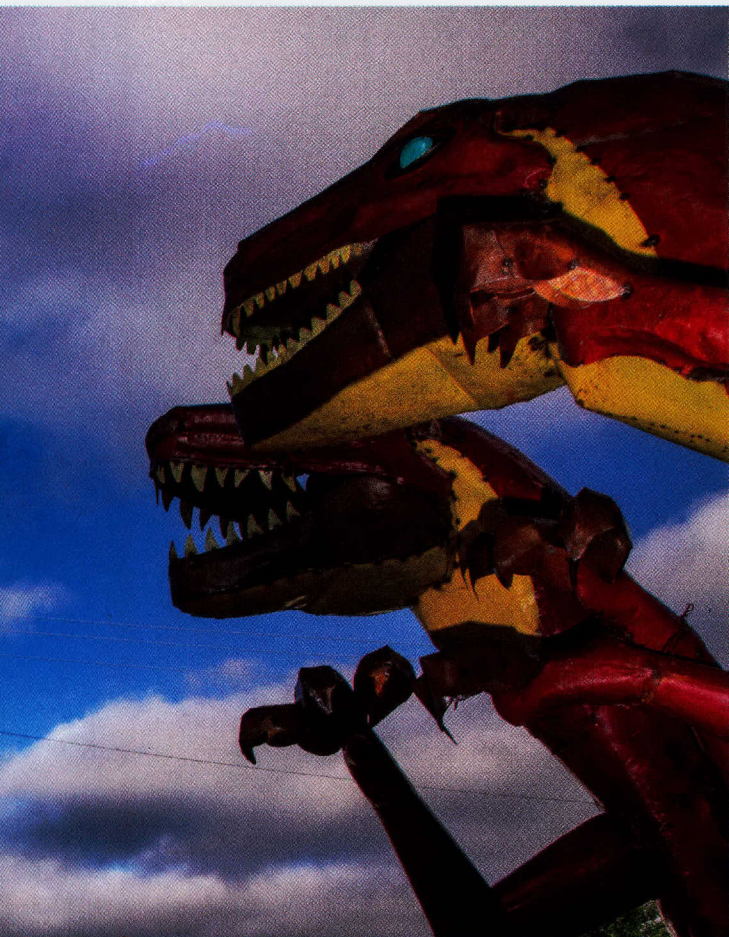
Roy and Ruth Engeldorf operate the Outback Oasis. It's one of the only motels in Texas that caters particularly to reptile lovers. The property has snake photographs and posters on the stucco walls of its office, metal imprints of little horned lizards on its porch, and a whole room of live, local snakes on display. The guest rooms, meanwhile, are forgivably free of reptilian decor.

THE OUTBACK OASIS MOTEL.
800 W. US 90
in Sanderson.
432-345-2850;
outbackoasis
motel.com



"Fully 20 percent of our clientele comes to Sanderson for snakes," Roy says.

A lifelong "herper," or reptile enthusiast, Roy is a garrulous talker who first came down to Sanderson from Kansas in the early 1980s, in pursuit of animals like the Trans-Pecos rat snake and the gray-banded kingsnake. He returned every other summer, walking the roadcuts and sailing along the desert roads at night, looking for snakes on the margin. In the summer of 2002, he noticed that a motel was for sale in Sanderson. Casually, he mentioned the business opportunity to



IN SANDERSON,
dinosaur yard art at
Z Bar Trading Co.;
a view from the
Cactus Capital
Hiking Trail; a gray-
banded kingsnake.



Ruth. To his surprise, she was interested. The Engeldorfs sold their house and specialty pet store, and they moved down to Sanderson in 2003.

“When we bought the motel, I just knew that I could double the volume just from the reptile people who would come to this area,” Roy says. “I pretty much knew how to market it.”

While the hills outside the town are rich in reptiles, its inhabitants originally took a kill-first, ask-questions-never approach to any snakes they found in their yards. But Roy changed that. He kept collecting local snakes—kingsnakes and racers, rattlers and copperheads—and set them up in his live animal display in a side room of the motel office. He took the snakes to events at schools and volunteered to remove dangerous rattlesnakes from people’s properties.

“People found out that I had reptiles, and they would come by and look at them,” Roy says. “Even the locals would come by and bring their kids.”

Snake Days, which takes place in late summer, draws remarkable crowds for Sanderson. Reservations at the Outback Oasis fill up faster than you can say anti-venom.

Educational and economic opportunities led the Engeldorfs to get involved with Snake Days, an annual festival in Sanderson that San Antonio reptile enthusiast Jeff Adams founded in 2012. Unlike the larger snake showcases, like Rattlesnake Roundup in Sweetwater, which can average around 30,000 visitors for an attraction that critics have called ecologically and ethically dubious, Snake Days takes a lighter approach. There are talks from visiting academics, field trips, and fundraising events that in a single weekend have raised as much as \$25,000 for conservation efforts.

Also, Snake Days draws remarkable crowds for Sanderson, and reservations at the Outback Oasis fill up faster than you can say anti-venom. While the 2019 event was held 85 miles away in Alpine, in August, the 2020 iteration is scheduled to be back in Sanderson.

"We get people from all over the world who come to see Snake Days," Roy says.

When not working at the motel, Roy gets back out into the desert to look for snakes in the wild. On a recent cloudy evening, he visited his favored roadcut. He walked beneath the craggy limestone, shining his flashlight at the rock cracks. Eventually he gave a whoop. He was near a fold of sandstone, where a lithe gray-banded kingsnake slowly poked its way along the stone, scales winking like little gems under a spotlight.

"Lots of people come down here for 10 years trying to find one of these," Roy says excitedly. "Sanderson is like Christmas morning. You never know what you're going to get." 🐍



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Blown Away

On "The Great Texas Wind Turbine Trail," find industrial beauty on a grand scale

By Joe Nick Patoski

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One of the great pleasures of roaming Texas roads is driving our scenic trails. Travel the Texas Brazos Trail, Forest Trail, Forts Trail, Hill Country Trail, Independence Trail, Lakes Trail—don't forget the Mountain, Pecos, Plains, and Tropical trails—and you'll see a whole lot of natural beauty.

I would like to nominate a new trail, or set of trails, for Texas highway wanderers to blaze for a different kind of beauty. Let's call it "The Great Texas Wind Turbine Trail." The presence of thousands of wind turbines—on average 300 feet tall but as tall as almost 600 feet, with three propeller blades of at least 115 feet in length—has radically transformed much of the state's landscape over the past 20 years, especially in the wide-open western half. Wind turbines are so huge that they render Lilliputian all of their surroundings, even gigantic structures like cell phone and water towers.

There is a lot of land in Texas and, therefore, a lot of wind. The prospect of converting this natural resource into energy—aided by incentives like the Renewable Electricity and Production Tax Credit and legislation including the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009—has created a wind boom. Today, Texas is the top producer of wind power in the United States, churning out three times the renewable wind energy as the runner-up, Oklahoma.

Love 'em or hate 'em, the influx of wind turbines on Texas land is inescapable. They're utilitarian landscape architecture, sometimes arranged in perfect lines, sometimes rolling with the topography, always flexing their muscles. The Roscoe and Horse Hollow wind farms—the former around the town of Roscoe and the latter in Taylor and Nolan counties—cover 100,000 acres and 35,000 acres, respectively, with wind turbines. Three to four of the 10 largest wind turbine farms on Earth are located in Texas, according to various sources that monitor the industry.

Driving through a dense concentration of turbines conveys the sensation of being on another planet, where humans are



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Driving through a dense concentration of wind turbines conveys the sensation of being on another planet, where humans are reduced to ants.

reduced to ants, skittering past these giant pinwheel behemoths that dominate minimalist landscapes. Eyeball several turbines in a line, so all you see is one single tower, along with multiple spinning props, and it's like watching a Busby Berkeley musical with dancers waving their arms and legs in synchronized movements.

My own wind-turbine epiphany happened about 10 years ago. I was driving south from Lubbock to Austin through Sweetwater on State Highway 70. Near Sweetwater, turbines began to appear on both sides of the road. They grew in number for the next 10 miles, until turning east and south onto State Highway 153 toward Wingate. I felt like I was in a dense forest, only the trees were white towers with steadily whirling blades, perched on a vast, grassy ridge top.

I stopped and got out of my car to get a better look. Wind turbines spun as far as the eye could see, some hovering right above the roadside. The constantly rotating props mesmerized me. These weren't static objects but huge metal instruments that were working, moving, doing something. After staring long enough, the turbines, part of the Horse Hollow wind farm, started reminding me of a marching band, all symmetry, precision, and synchronicity, with the propeller blades acting as the twirlers leading the band.

"They're kind of like doing cartwheels in the sky," says Mark Morgan of Guthrie Oil Company, who routinely drives through the part of west-central Texas where turbines are in great number.

But what some perceive as enchanting, others consider an eyesore. Environmentalists see wind turbines as infringements



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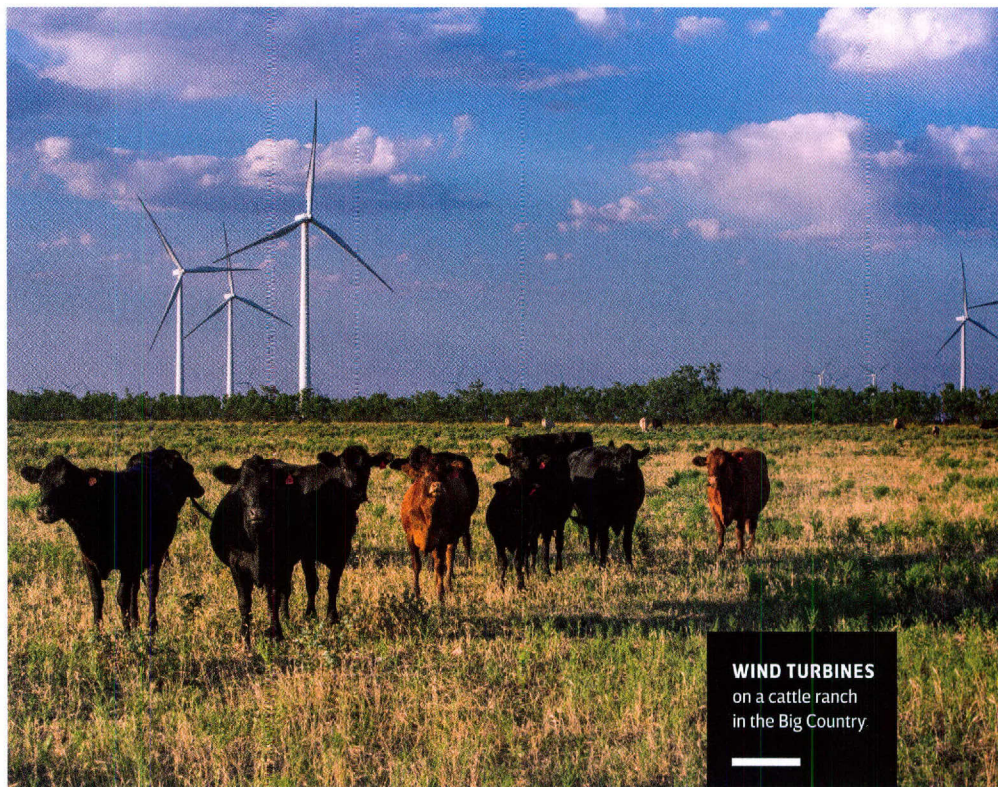
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of epic proportions on otherwise mostly pristine land. Other complaints are more complicated. Wind turbines' behemoth size requires permanent foundation pads that fragment the land, not to mention the turbines come with flashing warning lights at night. Also, their blades produce an irritating whooshing noise and are responsible for roughly a quarter of a million airborne animal deaths per year in North America, according to studies cited by the National Audubon Society. Moreover, their profits and future growth seem to be largely dependent on government subsidies.

When I place a call to the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau, near where I had my epiphany, the nice lady who answers the phone sums up wind-turbine ambivalence, offering her opinion that the machines "are butt ugly up close, and destructive. A lot of concrete goes into those



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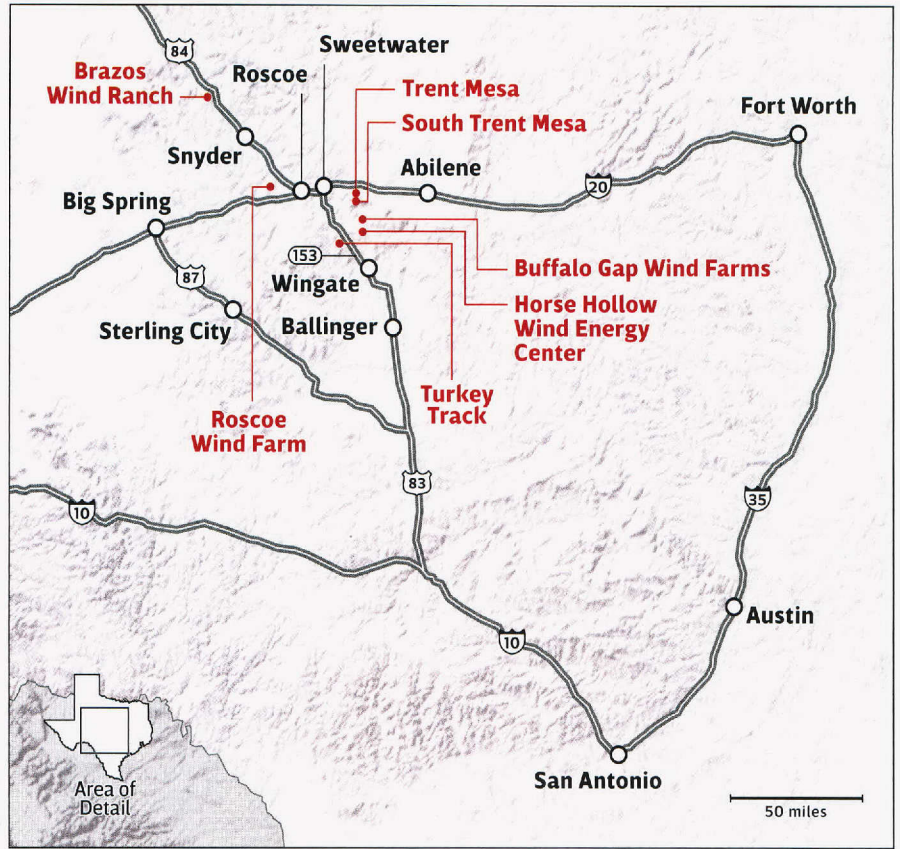


pads. Birds and bats fly into them.” She pauses, then adds: “But from a distance, they’re like dancers on the horizon.”

To experience “The Great Texas Wind Turbine Trail,” start in Sweetwater, where the Welcome to Sweetwater official greeting sign on Interstate 20 is affixed to a turbine propeller blade. From there, search west 66 miles on I-20 to Big Spring and east 40 miles to Abilene, while looking 50 miles north and south of I-20.

The Abilene-Sweetwater Wind Loop

Coming from the east, exit I-20 at Abilene and drive southwest on US 277 to FM 89 and head west. On the left is the Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center, one of the biggest wind farms on the planet with 421 turbines dotting two counties and 35,000 acres. On



Discover Fossils

Cephalon
Thorax
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www.mineralwellsfossilpark.com

MINERAL WELLS FOSSIL PARK

Crazy Fossil Dig!
October 19th

The advertisement features a chalkboard-style background. At the top, it says 'Discover Fossils' in white chalk. Below this is a diagram of a trilobite fossil with labels for 'Cephalon', 'Thorax', and 'Pygidium'. To the right of the diagram is a photograph of a fossil specimen and two markers (one red, one white). The text 'DIG AND LEARN!' is written in large, bold, white letters. Below that is the website 'www.mineralwellsfossilpark.com'. At the bottom, there is a circular logo for Mineral Wells Fossil Park, the text 'MINERAL WELLS FOSSIL PARK', and the event details 'Crazy Fossil Dig! October 19th'.

MINERAL WELLS
WHERE HISTORY RUNS DEEP

The photograph shows a young boy with a wide smile, wearing a green t-shirt with 'DALLAS' on it. He is holding several small, dark fossil specimens in both of his hands. The background is a dry, hilly landscape under a clear blue sky. At the bottom of the image, there is a logo for Mineral Wells Fossil Park and the text 'MINERAL WELLS WHERE HISTORY RUNS DEEP'.

the right is the 76-turbine Callahan Divide wind farm. FM 89 winds about 10 miles to a ridge top loaded with more wind turbines, part of the Buffalo Gap Wind Farm. Turn right at FM 126 before dropping into Mulberry Canyon for 6 miles. Turn left on FM 1085 for a mile, and then left again on FM 2035 for 8 miles, with the Trent Mesa and South Trent Mesa wind farms on both sides, and then on to Lake Sweetwater, I-20, and US 84.

The Wingate to Sweetwater Sci-Fi Wind Trail

Coming from Austin, San Antonio, and Ballinger, head up to Wingate and take SH 153 to the SH 70 turnoff toward Sweetwater almost 13 miles north. The viewshed boils down to the abstract of sky, land, and turbines, and there are towers and moving propellers in all directions as you pass through the Turkey Track and Horse Hollow

wind farms. Add the occasional metal-grid transmission-line tower built to carry that wind power to cities, and the setting is surreal enough that you might expect to see Spock hitchhiking along the road.

The Roscoe to Fluvanna Bank Shot Trail

From I-20 in Roscoe, take US 84 northwest for 31 miles through Scurry County toward Lubbock. The turbines punctuating the farmland west and east of US 84 are the Roscoe Wind Farm, one of the 10 biggest in the world. From Snyder, it's 12 miles up US 84 to the FM 612 turnoff. To the east is Amazon Wind Farm Texas, the internet giant's 110-turbine project. Head west up a quick 300-foot rise on to the Llano Estacado. Several lines of towers border the two-lane blacktop. That's the 2-year-old Fluvanna Wind Farm, which continues after the right turn onto FM 1269 north,

before giving way to the Brazos Wind Ranch and the Red Canyon Wind Energy Project. The road makes a curvy, dramatic drop off the Llano Estacado to reconnect with US 84, 8 miles from Fluvanna.

The Big Spring to Robert Lee Big Country End-Around Curve

Coming from the west on I-20, exit at Big Spring, take US 87 south for 43 miles to Sterling City, through one of the densest stretches of wind farms in Texas. The Big Spring, Ocotillo, Elbow Creek, Panther Creek, and Forest Creek projects extend to Sterling City, where Capricorn Ridge—thought to be one of the 10 biggest in the world with 407 turbines—and Goat Phase wind farms are clustered on a windy ridge top along State Highway 158 toward Robert Lee. Straight ahead: sweeping long-distance views from several ridges lead to a dramatic canyon. **L**

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PacificWarMuseum.org

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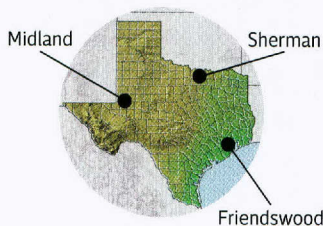
YOUNG READERS
 AT the Midland County Library at the Plaza.
RIGHT: The Friendswood Public Library.



Turn the Page

It's a brave new world at these forward-thinking libraries

By Dakota Kim



Last year, *Forbes* magazine published an article by economist Panos Mourdoukoutas arguing that Amazon stores should replace outdated libraries to save taxpayer money. *Forbes* later pulled the op-ed but it didn't seem to matter as a number of libraries were already inspired to evolve faster than a shush from the circulation desk. In Texas, libraries are coming alive by implementing grand renovations that feature open floor plans full of light and casual meeting spaces; cutting-edge gadgets and makerspace technology; and connections with nature and the environment.

A leader of the renaissance is the new, \$125 million Austin Public Library's Central Library, completed in 2017. This LEED Platinum-certified building—meaning it's “green”—is outfitted with a bicycle corral for 200, a “tech petting

zoo” for visitors to interact with new technology like 3-D printers, an art gallery, a native-plants rooftop garden, and a farm-to-table café. In 2018, *Time* magazine included the library on its list of the World's Greatest Places. Austin's show-piece is representative of a golden age of library innovation across the state. Here are three more libraries boasting smart, beautiful changes.

Rising from the Ashes

The **Sherman Public Library**, built in 1972 and serving a population of almost 42,000, was in disrepair. Its clutter-filled '80s addition had a floor that had sunk 4 inches. When the time for a renovation came, librarians hoped to keep half of the building open during construction. But in April 2017 an arsonist broke in and set four fires. Within a week and a half, an army of town volunteers boxed some

of the collection and helped the library move to a temporary location two blocks away.

Renovation began in May 2017, and the nearly 16,000-square-foot library housing more than 53,000 books reopened in August 2018. The design features a smart mix of private nooks nestled into open spaces, such as diner booths with individual hanging lights that project intimacy. Lower shelving now allows more sunlight to filter through the large new windows, and high ceilings contribute to an airy atmosphere. Prominent television screens display library programming. And one central desk now anchors the reception area facing the entrance.

"It's a really pretty building with a lot of curves and little alcoves," Library Services Administrator Melissa Eason says. "We have a lot more people sitting and visiting or sitting and reading, and we're getting great turnout for our programs."

Young visitors greatly benefit from the changes. The new children's library features a soft, rubber play floor with colorful flecks of red, blue, and green, and AWE Learning literacy-focused computers and Playaway tablets tune out the internet and turn children on to learning games.

The Sherman Art League has plans to turn the library into a gallery, with quarterly displays by various artists. Also, this fall, an empty 7,000-square-foot lot at the corner of Walnut and Mulberry streets will be converted into an outdoor pavilion with large interactive musical instruments and a butterfly garden. 421 N. Travis St., Sherman. 903-892-7240; ci.sherman.tx.us/283/library

Internet for All

Downtown Midland has seen a flurry of development in the past several years. Witnessing the revival, Midland County Public Library Director John Trischitti III realized the opportunity for a renovated library just one block south of the downtown plaza.

"We envisioned parking at the library, going to storytime with your kids, and then walking to the park one block away, where kids can play at the splash pad and get lunch at the food truck," Trischitti says.

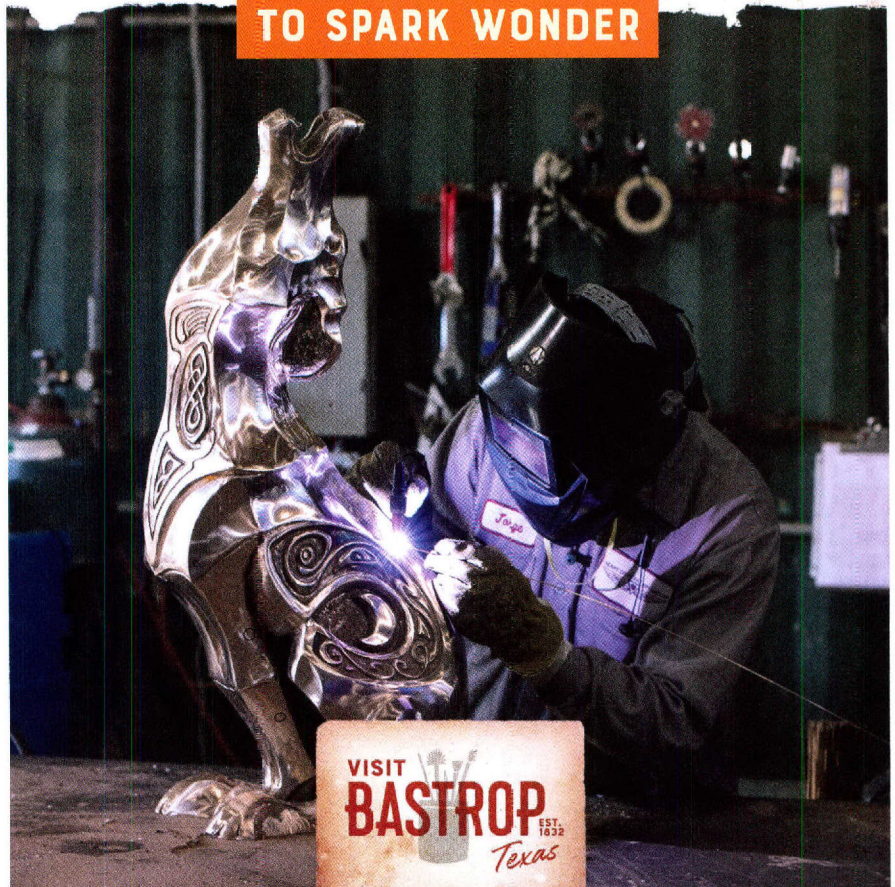


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The revamped 58,000-square-foot **Midland County Library at the Plaza** opened to the public in May 2019. Visitors enter through a tunnel lined with monitors scrolling community bulletins and library activities. Inside, a brightly lit digital world awaits. In rural West Texas, the No. 1 internet access point for a middle-class home is often the library, and Trischitti says he wants his library to be the place to do school research, apply for financial aid, and look for a job.

In the “living room,” formerly the main entrance, there is a 40-inch-wide sculpture made of recycled books, steel, and resin by Lubbock artist Jonathan Whitfill. Guests can browse books and read on colorful, modular furniture while bathing in the stimulating light of a 42-foot-wide, 12-foot-tall LED-powered digital wall with original artwork. The flexible, open floor plan projects abundant natural light,



A DIGITAL WALL is an eye-catching feature of the Midland County Library at the Plaza.

and while the living room bustles with activity, there is a traditional quiet reading room with a crackling fireplace.

The children's area has new computers, a freshwater aquarium, a kinetic sculpture by Jeffrey Zachmann, and a Lite Brite Everbright wall. Across the hall, the young-adult space has a video-gaming area with wall-mounted screens. The library will host gaming tournaments, hoping to encourage teens to improve interpersonal skills by gaming at the library rather than at home.

New nature-themed meeting rooms transport occupants with space, sky, and forest themes. “We’re in the desert, so we want to have scenes of water and mesquite trees,” Trischitti says. “We want people to feel like they can leave Midland without leaving Midland.”
 301 W. Missouri Ave., Midland. 432-688-4320;
co.midland.tx.us/150/public-libraries

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Pro golf returns to North Texas with the Volunteers of America Classic, the state's only LPGA event. Experience a week of world-class golf and family-oriented activities at Old American Golf Club.

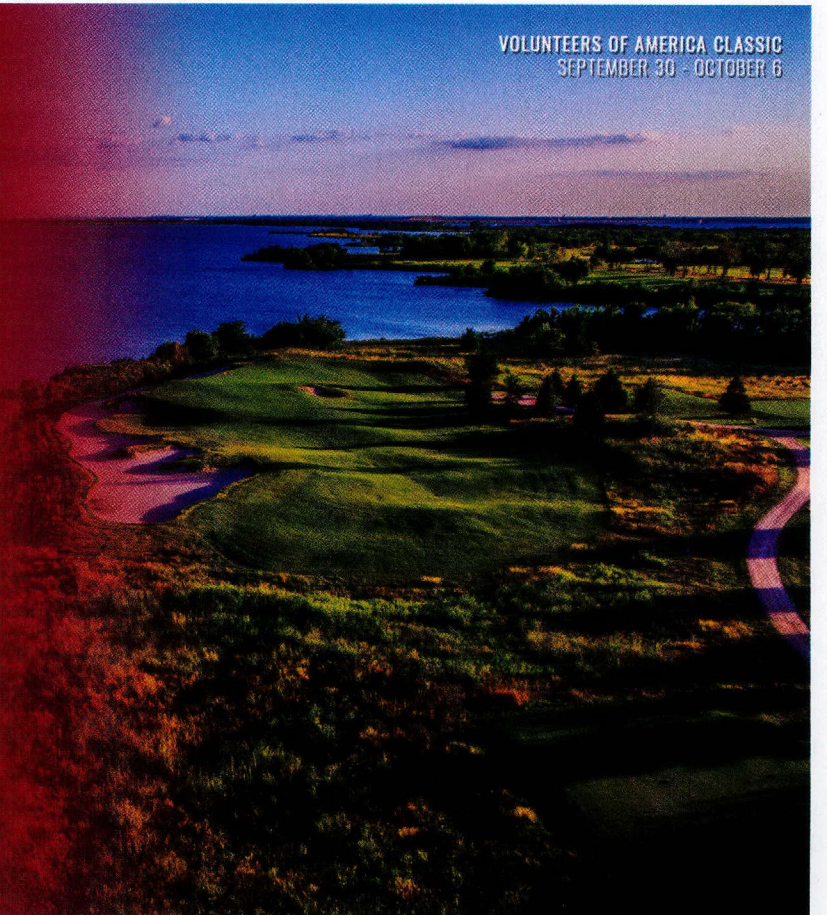


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 SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 6



Friends of the Written Word

The family-oriented city of Friendswood, population roughly 40,000, was outgrowing its library. With many of its residents working at NASA and the city's population booming, a facility assessment determined the library needed to grow. In 2013, Friendswood voters approved more than \$2.5 million in improvements and expansion, which were completed in 2016.

The new 20,876-square-foot Friendswood Public Library makes use of space efficiently, but also creatively. To the left of the front lobby is a wide hall lined with reading-themed art chairs and a hopscotch carpet, all leading into the children's space. The children's area has colorful, comfortable furniture and large, wraparound windows flooding the space with light. The wing also features a Lego table and a crafting room,

In Texas, libraries are coming alive by implementing grand renovations that feature open floor plans full of casual meeting spaces, cutting-edge gadgets, and connections with nature.

as well as a Cricut smart-cutting machine to fashion intricate patterns into paper or vinyl. Adjacent to the children's wing is a playground with large drums and xylophones.

The library's 3-D printer is mobile and used both in the youth department (for high school science fairs) and in the adult

reference area (for business and entrepreneurial needs). A green screen can be moved off-site to enhance community events such as Halloween in the Park, and an Oculus Rift headset is available for virtual-reality experiences. Reference and adult services are situated at the back of the library, near the café, computer, printing, copying, and magazine areas. The new meeting spaces have come in handy—in the past year, the library scheduled 3,564 meetings in its rooms.

The café is packed just about every night, with all 22 seats occupied by students and families, and on Wednesday evenings, the library hosts a chess club.

"It's a very inviting and open space," Library Director Matthew Riley says. "It provides the perfect setting for young minds to learn and explore." 16 S. Friendswood Drive, Friendswood. 281-482-7135; friendswood.lib.tx.us



NEW CHALLENGES and LASTING MEMORIES

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We wanted a real family getaway. No phones. No screens. No distractions. We chose Plano. It's close and there's lots of family activities; indoors and out. The kids had a blast on the zip line! I held my breath the whole time. The next day, we decided to check out the Crayola Experience. The kids loved it—it really sparked their imaginations! When it comes to family time, Plano has it all. visitplano.com

visit  TEXAS





Creative Energy

Lubbock's art scene flourishes from deep High Plains roots

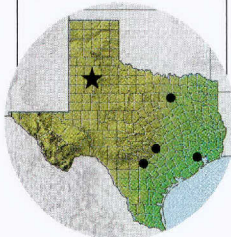
By Clayton Maxwell

Dallas
5 hours

Austin
6 hours

San Antonio
6 hours

Houston
8 hours



Lubbock may not be the first city that comes to mind when considering the arts in Texas, but maybe it should be. The High Plains town that nurtured many of Texas' most exalted musicians—Buddy Holly, Waylon Jennings, Joe Ely, Terry Allen, and Jimmie Dale Gilmore to name a few—must have some creative fairy dust blowing through its Caprock winds. The visual arts are now finding fertile soil here. Just walk through the galleries and workshops of the Lubbock Cultural District, and you'll get a whiff of the artistic freedom inspired by the city's wide-open spaces and 265 days of sunshine a year—a freedom that also comes from a cost-of-living low enough that artists don't sweat the rent. Like the wildly spinning wind turbines you pass on the drive into town, the "Hub City" is generating energy worthy of attention. If you are one of those travelers who buzzes through Lubbock on your way to New Mexico or Colorado, consider staying for the weekend to see what you're missing.

Friday



3 P.M.

Pioneer Living



The revamp of the historic Pioneer Pocket Hotel along the red-brick streets of downtown has brought a much-needed lodging option to Lubbock. Rather than snooze in a generic chain hotel, you can now unwind in a room with a little soul. When you stay at the Pioneer, a redevelopment project that includes residential apartments and retail, you are a short elevator ride away from the building's ground floor and three of Lubbock's finest hangouts: The Coffee Shop, a streamlined café with soaring ceilings and old-school tile floors; The Brewery LBK, a light-filled brewpub with affable staff and tasty craft beer; and The West Table Kitchen and Bar, an upscale eatery helmed by skilled local chef Cameron West. (West's grandfather, Dirk West, just happens to have been both a former Lubbock mayor and the cartoonist who devised Raider Red, the red-bearded, gun-toting mascot of Texas Tech.)



6 P.M.

Art Beyond Cowboys



For a whopping taste of the art buzz in Lubbock, head over to the First Friday Art Trail, a monthly crescendo of creativity in the Lubbock Cultural District. Charles Adams Studio Project—a



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nonprofit that supports local artists with workshops, studio space, and an artist-in-residence program—is central to the action; food trucks, music, and performances swirl around the CASP workshops and studios. In the gallery of CASP’s founder, Charles Adams, works such as the sweeping landscapes by contemporary photographer Ashton Thornhill are proof that, as Adams explains, you can capture the Texas countryside without always “cowboying it up.” If your visit doesn’t coincide with the first Friday of the month, you can still head over to the Cultural District’s new Two Docs Brewing Co. and admire the surrounding architecture and whimsical murals—without FFAT, it will be much quieter, but you can still soak in some of the art vibe.

9 P.M.
Music to Move You

OK, we know it’s late, but you can’t come to the hometown of Buddy Holly and Joe Ely and not see any live music. When the much-anticipated 2,200-seat Buddy Holly Hall of Performing Arts and Sciences opens in Spring 2020, this high-tech \$154 million facility will rival any theater in the country. Meanwhile, spend a little time on musical sacred ground on Buddy Holly Avenue in the Depot Entertainment District. The divey Blue Light Live—where Lubbock native Amanda Shires and her husband, Jason Isbell, played often before they hit it big—is home to Lubbock’s best Red Dirt bands, like Flatland Cavalry—catch them if you can. Also on Buddy Holly Avenue, the historic art deco Cactus Theater brings in big Texas talent like Patty Griffin and Kelly Willis.

Saturday

9 A.M.
Throw Your Smock On

Lubbock makes it easy to get artsy. Sign up for an affordable print-making class with the able staff at the Helen DeVitt Jones Print Studio, one of CASP’s facilities, and walk away with work worthy of hanging on your wall. Check the CASP website (casp-arts.org) for upcoming classes or arrange your own group lesson. Nearby, the Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts is a community art hub that, like CASP, is leading Lubbock’s artistic renaissance. Visit their galleries and check their events calendar; with clay workshops, sound meditations, and contra dances, LHUCA helps you get your own creative juices flowing.

“If you want to make art in Lubbock, you can do it,” says Chad Plunket, director of CASP, affirming the city’s can-do artistic spirit. “It’s an affordable town. And so if you have an idea, well, do it. There are other people who’ll help you. I think that LHUCA and CASP are just examples of that. We now sort of own a whole downtown city block that’s dedicated to the arts. I do think that’s unique to Lubbock and the West Texas hard-work mentality—things can happen here.”

NOON
Lunch with La Diosa

A visit to La Diosa Cellars, a bistro in Lubbock’s Depot Entertainment District, is like a visit to the home of an eccentric aunt—Frida Kahlo homage decor, bright walls, fanciful lamps with breasts. This aunt entertains with tasty Spanish tapas and wines from across



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Murals adorn buildings in the Lubbock Cultural District; Louise Hopkins Underwood Center for the Arts leads Lubbock’s artistic renaissance; paella at La Diosa Cellars; Chad Plunket, director of the Charles Adams Studio Project; Will Bannister and the Caldwell Collective Band perform at the historic Cactus Theater.



the globe. Who knew you could find *albóndigas* (Spanish meatballs) and paella in the High Plains of Texas? The owner, Sylvia McPherson, is the wife of Texas winemaker Kim McPherson, whose tasting room is just down the street in the historic Coca-Cola Bottling Plant. After your feast, take a stroll to McPherson Cellars to sample wines born of local terroir and further your gastronomic glee.



3 P.M.

Don't Let the Music Die

Pay homage to the rock 'n' roll trailblazer who died far too young at the Buddy Holly Center and J.I. Allison House, now located together on Crickets Avenue (in case you aren't up on your Holly trivia, his band was named the Crickets). You can hang out in the house where Holly and his bandmate, J.I. Allison, sat in his bedroom and wrote "That'll Be the Day." You can see the actual pair of iconic black specs that Holly was wearing when he died in a plane crash in 1959 as well as his 1958 Fender Stratocaster. Access is limited to group tour times or by appointment, so plan accordingly.

Be sure to stop by Holly's gravesite in the City of Lubbock Cemetery on the edge of town. You can't miss it—an etching of the Stratocaster graces his modest marble headstone by the cemetery's main road. Just look for the guitar picks and other mementos placed by fans who pilgrimage here from across the globe.



7 P.M.

Latin Fusion with La Sirena

Wind down from your creative undertakings over a tasty jalapeño margarita or cold michelada at Cocina de La Sirena, an

inventive Latin fusion restaurant tucked away in a courtyard in a strip mall. One taste of the La Sirena Queso, a gourmet concoction of manchego cheese, queso blanco, and chiles, and you'll say, "Toto, we're not in Tex-Mex anymore."

Sunday



10 A.M.

Public Art Stroll

A quiet Sunday morning in Lubbock is an ideal time to grab a *cortado* at The Coffee Shop then go for a stroll through Texas Tech's public art collection, named one of the top 10 in the U.S. by *Public Art Review*. Meander through 100 pieces of work by notable Texas artists like the great sculptor James Surls, whose *Complete Fragment* sculpture was installed in early 2019. And because art and music collide often in Lubbock, check out musician Terry Allen's bronze sculpture *Read Reader*, known by locals as "Bookman." With the PopWalk app to guide you, a stroll on the Texas Tech campus can lead you to the best art you've seen all year without even stepping foot in a museum. **L**

CAMP OUT

Buffalo Springs Lake, about 10 miles from downtown Lubbock, offers tent camping and RV sites on a reservoir with two beaches. Park activities include fishing, swimming, and hiking trails to explore its 55 acres, plus an amphitheater and pavilion for events throughout the year. 9999 High Meadow Road. 806-747-3353; buffalospringslake.net



Photo: Robert Strickland

On an unassuming street in Brownsville



it's nearly impossible to eat a bad taco



Barbacoa from Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que.

A

ARMANDO VERA'S STOIC FACE

lights up with a smile when customers mention how far they've traveled to eat at his restaurant, Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que. Patrons make sojourns from Dallas, Austin, and even El Paso to order pounds of his *barbacoa de cabeza de res a la leña en pozo*—beef-head barbacoa slow-cooked over mesquite in an in-ground pit that's 7 feet long and lined by bricks. The restaurant was established by his father in 1955 on Southmost Boulevard in Brownsville. Vera is tall and blocky with a mustache that has yet to sprout gray hairs. He's an imposing figure—even when he's sitting at a table, readers perched on the bridge of his nose beneath the brim of his mesh ball cap, reviewing receipts. He'll scan the dining room filled with out-of-towners (locals tend to get barbacoa to go) sitting gleefully over clumped threads of smoke-kissed meat. And they know the best way to eat barbacoa is in a taco: wrapped in an aromatic corn tortilla and sprinkled with chopped white onion and cilantro and a splash of red or green salsa.

Vera's is reason enough to travel to this corner of Brownsville locals call "La Southmost." The actual name of the nearly 4-mile road near the Rio Grande is Southmost Boulevard. Here, dozens of Mexican restaurants, tortillerias, and taquerias are wedged between grocery stores, dentist offices, ice cream shops, churches,





and a hodgepodge of other businesses. It's where you'll find some of the best tacos in the state of Texas. "It's a source of pride for us," Vera says.

I don't make this claim lightly. I started writing about tacos professionally 10 years ago. First at the *Dallas Observer*, and then for my own website, *thetacotrail.com*. In the last two years, I have traveled to 38 cities across the country in the process of writing my book, *American Tacos: A History of the Taco Trail North of the Border* (out in early 2020 by The University of Texas Press). From my experience, no single geographical area in the Lone Star State has tacos as uniformly excellent as La Southmost—and that includes Oak Cliff in Dallas, Airline Drive in Houston, the East Side of Austin, and South Jackson Road in Pharr.

The tacos you'll find on Southmost come in three varieties: breakfast tacos, fried tacos, and beef tacos. Trying them all is essential. Breakfast tacos go by the name *tortillas de harina* because of the 10-inch flour tortillas they're served in. They're typically filled with ingredients as familiar as chorizo and eggs, or as regionally specific as weenies (sliced Vienna sausages or hot dogs) and eggs. Fried tacos, like *tacos dorados* (deep-fried folded corn tortillas) and flautas (rolled and fried), are also popular—some are drowned in salsa, earning the moniker *ahogados*. Most prevalent are the beef preparations like *barbacoa*, *bistek* (thinly sliced), fajita, and *mollejas* (sweetbreads). They're generally smaller in size and served in orders of three to six—closer to what most Americans would recognize as "street tacos."

So start your fast: You're going to need as much room and time as possible to get a true taste of Southmost. These seven taquerias—vetted from many days of repeat visits—are great places to start your grand tour of this South Texas taco haven.

The APPETIZER

Frijoles charros are indicative of Southmost and the greater Rio Grande Valley area. They are served ahead of meals in most taquerias and restaurants. The soupy pinto bean-based appetizer is swimming with soft shards of bacon, onion, cilantro, and whatever else the cook throws in.



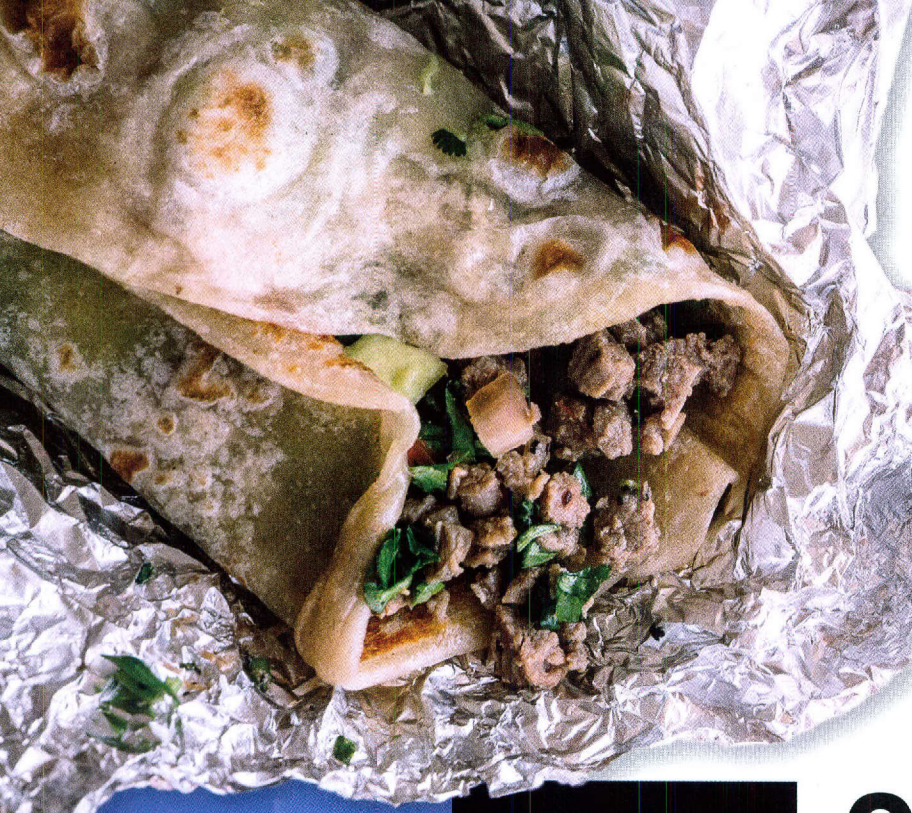


VERA'S BACKYARD BAR-B-QUE



BARBECUE PILGRIMS TREK TO VERA'S because it's the last of its kind—the only restaurant in Texas where barbacoa is prepared in the traditional manner. They come to get a glimpse of Vera working the counter, where he does things the old-school way. And he'll do so until the very end. "I'll probably die here," Vera says, chuckling. Other establishments that practiced the pit-cooking method have either gone out of business or shifted to cooking in large steamers or ovens in compliance with reformed health regulations. Nevertheless, barbacoa remains a way of life here, a vestige of South Texas' cattle-ranching heyday, when Mexican ranch hands would cook discarded calf heads after a week's hard labor. The prepared meat would then be taken home for family meals. Today, barbacoa is often eaten on Sundays. (Vera's opens Friday through Sunday and only for breakfast and lunch.) Businesses like Vera's see a rush ahead of and immediately after the day's church services. The restaurant offers barbacoa in several cuts: *lengua* (cow tongue), *cachete* (beef cheek), *paladar* (palate), *ojo* (cow's eye, which Vera calls "Mexican caviar"), *surtida* (general bits), and *mixta* (the beef-head meat after the other parts have been taken out). Go for the mixta. 2404 Southmost Blvd. 956-546-4159

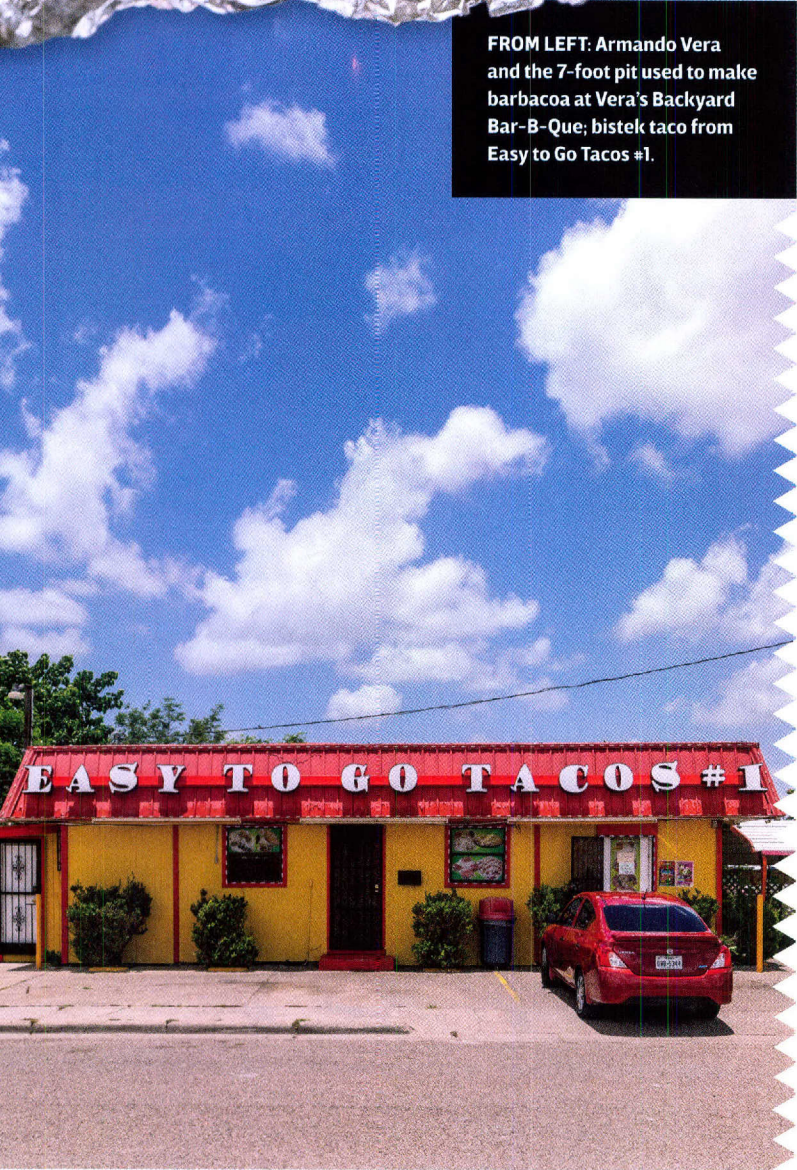




EASY TO GO TACOS #1



FROM LEFT: Armando Vera and the 7-foot pit used to make barbacoa at Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que; bistek taco from Easy to Go Tacos #1.



ONE OF THE OLDEST TAQUERIAS ON Southmost is Easy to Go Tacos #1, located across the street from Vera's. When Teodas Martinez and her son-in-law Cipriano Mejia opened Easy to Go in the 1970s, Southmost was little more than a road squeezed by shotgun houses and working-class bungalows. They saw a niche in the market that needed filling—there wasn't a neighborhood taco spot yet.

"Easy to Go Tacos was the first taco place on Southmost," says co-owner Daniel Garces III. Garces' mother, Maria, was a cook at Easy to Go and purchased the concept from the original owners in 1992. "In essence, it started the boom," he adds. In the nearly 30 years since the Garces family took over the business, Easy to Go has expanded to six locations in Brownsville, Los Fresnos, and Harlingen. "Now, there is a lot of competition," says Daniel's father, Daniel Garces Jr. And yet, the restaurant endures. "Customers keep coming back because they claim they can't find our unique flavor in other locations, no matter how hard they try," the younger Garces says. That special flavor is evidenced in dishes like the flautas that come with a side of *cuertitos* (pickled pig skin)—the snappy, sour brightness cuts through fierce salsa. *2344 Southmost Blvd. 956-542-4592*



The GARNISHES

Almost all beef tacos come topped with a flurry of crumbled or grated white cheese and a wedge of soft avocado. "If you try to sell tacos without avocado and cheese, people are not going to buy them," says Armando Vera of Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que. These garnishes are elemental to the borderlands. They are as characteristic of Brownsville as they are of Brownsville's sister city, Matamoros, Mexico. Southmost is the center of the Venn diagram of what is considered typical of two countries.



TACO EL COMPADRE



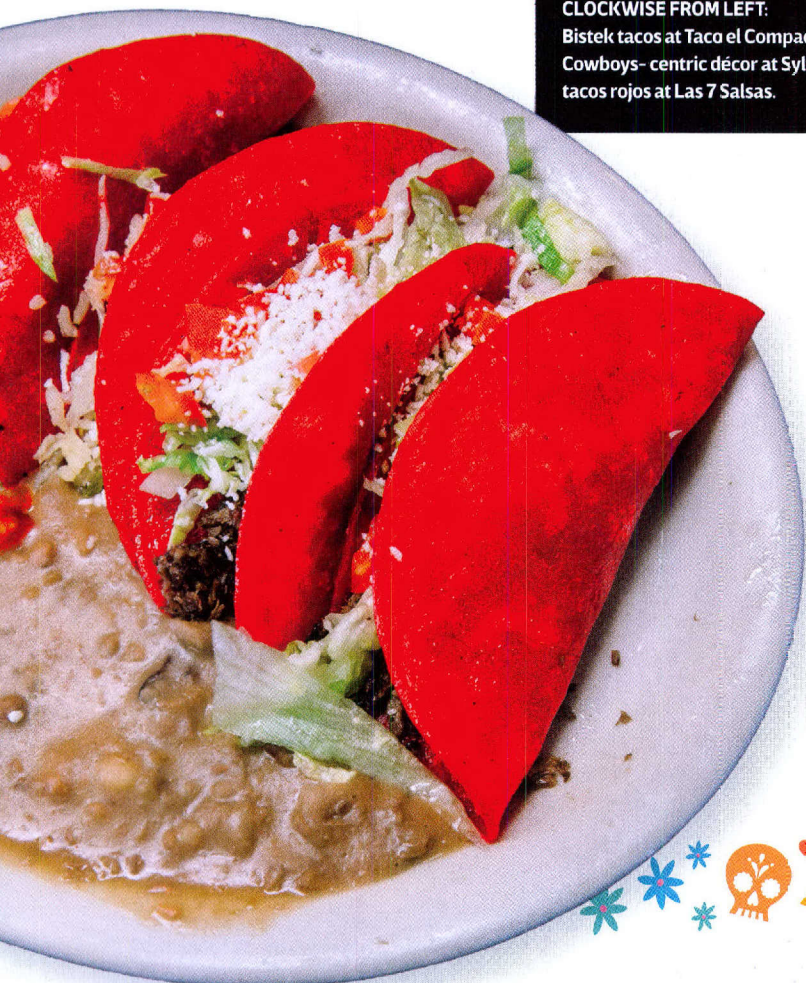
DOWN THE STREET FROM EASY TO GO, TACO EL COMPADRE'S MENU DECORATES its interior. Along the rear wall hangs a long poster of photos of the dishes with their respective names in yellow-outlined bold green font. The small dining room's tables are covered in red tablecloths with rainbow-striped runners protected by thick plastic sheets kinked at the corners. Ask for the flautas, which the cooks plate in stacks beneath a thicket of cabbage speckled with crumbled white cheese and a scratchingly spicy salsa roja that holds everything in place; and the tacos dorados, filled with a mashed potato-chicken combo and bathed in thin salsa. 3915 Southmost Blvd. 956-542-5727

SYLVIA'S RESTAURANT

ON THE FURTHEST NORTH PART of La Southmost, Sylvia's Restaurant is covered in Dallas Cowboys memorabilia like autographed posters, Super Bowl championship flags, jerseys, and figurines. If it's got a blue, silver, and white star stamped on it, the super-fan owners have given it a home. Sylvia's serves its barbacoa in a large, sweet, buttery flour tortilla. For those craving other delights, the *carne guisada*—stew meat in earthy gravy—makes for a comforting taco, as does the *machacado con huevo a la Mexicana*, dried and pulverized salt beef scrambled with eggs and topped with pico de gallo. 1843 Southmost Blvd. 956-542-9220



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Bistek tacos at Taco el Compadre; Cowboys-centric décor at Sylvia's; tacos rojos at Las 7 Salsas.



LAS 7 SALSAS RESTAURANTE

THIS RESTAURANT'S INTERIOR, LIKE EL Compadre's, is adorned with its menu options. The tortillas de harina selection is myriad. Among the best are the *carne guisada* with wide slices of carrots, fraying chunks of beef, and unevenly chopped potatoes; the smoky barbacoa; and the weenies with soft-scrambled eggs. *Tacos rojos* are a popular selection in the borderlands—red corn tortillas are stuffed with the filling of your choice, and topped with tomato, lettuce, and crumbled white cheese. 3424 Southmost Blvd. 956-407-8426





MARCELO'S TACOS



YOU'LL KNOW YOU'VE FOUND THE PLACE WHEN YOU SEE THE GOOGLY-EYED salivating taco mascot painted on a wall facing the parking lot. Although Marcelo's serves typical Southmost tacos, its *guisados*, or home-style stews, are truly spectacular. Try the stellar *rajas con queso*, sliced and roasted poblano chiles cooked down into a stew of cream and white cheese in a choice of corn or handmade flour tortilla. It is as hearty as barbacoa, but with a brighter flavor and a stirring aroma. Fill out your order with a couple of the staff's suggestions—they're particularly proud of their *taco al pastor* (spit-grilled pork). 3305 E. 26th St. 956-546-0021




Various tacos, including barbacoa and rajas con queso, at Marcelo's Tacos.



TACOS PKCHÜ



AT THE END OF LA SOUTHMOST TACO DISTRICT, A TRULY outstanding taqueria awaits. Tacos Pkchü operates out of a stout orange trailer emblazoned with the image of Pika-chu, the cute, mouse-like Pokémon character. Owner Pablo Aviles opened his mobile rig in April 2017 at an auto body shop and mechanics garage beyond where the road turns south toward the border. Aviles, who has the short manner of a confident man accustomed to quick, hard work, decided to establish his trailer here because of the neighborhood's reputation. "Southmost is known best for its tacos," he says in Spanish before explaining he's not afraid of the competition. "The other guys are good, but Pkchü's are the best."

Here, the bistek tacos bear chopped, griddled, and juicy beef. The filling is light, a touch salty, and generously coated with queso fresco. Passed through the trailer's window on a rectangular Styrofoam plate, Tacos Pkchü's tacos don't look much different from the others served along Southmost, but they are exceptional—and further evidence that Southmost has distinguished itself from Texas' other taco corridors. *5727 Southmost Blvd. 956-579-7983* 



And IF YOU'RE STILL CRAVING more TACOS...

Here are some additional spots on Southmost that are sure to leave you fully satisfied, if not downright comatose:



Brownsville Coffee Shop #2

Get your first tortillas de harina of the day and a cup of coffee here before venturing farther into La Southmost.



Otro Rollo

The tacos al pastor are served in a unique way: rolled at the center in wax paper, resembling a large sushi hand roll, in order to help soak up the grease.



Taqueria La Vaquita 4




Order the tostadas, which are flat, crispy tortillas topped with a mound of beef, onion, cilantro, and avocado buried under white cheese.



Tacos Matamoros #2

Find more beef tacos at this dependable local chain.



THESE 
THE BOOTS 
ARE MADE
FOR 
GAWKIN'

VISITING THE MASTERS IN THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE COWBOY BOOT



BY W.K. STRATTON | PHOTOGRAPHS BY KENNY BRAUN





I'm in one of my favorite parts of Texas—the Brush Country south of San Antonio—with miles and miles of chaparral lying ahead of me. I like it because it's an expansive place with a rich history. It's here where American cowboy culture grew out of the vaquero way of life and, to this day, both vaqueros and cowboys work on large ranches in South Texas. Good boots are part and parcel for anyone working cattle from the saddle. It's not surprising, then, that South Texas is home to many first-rate bootmakers.

In the world of custom cowboy boots, the Rio Grande Valley in particular is known for its bootmaking heritage, both for the number of bootmakers concentrated in the four-county area at the southern tip of Texas and for the high quality of their work. My purpose for this trip is to order custom boots from two of the Valley's master bootmakers, Armando Duarte Rios in Raymondville and Henry Camargo in Mercedes.

Both Rios and Camargo have operated their shops since the early 1980s. Their creations have attracted clients who place orders year after year, from politicians and entertainers to ordinary folks. The success of these two craftsmen is testament to their ability to do what all great bootmakers must: Satisfy their customers' needs when it comes to form, function, and flair.

Many people seek out Rios and Camargo because standard-size, factory-made boots simply don't fit their feet or





they don't have the broken-in feel that is inherent in new, custom-made Western boots. Boots must be functional too, and Rios and Camargo have built pairs for all needs, from knee-high boots for protection against rattlesnake bites to low-cut ropers made to glide over a dance floor. Perhaps most importantly, boots must look good. Customers have many different options when it comes to the kind of leathers used, the shape and size of the toes and heels, fine points like piping and pull-straps, and the designs to appear on the shafts. It is the bootmaker's job to turn a customer's concept into reality. Rios and Camargo have exceeded expectations for decades.

Operating in the Valley, they don't receive as much attention as bootmakers in, say, Dallas or Austin. But they're just as good as, if not better than, the very best in the big cities.

Earlier in the morning, I drove past what is billed by Guinness World Records as the World's Largest Cowboy Boots Sculpture, located outside San Antonio's North Star Mall.



**Clockwise from left:
Armando Duarte Rios with
the boot his uncle designed for
King Ranch cowboys; Armando's
Boot Co. in Raymondville;
train tracks on the outskirts of
Raymondville.**

These 35-foot-high and 33-foot-long renderings of what Merle Haggard called "manly footwear" in his song "Okie from Muskogee" are indeed gigantic. (Of course, women make up a big portion of a bootmaker's clientele, too.) Sculpted by my artist friend Bob "Daddy-O" Wade, they have been a San Antonio landmark for nearly four decades.

It occurred to me that Daddy-O's mammoth boots could be emblematic of the position cowboy boots have held in my life. One of the oldest photos of yours truly shows me at age 4 wearing jeans and boots. I later flunked shoe-tying in kindergarten because I never wore shoes with laces. My father was a rodeo cowboy. My mother was a rodeo girl. I have a birthright to cowboy boots and I've indulged it all my life, though it's only been in recent years that I could afford custom-made boots—and I haven't wasted any time collecting. I counted 15 pairs in my closet before I set off for South Texas, but I've never had any built by a custom bootmaker in the Valley.



It's hard to pin down the exact birthplace of the cowboy boot, but for my money the Rio Grande Valley is the spot. By the 1790s, formal ranches were established in New Spain, north of the Rio Grande, in what is now South Texas. Cowboy culture flourished in this cattle country. *Zapateros* (shoemakers) working along the Rio Grande began making leather boots, plus saddles, lariats, hats, spurs, and chaps. These items were essential to the vaqueros, just as they would be to the American cowboys who drove great herds northward from South Texas in the years after the Civil War.

As part of teaching American cowboys how to be cowboys, vaqueros showed them what kind of boots were best for a life spent in the saddle while herding fierce Longhorns that had little in common with today's docile beef cattle. Their preference: sleek, leather-soled boots that could slide out of a stirrup easily, with tall shafts to protect the calves from brush scrapes and snakebites.

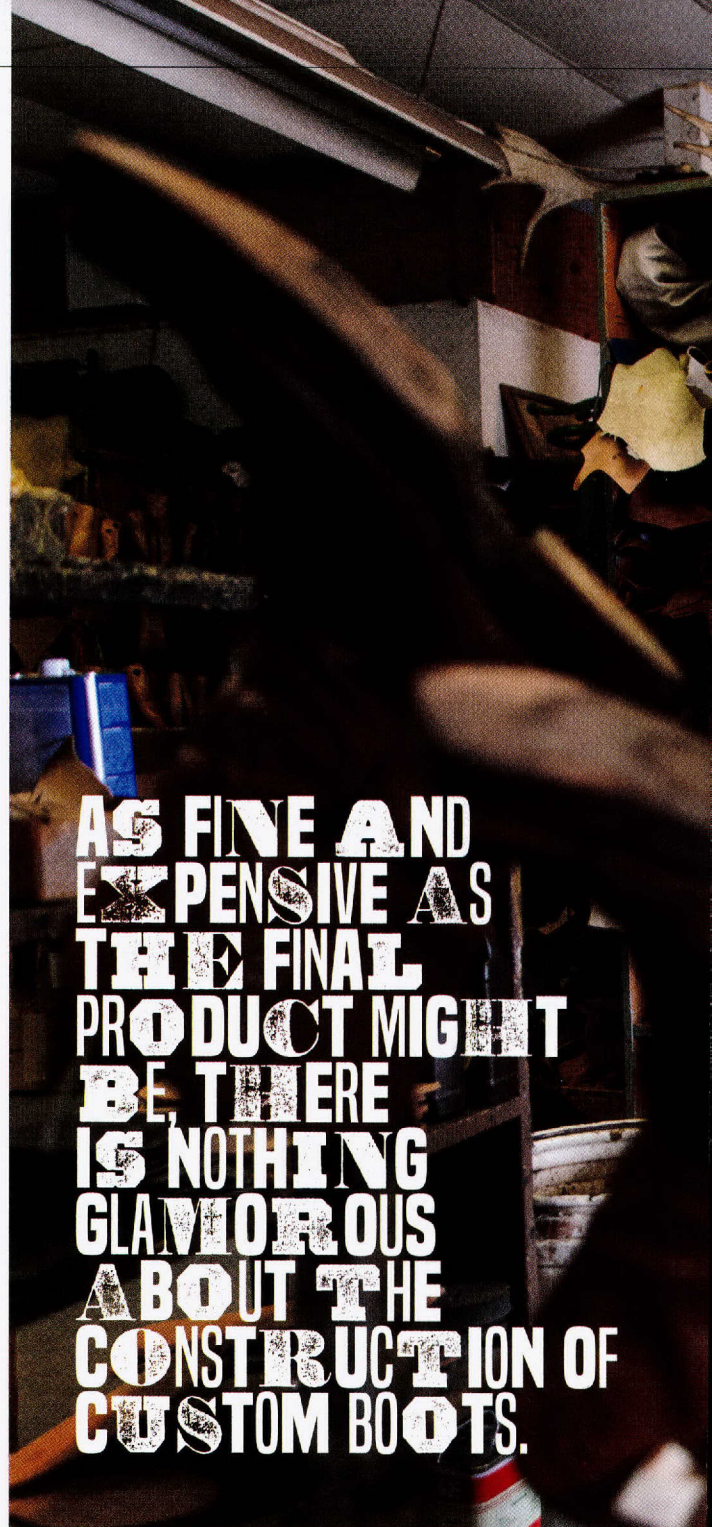
This history is heavy on my mind as I approach my first stop, Raymondville, where I will visit Armando's Boot Co., the shop of Armando Duarte Rios and his son, Armando Jr. The Rios family has made boots for both vaqueros and cowboys for more than 150 years. Family history holds that at least as far back as 1853, a Rios was working as a leather tanner and maker of saddles and sandals for *granjeros* (farmers) in Nuevo Leon, Mexico. By the mid-1860s, another Rios was building boots for Mexican army troops loyal to Emperor Maximilian I.

The family relocated to the Rio Grande Valley in 1925, and in 1928 brothers Abraham and Zeferino Rios opened Rios Boot Company in Raymondville. A year later, disagreement between the two led Zeferino to break away and open his own shop in Mercedes, 40 miles south. Zeferino would sell to investors from West Texas in the late '60s, establishing Rios of Mercedes, a corporate boot factory that to this day turns out thousands of pairs of boots a year.

Meanwhile, Abraham continued to operate Rios Boot Company in Raymondville, with a clientele that included *Los Kineros*, the vaqueros on King Ranch. In time, Abraham's nephew, Armando Duarte Rios, began working for his uncle, learning family bootmaking traditions. Rios Boot Company would eventually fold, but in 1982 Armando opened Armando's Boot Co., where I'm stopping.

At Falfurrias, I take State Highway 285 over to US 77, then head south again. This route takes me across the Norias Division of the King Ranch and into Raymondville, a town founded by a King Ranch division manager. The town is still steeped in vaquero and cowboy culture. Like most communities in the Valley, Raymondville is growing, yet it's still a safe distance from the urban sprawl of the McAllen metro area 50 miles southwest.

Armando's Boot Co. is easy to find along US 77—the big cowboy boot on the roof giving it away. Armando Jr., a 50-something with



**AS FINE AND
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gray in his hair and whiskers, greets me. His dad, Armando, who is in his late 70s, still puts in full days at the shop, but Armando Jr. is heavily involved with the operation of the business, answering the phone, greeting customers, and keeping the books. If there's time left, he works on boots himself. "That's my real love," Armando Jr. says. "I'd rather be back in the shop."

In short order, I have my traveling boots off and Armando Jr. is tracing outlines of my feet on paper. Then he records measurements he takes of my feet, ankles, and calves. This all goes into a file folder, which he and his father will use when it's time to actually begin construction of my boots. But for now, the paperwork



is stored in a file cabinet where it joins similar information for hundreds of other customers.

I admire the look of boots made of snake skin, lizard skin, alligator skin, and other exotic hides, but when it comes down to it, I prefer the stuff cowboy boots were originally made of: calf skin and bull hide. I'm an old soul. I also tend to be pretty conservative when it comes to colors and the stitching on the shafts, but today I break out of tradition.

Armando Jr. produces a roll of bull-hide leather that's just a shade lighter than peanut butter. Then I spy a roll of green French calf skin. A design immediately comes together in my



**Henry Camargo, owner
of Camargo's in Mercedes,
in his shop.**

head: shafts of the green calf skin, with Spanish-style 10-row stitching in tan, silver, brown, and other colors, with the lower part of the boot made from the bull hide, including a standard toe bug (the stitching on top of the toes).

A bit of a showy boot for me, but I've traveled all this way, and you only live once.

I take a quick tour of the backshop, where Armando is working with three other men "It gets hot as hell back here in the summer," Armando Jr. tells me. There's no air-conditioning. As fine and expensive as the final product might be, there's nothing



glamorous about the construction of custom boots. It's tough work, requiring exactitude under often uncomfortable conditions. It also requires Zen-like focus as the bootmaker deals with a variety of sewing machines and hand tools, including specialized hammers, pliers, heel pries, tack pullers, awls, and leather knives.

The shop is running behind on its orders, so it will be several months before I have my boots. No problem, I'm expecting that kind of delay for custom-made boots. I leave Armando and Armando Jr. and head to McAllen, where I put up at Casa de Palmas, a hotel that turned 100 last year.

That night, I lie awake in bed and ponder the connection I've made. My boots will be crafted by someone whose direct antecedents once built boots for Emperor Maximilian's cavalry troops. I'm not just honoring tradition; I'm preserving history.

The next morning, I set out for Mercedes. If Raymondville is a laid back rural town, Mercedes is in the middle of one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the U.S. Hidalgo County's population is close to a million people, with McAllen its largest city. Municipal boundaries mean little these days: McAllen, Pharr, San Juan, Alamo, Donna, Weslaco, and Mercedes blur into each other. I fail to account for rush-hour traffic, so I'm a little late when I arrive at Camargo's Western Boots—or Camargo's of Mercedes.

Henry Camargo is 65 years old and has operated this shop since 1980. A native of Mercedes, he grew up obsessed with drawing and describes himself as a visual artist. After he graduated high school, he started college with the intention of working for Border Patrol. In 1973, he took a job at the Rios of Mercedes boot factory. It proved to be a life-changer: He never went back to college and has been in the business ever since.

It was Camargo's good fortune to fall under the tutelage of Antonio "Tony" Sanchez at Rios of Mercedes. Within the world of bootmaking, Sanchez was a huge figure. A native of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, Sanchez lived most of his life in the Rio Grande Valley, working in the boot business. "Sanchez was the greatest boot designer of them



all,” Camargo says. “His designs did much to put Rios of Mercedes on the map, and some are still used by the company.”

Camargo ultimately left Rios of Mercedes and worked at other bootmaking companies. Throughout that time, and even after Camargo opened his own shop, Sanchez, who eventually left Rios of Mercedes and went into business for himself, remained his mentor up until his death. Today, Camargo’s Western Boots is a two-person operation comprised of Henry and his brother, Santos, who has his own connection to a bootmaking legend. He worked for Lee Miller in Austin and Miller learned from Charlie Dunn, the famous bootmaker memorialized in the eponymous Jerry Jeff Walker song.

Camargo’s specialty is creating images on the shafts of his boots. He shows me a pair of black boots with a 1955 Chevrolet Apache pickup on each shaft. It’s amazingly realistic, right down to the truck’s turquoise paint job. I see other boots that have Texas state flags, motorcycles, and rodeo riders on their shafts. “Right now,” Camargo says, “I’m tooling the leather image of a goddess to go on some boots I’m making.”

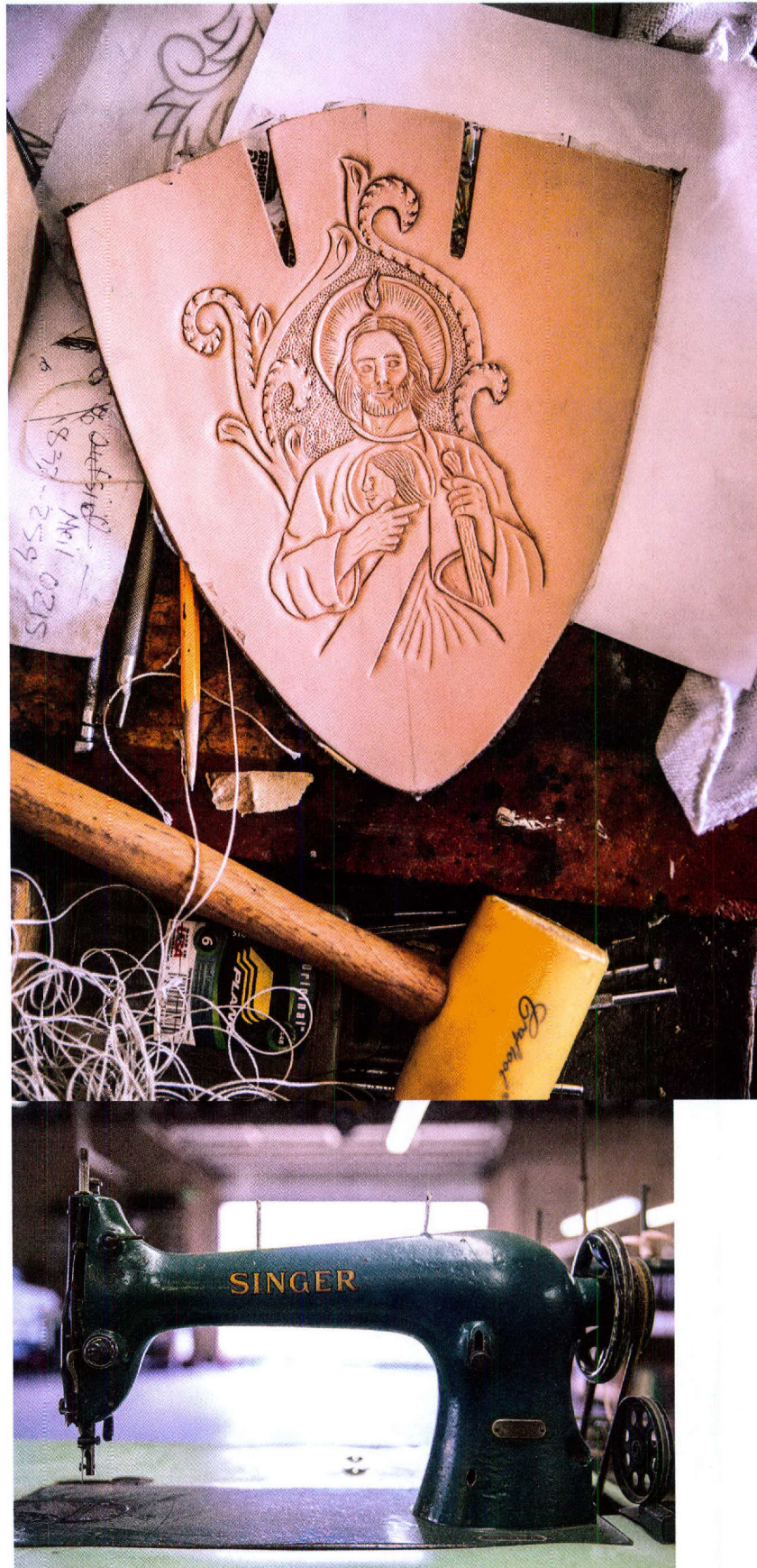
I decide to stick to tradition, however, when I place my order. I leave whatever shaft-stitching Camargo wants to do up to him—trusting his artistic eye—as I order a pair of black calf-skin boots. He traces and measures my feet, works out some calculations, and gives me a price for the boots. It’s about half of what I expected to spend. Some bootmakers charge \$2,500 and more, and customers have to wait for years to get their orders. Meanwhile, factory-made cowboy boots from China can be purchased at discount stores for \$200 or less.

I paid Armando’s Boot Co. \$700 for my bull-hides. Camargo prices my calf-skins at roughly half that. “Man, I work in the Valley,” Camargo says. “I can’t charge what those guys up in Austin and Dallas get. People here can’t afford that.” I let that register. Then I order a second pair.

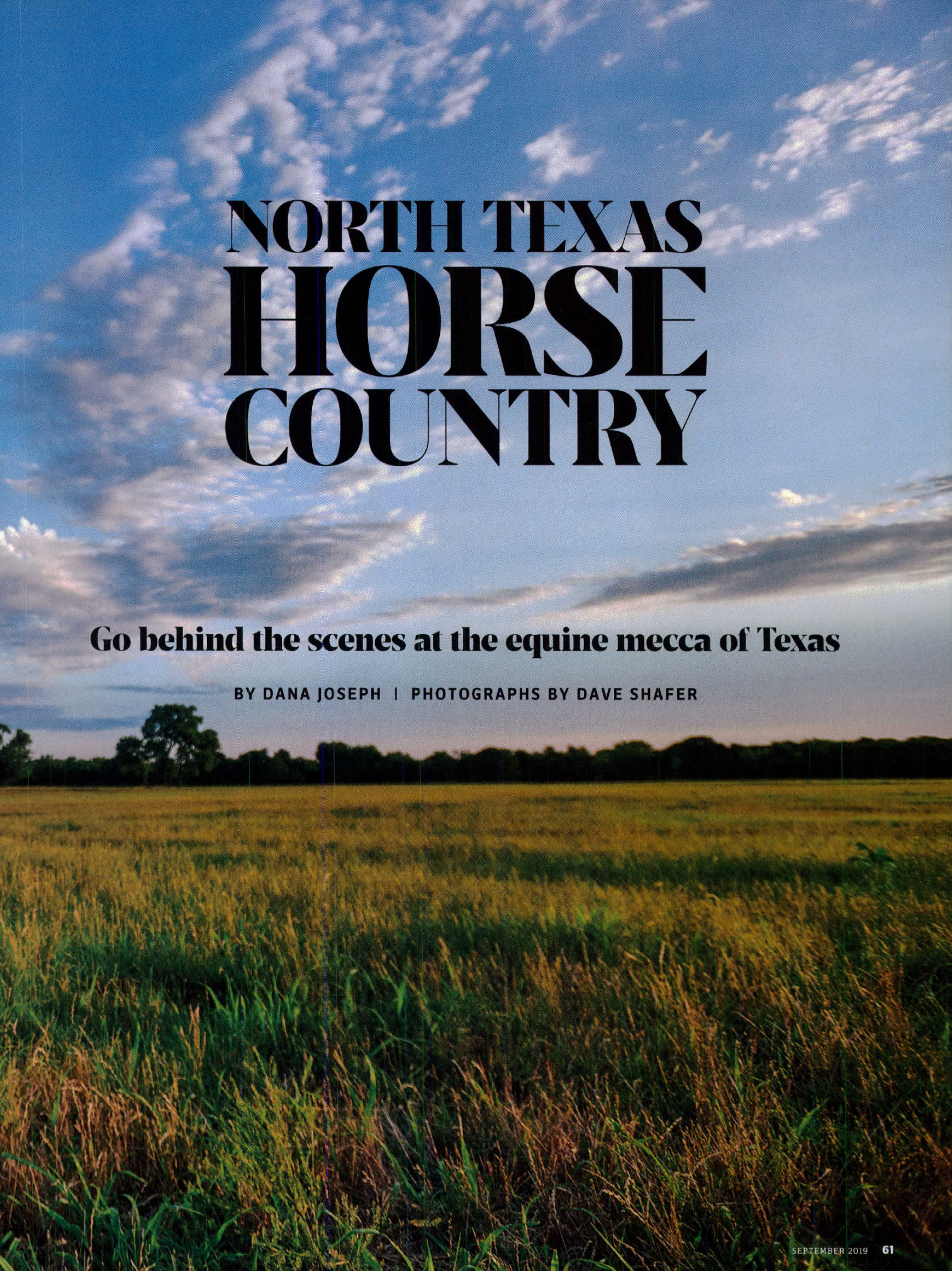
Camargo is someone I could spend all day hanging around with, but soon enough I’m back on US 281, relishing in my bounty. I’m the soon-to-be owner of three pairs of the Valley’s finest “manly footwear”—pairs 16, 17, and 18 in my collection. I’m now part of a bootmaking tradition that began in earnest on the north side of the Rio Grande the same time as the U.S. Constitution was drafted.

Armando Rios Jr. will certainly keep the Rios family’s heritage alive and well. But it’s unclear who will be Camargo’s successor in Mercedes. Good thing there are a number of young upstarts active in the Valley with the potential to fill his boots. **L**

★
**Clockwise from left:
Armando’s Boot Co.
showroom; a new design
for boots at Camargo’s;
one of the sewing machines
at Armando’s Boot Co.**







NORTH TEXAS HORSE COUNTRY

Go behind the scenes at the equine mecca of Texas

BY DANA JOSEPH | PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE SHAFER

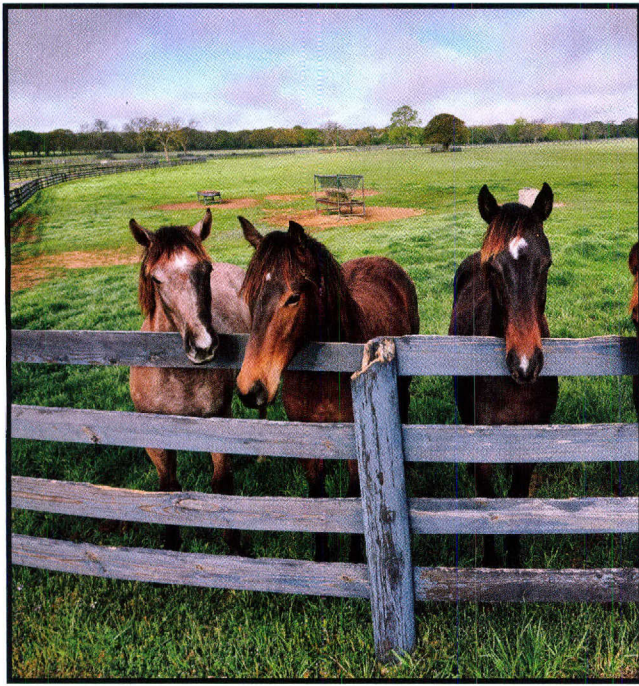
Here's something you don't get to see every day: a huge stallion working out on a treadmill in a hydrotherapy tank recessed below the floor of a barn. This isn't any old horse, nor is this any old barn. This is a state-of-the-art facility at Tom McCutcheon Reining Horses, an 80-acre ranch just north of Denton in Aubrey. The center breeds, raises, trains, treats, and sells some of the most elite equine athletes in the world.

You don't have to be the moneyed owner of an expensive Western-performance or hunter-jumper horse to see such magnificent animals in this exclusive setting. Some of the premier horse farms and ranches of North Texas grant inside access to their facilities and their resident four-legged celebrities. Six behind-the-scenes public bus tours are offered each year—three in the spring and three in the fall—as well as private group tours by appointment. Winding through countryside once devoted to peanut farms, each six-hour bus tour stops for visits at two of the more than 350 horse farms that collectively stable roughly 40,000 animals.

"A lot of people, even people living nearby in the Dallas area, might not realize that North Texas is a true equine mecca," says Dana Lodge of the Denton Convention & Visitors Bureau, which organizes the tours.

From American quarter horses, thoroughbreds, and American paint horses to Appaloosas, Arabians, and pasos; from reining and cutting to barrel racing and track racing, North Texas horse country is home to a remarkable variety of breeds and disciplines. This is the horse epicenter of the Lone Star State, which is saying something when you consider that Texas is home to more horses than any other state in the union.





Good Dirt

Why does so much horsepower converge on North Texas? "It's all about the sandy loam. The soil is good for their hooves," Lodge explains. "Between the soil and the climate, this region is ideal for working horses." As the tour guides explain, sandy loam consists of less than 7 percent clay, less than 50 percent silt, and between 43 and 50 percent sand. There's a great swath of it in North Texas covering an area about 45 miles wide

and 90 miles long from the Red River to south of Fort Worth. On the western fringes of the sandy loam, Weatherford. On the eastern edge, Sherman.

The well-drained, gently sloping land and mild winters that allow for almost year-round training started attracting horse farms and professional horsemen in the 1970s. As the industry grew, so did the economic impact and the area's reputation for equine excellence.



OPENING SPREAD: Valor Farm in Pilot Point. **LEFT:** The mare barn and a pasture at Valor Farm. **ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Yearlings at Valor Farm; a farrier at Tom McCutcheon Reining Horses in Pilot Point; awards adorn the office wall at Timberridge Ranch; the stallion Too Much Bling at Valor Farm.

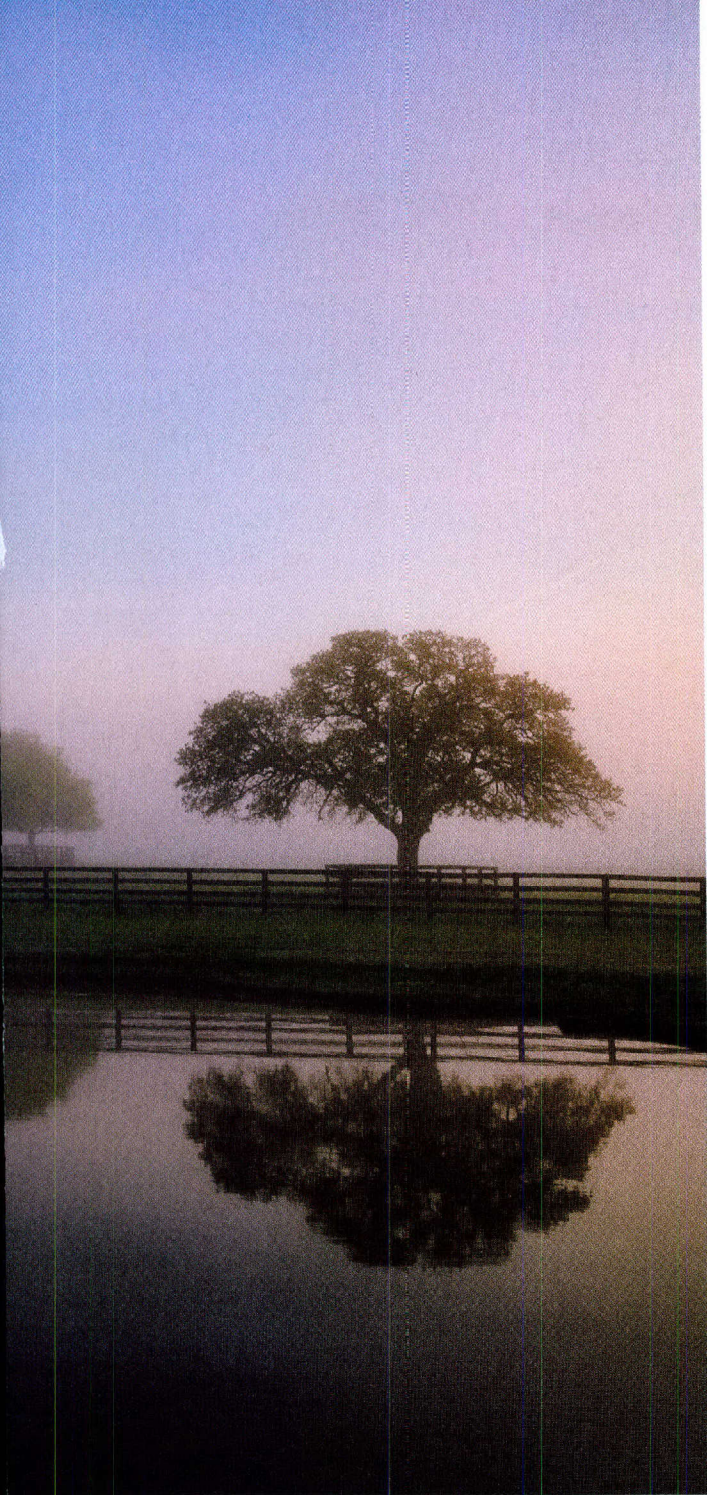


Horse aficionados, including some famous names, are well-aware. At McCutcheon's ranch, for example, musician Lyle Lovett keeps his quarter horse Smart and Shiney in breeding residence. In the farm's trophy-filled viewing area, visitors can see Smart and Shiney's stallion card—a glossy 8½-by-11-inch glamour shot with stats on the back that document his lineage and accomplishments. The card is like a cross between a model's one-sheet, a professional resume, and

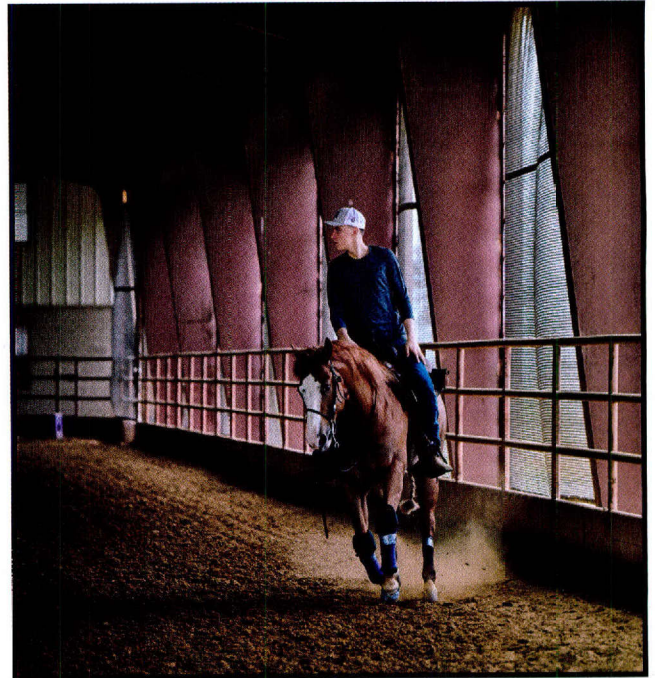
a sperm donor's profile. "The more black type on the card," the tour guide says, "the more prestige and money won."

In the same rack, you'll also find a stallion card for Gunners Special Nite, one of McCutcheon's prize horses and one of the most decorated horses in the sport of reining. A favorite in the barn and the show arena, Gunners Special Nite is top-ranked among sires for the earnings of his offspring in reining competitions.

McCutcheon's trophy room also provides a window view of the arena, where visitors look on as trainers like Cade McCutcheon work with both green horses learning the ropes and celebrity horses getting serious workouts. It's a marvel to watch as Cade puts a reining horse through its paces, maneuvering the quarter horse like a driver maneuvers a car: drive forward, back up, circle, turn on a dime, slide to a dramatic dust-raising stop.



LEFT: Valor Farm. BELOW: Ronny Lane Colston exercises Me and Julio at Tom McCutcheon Reining Horses; a yearling at Valor Farm.



**Why does so much horsepower converge on North Texas?
“It’s all about the sandy loam.
The soil is good for their hooves.”**





Behind the Scenes

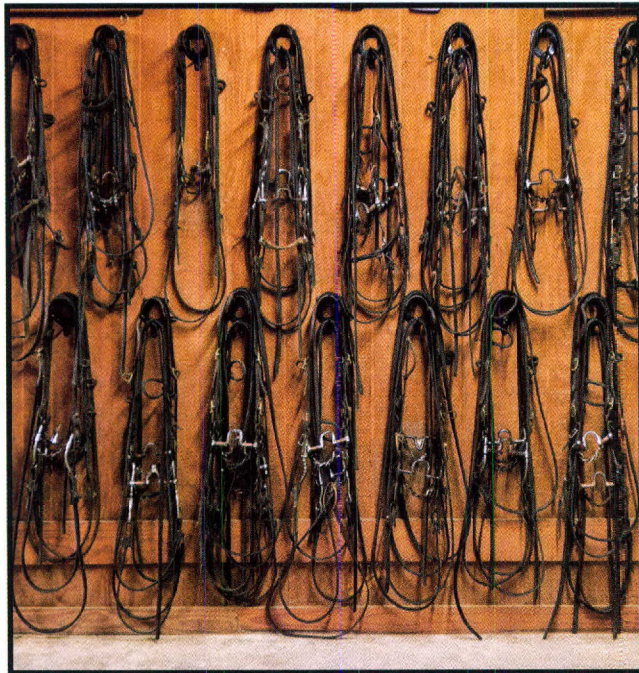
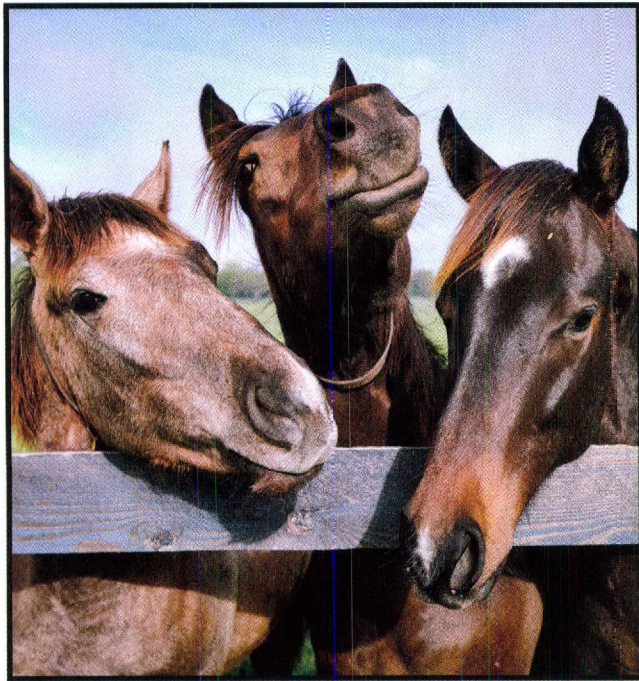
The tours vary depending on which ranches they visit and what's happening on any given day. But all provide an authentic first-hand look at horse people going about their business—a farrier shoeing; a horse getting a thorough scrub; over here, a rubdown; over there, a towel-off. From January through June, you're likely to see foals. You might even meet owners, if they're around, or get a chance to talk with breeding managers.

The facilities treat their horses like the sports professionals they are. McCutcheon's rehabilitation manager, Shannon Kernan, works with horses in a heated underwater treadmill, which is used for exercise, fitness, and post-operative care. "It's like water aerobics and physical therapy," Shannon says. "It's good for their minds, too." Or you might see a horse having a hydrotherapy treatment. "It's like a cold saltwater spa," she explains. "It dries out inflammation in legs or abscesses and fungus."

A sign posted near the ramp of the hydrotherapy tank reminds people to keep their wits about them when in the presence of animals that can weigh more than a ton: "An equine professional is not liable for an injury to or death of a participant in equine activities resulting from the inherent risks of equine activities." Throughout the tour, guides and trainers offer gentle reminders about how to behave—which horses are sweet, which might be dicey, which ones nibble, which need a wide berth. "It's better not to touch the stallions to be on the safe side," goes the practical suggestion.

For safety reasons and somewhat graphic content, the tours are not appropriate for young kids. McCutcheon's isn't shy about revealing some of the finer anatomically correct points of the breeding side of the business. The tours sometimes go into detail about how semen is collected from stallions for impregnating mares, either at the farm or for shipment.





PREVIOUS SPREAD: Valor Farm. LEFT: Gunners Special Nite works on an underwater treadmill at Tom McCutcheon Reining Horses. ABOVE, FROM TOP: Yearlings at Valor Farm; bridles at Tom McCutcheon Reining Horses.



The facilities treat their horses like the sports professionals they are, using tools like underwater treadmills and hydrotherapy.

“One collection can impregnate up to several mares,” Breeding Manager Kelse Clark-Fernandez points out. Semen can be shipped anywhere. That’s why you see FedEx trucks driving around horse country, the tour guides explain with unembarrassed candor: They’re ferrying stallion semen to DFW Airport for delivery all over the world.

Horses on a Hill

In the rolling countryside of Pilot Point, you’ll find Valor Farm. From the looks of the place, it could be a resort. Set on land that might be mistaken for a Kentucky thoroughbred farm, this is strictly a breeding ranch. Every bus tour incorporates Valor Farm, at least for a drive-through, if not a full behind-the-scenes visit.

It’s easy to see why this place is a crown jewel. The wrought-iron gates open to a tree-lined drive, and immaculate wood fencing extends in orderly fashion across some 400 rolling acres punctuated by oak trees. Clarence and Dorothy Scharbauer bought the land in 1991. Within two years, the former president of the American Quarter Horse Association and his wife, who owned racehorses from a young age, had built the barns and 18 miles of fencing. Today, both have passed on, and Valor Farm is owned by their son Douglas Scharbauer.

The offices sit in red-brick majesty at the top of a hill, presiding over a stallion barn, a breeding barn, and a mare barn. Valor Farm has hosted some of the

Horse Country Tours of North Texas

Discover Denton's North Texas Horse Country guided motor-coach tours are offered six times per year in spring and fall.

Upcoming dates are Oct. 5, Nov. 2, and Dec. 7. Tours depart from downtown Denton at 9 a.m. and last until 3 p.m. Lunch is included. Tours cost \$40 per person; advance reservations required. Discover Denton also provides information for self-guided driving tours online.

The tours are not recommended for children under 13.

940-382-7895;

horsecountrytours.com





A pasture at KaiseRosa Ranch in Pilot Point.

Southwest's top stallions, including the great thoroughbred racehorse Alysheba, who won two legs of the Triple Crown in 1987 and sired 11 horses that have gone on to win high-profile races.

You'd be forgiven if you confused the stallion barn for an exclusive hotel. Constructed with cherry wood and cobblestone, and with straw in the stalls rather than shavings, it's as elegant and immaculate as it is secure and professional. Framed "silks" line the walls as if in a museum—jockeys once wore these colorful jackets in races to indicate the owner of the horse and help identify the horse and rider. The office, which is connected to the stallion barn, has observation windows and security cameras trained on the horses, leaving no doubt what the truly valuable assets are here.

Visitors can watch as stallions are led into the barn, looking the part in the rarefied surroundings and appearing unconcerned about their duty. If you go behind the scenes at Valor Farm, employees will explain that teaser stallions of lesser quality often "tease" the mare so breeders are 100 percent sure the mare will accept the male. Once that's established, they bring in the expensive stallion.

Driving through Valor Farm is a show in itself—the manicured grounds and pond, the miles of fencing, and the "foaling barn/mare motel," where the mares closest to delivering are kept. In big paddocks, the horses have plenty of room to run and build leg muscles. The standoffish stallions look back at oglers like they somehow understand they're the main attraction.

And with good reason. Even if you opt for one of the self-guided tours and drive through North Texas horse country on your own, you're in for a treat. Ranch after ranch, fence line after fence line, paddock after paddock, you'll see man's other best friend: horses, in all their glory, dotting the landscape as far as the eye can see. 🐾



The Texas Collection

Tiny Texas Necklace \$28.00 *Handmade in Austin by Amanda Deer Jewelry 37914* | **Texas on the Table** \$45.00 *by Terry Thompson-Anderson 36139* | **Maple Serving Board with Turquoise Inlay** \$70.00 *Made in Waco by Waco Woodworks 40017* | **Texas Print Cosmetic Pouch** \$48.00 *Made in Austin by Newton Supply Co. 37427* | **Talk Texan to Me Set** \$21.95 *Made in the USA 37897* | **This is Texas Y'all!** \$14.95 *by Misha Maynerick Blaise 36810* | **True Texan Hook** \$39.99 *Made in Waco, Texas 37764*


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PLATES



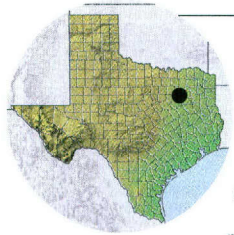
**ASSORTED STUFFED
DUMPLINGS** at
Russian Banya, a spa,
sauna, and restaurant
just outside Dallas.



Sweat for Your Supper

This Russian bathhouse and restaurant encourages both detoxing and indulgence

By Veronica Meewes



RUSSIAN BANYA
2515 Rosemeade
Parkway, Suite 401,
Carrollton.
Open Tue-Fri,
Noon-10 p.m.;
Sat-Sun, 10 a.m.-10 p.m.
214-483-5050;
russianbanyaofdallas.com

Communal public bathing has been a part of many cultures—from Turkish hammams to Roman baths—for centuries. While traditional bathhouses are much less widespread these days, there are still places where you can take part in the age-old tradition of not just getting clean but also being *cleansed*. At Russian Banya in the Dallas suburb of Carrollton, a Slavic feast follows intensive sauna sessions. The bathhouse and restaurant is the only one of its kind in Texas.

Inside, a row of snowy Russian birch trees hung with Khokhloma-patterned oven mitts opens up to the kitchen and dining room, where Chef Niyara Alieva stirs up fragrant dishes like dumplings, soup, and stuffed cabbage from her native Uzbekistan and neighboring countries.

Although you can go to Russian Banya just to eat, a meal there is much more satisfying after putting your body through the rigorous routine that's been practiced at establishments like this one for thousands of years.

Regulars know to bring their own robes, towels, and flip-flops, but newcomers can

easily rent these essentials at the front counter before making their way back to a lounge area reserved for bathers. The walls are muraled with provincial cabin scenes—a stark contrast to the vivid floral designs painted on the windows in a stained-glass effect.

“You’re not going to find another spa in the state of Texas with a wood-burning stove because it’s against fire code,” host Maxim Kim explains. “But ours was grandfathered in 13 years ago when the code still allowed it. Gas and electricity dry out the air; they’re not natural. Whereas with wood, the fire dies out, the coals keep the heat, and you don’t get the smoke that fire generates.”

The wood-fueled sauna is heated to around 220 degrees with 85-percent humidity—hot enough that guests are advised to enter with a wooden slab to sit on for protection. An adjacent Turkish steam room moisturizes at 110 degrees with 100-percent humidity; and an electric-heated dry Finnish sauna, recommended for experiencing last, reaches 180 degrees with 10-percent humidity. Kim recommends five-to-15 minute sauna sessions alternated with cold plunges in the nearly 40-degree pool.

“Traditionally, in Russia, people have banyas inside their house, and they will just go outside and rub snow on themselves to cool down,” Kim says. “We don’t have snow or a cold river nearby, so the next best thing is a pool like this with filtration and a cooling system.”



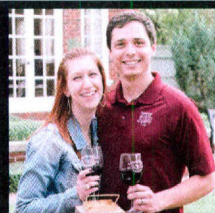
FROM LEFT: Chicken tabaka, a traditional Georgian dish; hand-painted mural outside the restaurant.



HISTORIC DOWNTOWN BRYAN

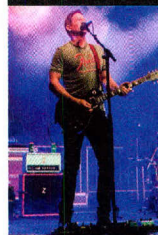
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PLATES

When sweating in the sauna is followed by a cold plunge, the heart rate increases, blood vessels constrict, and both adrenaline and endorphins surge. Common theories purport that the practice improves blood and lymphatic circulations, helps flush out waste faster, and boosts white blood cell count to fight unwanted substances.

“If you leave without getting in the pool, you haven’t really experienced the Russian banya,” co-owner Delsey Portillo says.

Portillo, a retired commercial pilot; her husband, JR, who runs the family trucking business; and their daughter, Noor, a recent UT-Austin graduate, were regulars at the banya before they found out last year it was for sale. They decided to take it on as partners, with Noor as the majority partner. The facilities had been owned by two different Russian families since 2006, and the local Russian community did not immediately embrace the new ownership.



JR, DELSEY, AND NOOR Portillo with host Maxim Kim (far right). The Portillos purchased Russian Banya last year.

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“If you leave without getting in the pool, you haven’t really experienced the Russian banya.”

“People were wondering why Russians weren’t buying the banya,” says Portillo, whose family made improvements to the facility before reopening. “But we have worked really hard to make it better, and now they know we really care for the tradition.”

After several rounds of sweating and plunging, it’s finally time to eat. Start off with *khachapuri*, a Georgian cheese-stuffed bread to dip in *ajika*, a bell pepper-based paste. Follow that with a trio of dumplings: potato-stuffed *vareniki* topped with fried onions and sour cream; minced-meat filled *pelmeni* in a rich broth; and peppery *khinkali*, a type of hand-pinched Slavic soup dumpling filled with savory juices. Chef Alieva’s version of *golubtsi*, Russian stuffed cabbage, is stewed to perfection in a slightly sweet sauce of sour cream and tomato, and the straightforward borscht features tender chunks of beef.

It is clear that Alieva, who’s been the chef since the banya opened 13 years ago, mastered each of these carefully executed, homestyle dishes while cooking for her large extended family. The desserts, also made in house, include *syrniki*, a creamy and lightly sweet cheesecake, which is best eaten with a Turkish tea digestif.

You’re likely to leave feeling like a new person after the delightfully polar experience of detoxing and indulging—it might even open your mind.

“Sometimes people work really hard to make money, but they don’t appreciate life or enjoy the small things,” Portillo says of the banya’s philosophy. “There are a lot of opportunities in front of you, but you don’t even know that they are there. If you have peace of mind and relax, then you can see what opportunities can bring you.”

Photo: Eric W. Pohl

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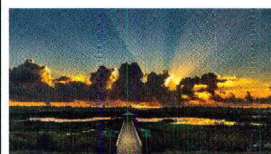
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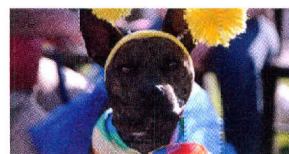
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A Taste of the Past

Pioneering Texans provided the blueprint for the state's cuisine

By E. Dan Klepper

CARNE GUISADA, a typical pioneer dish of South Texas, from Adán Medranc's cookbook *Truly Texas Mexican*.



COWBOYS AT KING RANCH cook batches of traditional Mexican cowboy bread in cast-iron Dutch ovens.

Polk County Enterprise. These berries were used to create the region's favorite jelly, a tart, nectarous preserve. Like South Texas salsa and Central Texas kolaches, a jar of mayhaw jelly at the breakfast table once revealed as much about where you lived as it did about what you ate.

At its genesis, Texas cuisine was tethered to a nomadic lifestyle, more a means of forestalling starvation than a tasty pleasure. For native populations as well as newcomers on the move, meals often depended on adaptability, opportunity, and edibility. If it didn't kill us or make us ill, we cooked and ate it. In 1859, Randolph B. Marcy, a U.S. Army officer and explorer, provided useful recipes in *The Prairie Traveler*, a handbook for the westbound. In addition to advice like the best routes across Texas and the safest way to navigate horses through swift river currents, Marcy included information about food. His recipe for pemmican was derived from indigenous peoples. Pemmican could be made from whatever meat was available, which, for a while, was bison.

"The buffalo meat is cut into thin flakes, and hung up to dry in the sun or before a slow fire," Marcy wrote. "It is then pounded between two stones and reduced to a powder; this powder is placed in the bag of the animal's hide, with the hair on the outside; melted grease is then poured into it, and the bag sewn up." Jerky is likely the closest kin to pemmican, adopted by traveling pioneers who could hang the meat to dry on lines strung along the sides of their wagons before flavoring or smoke-curing in camp. Today, artisanal smokehouses across Texas offer delicious jerky options (see sidebar on Page 83), regionalized in part by the choice of smoking wood. East Texas black hickory imparts a strong bacon flavor, Hill Country peach wood adds sweetness, and South Texas mesquite gives an earthy punch.

Food often took on a different kind of significance as pioneers struggled to forge a new life for themselves and

Food has always been instrumental in establishing a sense of place—especially during Texas' journey from settlement to statehood. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, Texas cuisine was shaped by the variety of ethnicities arriving into the territory as well as those who were already here. Ingredients, and the meals they composed, were determined by what could be locally gathered, raised, or

hunted, then prepared in manners that had been used for generations or replicated the flavors of home.

One of those ingredients was mayhaw, a small, cranberry-like fruit that ripens beneath the hardwood timbers of the East Texas floodplains. "Who would deny themselves the pleasure of living in grand old East Texas, where mayhaws, that make the best jelly in the world, grow wild in the woods?" editor W.L. West proclaimed in a May 1910 edition of the

Ingredients, and the meals they composed, were determined by what could be locally gathered, raised, or hunted, then prepared in manners that had been used for generations or replicated the flavors of home.

their families. In diaries and travel journals, the settlers dwell mostly on daily challenges and failures, while descriptions of food appear as if to substitute for joy, providing the only light-hearted moments in a narrative of hardships.

“The soldier whom the horse kicked died just as we reached camp,” Eliza Griffin Johnston, artist and wife of a Confederate general, wrote on Nov. 3, 1855. “He left the Breaks but a week since, in fine health and buoyant hopes and now he is nothing but dust and ashes.” Johnston follows six days later with this entry: “Ellen makes very nice rolls and between venison, chicken’s eggs, cornbread, fresh butter, potatoes, apples, and dried peaches, we fare quite sumptuously.”

As pioneers put down roots and began to build communities, Texas’ regional cuisine evolved. Settlers imbued the flavors brought from the places they’d left behind into the ingredients they cultivated in their new home. For East Texans, this meant corn and pork. Corn, a prolific crop developed by Native Americans from a wild grass, provided settlers with options: It could be ground, soaked, boiled, baked, fermented, popped, fried, and kept year-round. It also fed hogs—in the state’s forested areas, farmers kept hogs in pens or turned them loose to forage. As



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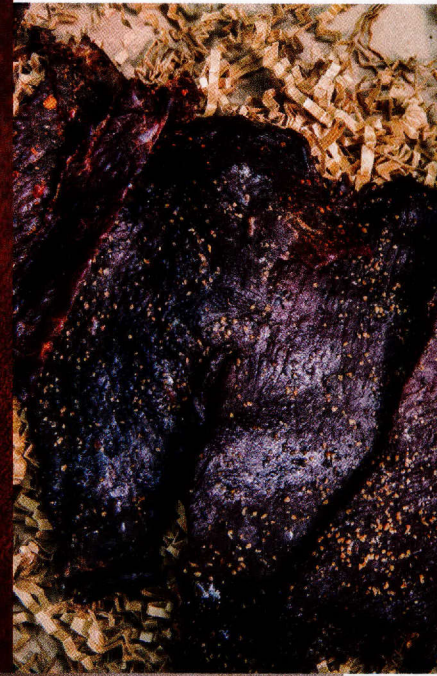
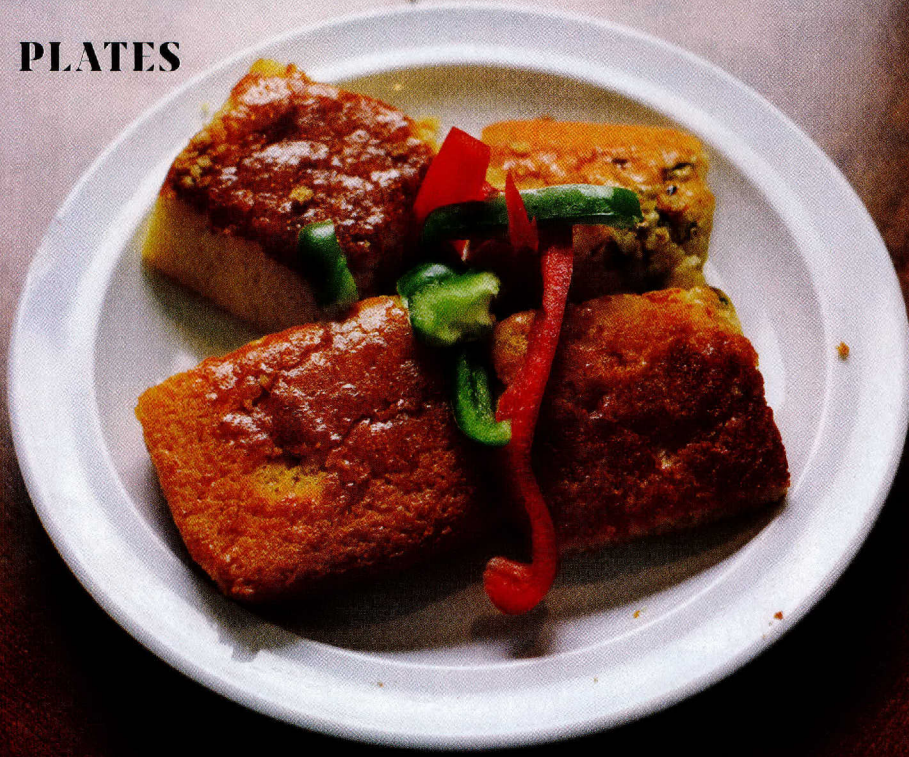
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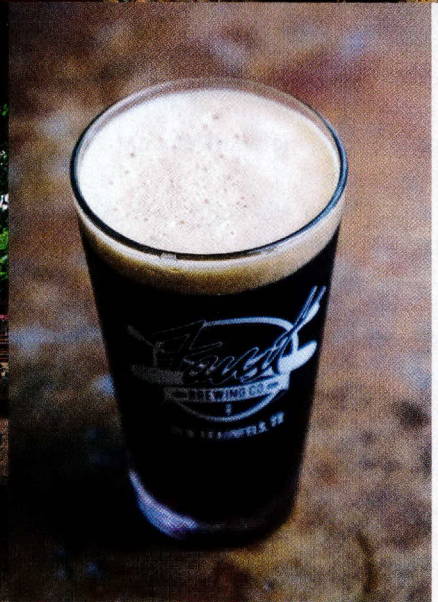


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PLATES



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: Cornbread at
Mikki's Cafe, jerky from
Brockhouse Jerky, pint
and beer garden
at Faust Brewing in
New Braunfels.



omnivores, the hogs were willing to eat almost anything and, if free-ranging, foraged for most of their food around the homestead. Pigs were used for their hams, chops, loins, ribs, bellies, and trotters in dozens of dishes. The fat, rendered into lard, was used for baked goods and grease for the skillet. Corn was served as a side dish in the forms of corn pone, hoecakes, corn muffins, scratch cakes, spoon bread, corn dodgers, johnny cakes, hominy bread, and hush puppies—all brothers and sisters in the cornbread family.

“One pint of [corn]meal, mixed very thin with water, three eggs, one tablespoon of lard, one-half tablespoon of butter, one teaspoon of yeast powder, and a little salt,” reads the cornbread recipe in *Texas Cook Book*, published in 1883 by the Ladies Association of the First Presbyterian Church in Houston. The cookbook represents an amalgamation of Southern recipes and regional ingredients, often reflecting the skills and inventiveness of household cooks who, up until the end of the Civil War, were frequently slaves.

Hundreds of miles away, Central Texans’ tastes were also expanding thanks in part to immigrating Germans. The Germans favored lager, a type of beer requiring cool, slow fermentation. The mid-1800s saw a proliferation of German breweries across Texas, kickstarting regional craft brews that, over a 150 years later, have seen a renaissance with hundreds of new breweries and brewpubs now flourishing throughout the state.

The gradual settlement of West Texas and the rise of cattle ranching created a

cuisine uniquely suited to range culture—the culinary art of the chuckwagon. Rancher Charles Goodnight is credited with the mobile cowboy kitchens we're familiar with today. He modified an army-surplus wagon by adding a box on the back for provisions, a hinged folding lid for a cooking surface, a large water barrel in the wagon bed, and a canvas sling underneath for storing firewood. Chuckwagon food featured a spartan menu of beef, beans, coffee, salted pork, and sourdough biscuits. But on occasion the cook, known as a "coosie," would prepare a dessert, usually a fruit cobbler composed of sweetened, buttery dough layered with dried apples, peaches, or apricots and baked among coals in a Dutch oven.

Perhaps nowhere in the state saw as much a mix of cultures—native, Mexican, and European—as South Texas. These days, it's mostly recognized as the birthplace of Tex-Mex. This pervasive American treatment of Mexican cooking, known for lots of frying and yellow cheese, has become beloved throughout the country. But historically, "true South Texas cuisine is the home cooking, *comida casera*, of Texas Mexicans," says Adán Medrano, Texas chef and author of the upcoming cookbook *Don't Count the Tortillas: The Art of Texas Mexican Cooking*. According to Medrano, authentic South Texas cuisine is "clearly descended from early traditions, vibrant and strong in their flavor profiles, using the same cooking techniques that were traditionally employed." One of the holdover dishes from centuries' past is *carne guisada*, a beef stew made thick with roux. Luckily, it's still available at many Mexican restaurants around the state.

With a clear blueprint of where it's been, Texas' cuisine marches into the future—and continues to be shaped by the state's unique ethnic mix and the natural bounty of its land. 🌵



Then & Now

Here are a few ways to satisfy your appetite while getting in touch with your inner pioneer.

For a modern version of pemmican, **Brockhouse Jerky** in Seagoville offers hickory-smoked jerky, including the spicy "Hell's Fire" flavor. 469-333-5265; brockhousejerky.com

The classic pioneer pairing of pork and corn can be sampled at **Mikki's Café** in Houston, where cornbread dressing is served alongside smothered pork chops on Fridays and Sundays. 281-568-5115; mikkiscafe.com

Sip German-style lagers and ales at **Faust Brewing Company** in New Braunfels, which has been in operation since 1998. The brewery also creates uniquely Texan mash-ups like the JalaPolka Pils, a pilsner aged with fresh jalapeños. 830-625-7791; faustbrewing.com

Learn Dutch-oven cooking from outdoor cooking masters at **Texas Parks and Wildlife**. Classes are featured in parks across the state. tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/cooking

For authentic South Texas cuisine, chef and food writer Adán Medrano recommends trying the *carne guisada* at **Rita's Fiesta Café** in San Antonio. Or try cooking in your own *cocina* using one of Medrano's recipes from his book, **Truly Texas Mexican: A Native Culinary Heritage in Recipes**.

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TEXANA



ALVIN CROW and the Pleasant Valley Boys are among bands keeping Western swing music alive at venues like the Broken Spoke in Austin.

Swinging out West

Milton Brown, Bob Wills, and the Texas birth of Western swing

By Michael Corcoran

Western swing was born about 4 miles southwest of downtown Fort Worth at the Crystal Springs Dance Pavilion, although you wouldn't know it when driving past the now-empty lot near the West Fork of the Trinity River. In the early 1930s, the cavernous pavilion drew hundreds for the "hillbilly jazz" of Milton Brown and His Musical Brownies. While the venue burned down in 1966, Western swing is still going strong—a style that's among the most recognizable roots of Texas music.

Bob Wills famously earned the "King of Western Swing" tag over four decades of dance hall-filling dominance with his band, the Texas Playboys. But the true innovator was Brown and his band, the Musical Brownies, who developed the prototype sound of Western swing in 1932. Four years later, the singer/

bandleader would be dead, and Wills would carry the torch with his trademark "Ah-ha!" holler.

"Western swing was invented for its danceability," says Jason Roberts, who leads the modern-day Texas Playboys. "But I think it's also the classic songs that endure. The big three are probably 'Sar. Antonio Rose,' 'Faded Love,' and 'Maiden's Prayer,' plus you've got all those great songs Cindy Walker [of Mexia] wrote like 'Bubbles in My Beer.' You'll hear some blues, jazz, country, polka, and pop music when you go to a Western swing show."

Fort Worth Origins

Born in 1903, Brown grew up in Stephenville with a fiddle whiz as his pop. But the younger Brown was a singer, not a fiddle player. Back then, house party bands typically featured a fiddler and a guitarist mostly playing instrumental tunes. If there were vocals

“Western swing was invented for its danceability... You’ll hear some blues, jazz, country, polka, and pop music when you go to a Western swing show.”

in fiddle music, they were country-raw, from the backwoods. Brown’s vocals were smooth, from the ballroom, with a sense of swing. Wills grew up in Turkey and made his name playing fiddle.

In 1930, the formidable pair met at a house party in Fort Worth, the home of WBAP and its Barn Dance program, which began broadcasting in 1923 (two years before WSM’s Grand Ole Opry in Nashville). Brown and Wills joined forces in a band that would come to be called the Light Crust Doughboys, a name taken from the sponsor of their daily radio show, Burrus Mill and Elevator Co., which made Light Crust Flour. The band honed its sound in real time, performing live over the airwaves, day after day.

From the Barn to the Ballroom

As the Light Crust Doughboys grew more popular, Burrus Mill’s general sales manager, the infamous W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel, who would go on to become governor of Texas, forbid the band to play dances. Brown, who was already at odds with O’Daniel over pay, left in protest and started putting together the Musical Brownies.

Brown’s smooth vocals brought the city to the country, and with the addition of pianist Fred “Papa” Calhoun, the Brownies converted the string band into a dance outfit, mixing the previously disparate styles of jazz, country, blues, and pop to fill the floors. The 2/4 “Milton Brown Beat” revolved around the mighty strike hand of tenor banjoist Ocie Stockard, who was followed closely by stand-up bassist Wanna Coffman and Milton’s little brother Derwood Brown on rhythm guitar. Fiddler Jesse Ashlock handled the melody.

In Cary Ginell’s 1994 biography *Milton Brown and the Founding of Western Swing*, Calhoun recalled being dragged out to Crystal Springs on a snowy Thursday night in late ’32 and being impressed by the turnout of hundreds for Milton and the boys. Nobody played keyboards with string bands back then, but Milton took the cover off of the house piano and called Calhoun up to sit in on “Nobody’s Sweetheart.” The pianist



was jammed for the entire set, and during intermission, Brown asked him to join the band.

They had found something special, but Brown was not done assembling his dream lineup. He hired classically trained Cecil Brower to play twin fiddle—a new concept—with Ashlock at first, then Cliff Bruner. In late ’34 came steel guitar genius Bob Dunn, who started off as a Hawaiian-style player, then found greater satisfaction emulating the sliding trombone of Vernon’s Jack Teagarden.

Bring the Swing

Everybody wanted that swing, pioneered in the 1920s by bands like the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra, with Louis Armstrong’s trumpet peppering the beat. Jazz-minded rural musicians wanted to play “that hokum,” too, and the Musical Brownies showed that Texas audiences also wanted to dance to it. The old Texas dance halls, built by Czech and German immigrants in the years between the Civil War and World War I, were ready-made for this exciting new string-band swing. The venues were so cavernous that bands had to use more instrumentation, because if there’s a word to describe what makes Texas music special, it’s dancing. The beat had to break through the chatter to give a template of movement to dancers on the floor.

Brown’s band was the first to play a jazz/pop repertoire with country music instrumentation, but Wills went bigger, adding drummer Smokey Dacus in 1935, then a horn section soon after. Wills and his 13-piece orchestra, with Tommy Duncan on vocals, filled every square inch of air in the enormous dance halls and ballrooms of Texas and Oklahoma, even-



tually outdrawing Tommy Dorsey and Harry James.

"Bob Wills taught me how to be a bandleader and how to be a star," Willie Nelson wrote in 1988 in *Willie: An Autobiography*. "He would hit the bandstand at 8 p.m. and stay for four hours without a break. One song would end, he'd count four and hit another one."

Keep the people moving and dancing. It was a formula later followed by bands like Bruner's Texas Wanderers and the Blue Ridge Playboys, both from Houston, and San Antonio's Adolph Hofner and the Pearl Wranglers.

"Although I never had the pleasure of knowing Milton Brown, he and his band were my big inspiration," Hofner told an interviewer. "They played jazz then, the same as New Orleans jazz, but without the horns. They did it with strings."

So why did Bob Wills get the credit as the "King of Western Swing?" Because Brown died just as Western swing was taking off. In April 1936, he crashed his new Pontiac Silver Streak into a telephone pole on the Jacksboro Highway near the Avalon Motel (still operational). He was only 32. His passenger, 16-year-old Katy Prehoditch, was also killed in the crash.

Brown and Wills worked together less than two years before splitting ways and forming separate bands. Both kept adding instruments and improvisation, and a Texas tradition was born—one carried on by popular bands like Asleep at the Wheel, Billy Mata and the Texas Tradition, Jody Nix and the Texas Cowboys, Hot Club of Cowtown, and The Western Flyers.

Sometimes what you go out and accomplish on your own surpasses the benefits of collaboration. Brown was the Thomas Edison of Western swing, and yet, perhaps because he was a singer and not an instrumentalist, he's not widely known for his mammoth musical innovations. But Wills went to his grave in 1975 knowing that, at least in the beginning, his Texas Playboys followed what the Musical Brownies were laying down. Still, if the Texas Playboys hadn't been so good, we likely wouldn't be listening to Western swing and honoring Brown's musical legacy to this day. 🐾

Get in the Swing!

Western swing lives on in Texas dance halls and honky-tonks, as well as at celebrations and museums across the state.

Turkey celebrates its hometown boy with **Bob Wills Day** on the last Saturday of each April with performances by Western swing bands. The Bob Wills Museum showcases Wills memorabilia, and the old Texas Playboys tour bus is parked downtown. bobwillsday.com

Nov. 1-2, **Greenville** hosts the annual **Bob Wills Fiddle Festival & Contest**. Performers this year include Bob Wills' Texas Playboys under the direction of Jason Roberts, Jody Nix and the Texas Cowboys, and Riders in the Sky. bobwillsfiddlefest.com

Cowtown Birthplace of Western Swing in **Fort Worth** celebrates the **90th anniversary of Western swing** with a music festival in November 2020 at the Historic National Hall. The group is raising funds to build a Western swing museum. birthplaceofwesternswing.com

The Heart of Texas Country Music Museum in **Brady** celebrates the history of Western swing, as well as all country music from Texas, with artifacts such as a stage suit worn by Jim Reeves and Kitty Wells' gingham dress. hillbillyhits.com

In **Austin**, the **Broken Spoke**—where Wills played in 1966—has a mini-museum celebrating classic Western swing, along with live honky-tonk music most nights. brokenspokeaustintx.net



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2. All the Awesome Events

Fall in Galveston is filled with parades, music and all the food you can handle. Get your fill of festival food at the Galveston Shrimp Festival, Oktoberfest and Greek Festival. Do you love art? Don't miss ARToberFEST, which transforms the Historic Downtown District into an outdoor gallery that showcases the works of more than 125 artists from across the country.

If you're here in November or December, check out the 50 days of holiday events that transform Galveston into the Winter Wonder Island of Texas. Popular events include ICE LAND at Moody Gardens, 46th Annual Dickens On The Strand and THE POLAR EXPRESS™ Train Ride at the Galveston Railroad Museum.

3. Ghost Tours. Need We Say More?

What better time to experience the island's spooky side than Halloween season? Fortunately, there are an abundance of captivating ghost tours that will give you all the spine-tingling chills you could ask for.

Explore some of the island's most active paranormal hot spots with Dash Beardsley, the Ghost Man of Galveston. Visit some of the creepiest locations in the Strand Historic District or embark on an eerie journey into the Old City Cemetery, the resting place of Civil War soldiers and victims of The Great Storm of 1900. Stay at the Hotel Galvez to learn about

the ghost bride on the fifth floor. Take a ghost tour of the 1859 Ashton Villa for a chance to see the spectral form of former resident Miss Bettie Brown. Meanwhile, a sunset cruise to some of the island's mysterious places is a gripping way to learn about Galveston's supernatural past.

4. World-Class Shows at The Grand 1894 Opera House

For a first-rate concert or to see a Broadway show live, look no further than one of Galveston's cultural institutions, The Grand 1894 Opera House. This fall is the beginning of the opera house's 125th anniversary season with plenty of upcoming shows that you won't want to miss.

5. It's a Great Time to be Outdoors

For starters, autumn is one of the best times to go fishing on the island. Flounder, red drum and trout are especially active as they start feeding for the winter, meaning you just might catch a few fish you can brag to your friends about. Fall is also bird migration season and Galveston sits in the heart of the trans-Gulf migration route. Get your binoculars and explore the island's shorelines, prairies and waterways to see non-native birds like the sandhill crane, sharp-shinned hawk and Mississippi kite.

When you're not fishing or birdwatching, rent a stand-up paddleboard and hit the waves at the Galveston Seawall, explore the kayaking trails in Galveston Island State Park or simply kick back and catch a refreshingly cool sea breeze.

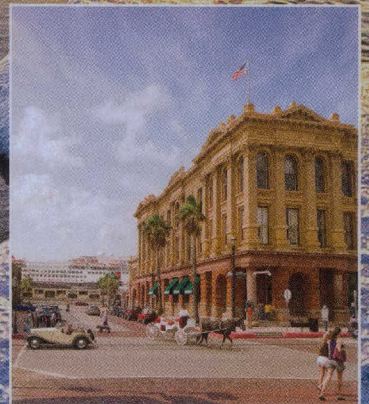
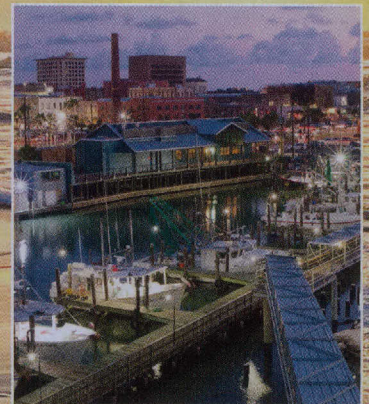
All of this is just a taste of why you should visit Galveston this autumn. The island's happening nightlife, unique shops and restaurants, remarkable historic sites and incredible attractions serve up plenty more reasons to "fall" for Galveston.

To plan the perfect getaway, visit Galveston.com.



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Ocean Star Offshore Drilling Rig & Museum

Welcome aboard!

Embark on an industrial-strength discovery in a modern museum setting. The Ocean Star offers the opportunity to physically enter the world of the offshore industry. So much of our modern society relies on oil and things made from it. At the Ocean Star Museum learn how hydrocarbons form and what it takes to extract them from the earth—from people and processes to tools and technologies.

Open seven days a week for self-guided tours, step aboard for a unique learning adventure. Discount rates are available for groups.

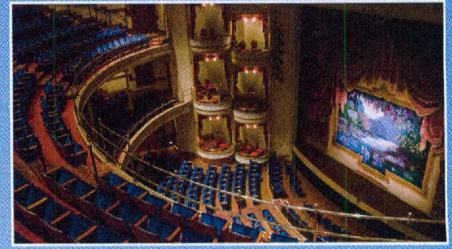
OceanStarOEC.com
409-766-7827



Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier

Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier is a Gulf Coast destination featuring family-oriented attractions including 16 rides, midway games, waterfront dining and retail shops. From the extreme steel coaster, the Iron Shark to our 5D Theater Ride, kids of all ages will relish in the excitement.

Be adventurous at PleasurePier.com.
409-766-4950



The Grand 1894 Opera House

The Grand 1894 Opera House presents a year-round performing arts schedule featuring stars of stage and screen. Broadway hits, music, dance, comedy and more. This historic venue, the official opera house of the State of Texas, offers no seat further than 70 feet from the stage with an intimate view of performances that can't be matched! The Grand is also available for meetings, weddings, and corporate events, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Get your entertainment at TheGrand.com.
800-821-1894



The Galveston Naval Museum

Come aboard the "Avenger of Pearl Harbor," the USS Cavalla (SS-244), known by her crew as the "Lucky Lady." This attack submarine sank the Japanese aircraft carrier that launched the attack against the US Naval Fleet on Dec. 7, 1941. See how sailors lived onboard the "Defender of D-Day," the USS Stewart (DE-238). The Stewart secretly escorted President Roosevelt and his flotilla across the Atlantic Ocean to meet with Stalin and Churchill for what would come to be known as the Tehran Conference." The museum is located at Seawolf Park and is open 7 days a week.

GalvestonNavalMuseum.com
409-770-3196

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GALVESTON ISLAND



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Magrit Co.

IN 2014, MAGGIE DIETRICK established Margrit Co. in Lorena, just south of Waco, with the idea of creating her own signature jewelry line. Her eye-catching earrings, bracelets, and pendants incorporate colorful pieces of recycled glass in geometric forms, which she frosts to look like sea glass and then artfully wraps in metal wire. Her casual-chic designs, produced in a range of hues, evoke summer days spent on the beach. "I had always planned to one day start my own business—it just happened sooner rather than later," she says. "I wanted to share my love for fashion and jewelry." As for inspiration, she doesn't have to look far for successful role models: Kendra Scott, Mica May, and Marcey Futris are all fellow Texans. "I love to see those women's creativity and passion for their own business, but also how they share that passion with other women and mentor other businesses along the way," she says. **Shop more Magrit Co. products at shop.texashighways.com**



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EVENTS



Out of the Woods

A Piney Woods traditor celebrates the art of the lumberjack

The Texas State Forest Festival, founded in 1938 and held as a county fair until 1953, is a fall staple in Lufkin. This year's event features more than 20 rides, live music, a beer garden, and market and food vendors, so there's something for everyone in the 20,000-plus crowd. A homespun highlight is the annual hushpuppy championship—now in its 48th year—where fried-food fanatics compete to see if their special ingredient causes their iteration of the Southern delicacy to soar to the top of the judges' list. Attendees can also enjoy an event Paul Bunyan wouldn't miss: the All-American Lumberjack Show. This 35-year tradition features axe throwing, tree climbing, and log rolling.

—Mikela Floyd Kinnison

Texas State Forest Festival, Sept. 18–22
George H. Henderson Jr. Expo Center,
1200 Ellen Trout Drive, Lufkin
936-634-6644;
texasstateforestfestival.com

Arts & Culture

CENTRAL TEXAS

Comfort

Fall Art Festival

Sept. 14

Nearly 30 artists display their works at shops in the historic downtown area and at local wineries. Browse, shop, and support artists selling paintings, ceramics, and jewelry. *Historic Downtown Comfort*. 830-995-3131; comfort-texas.com

Giddings

Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival

Sept. 13–14

Texas authors come to Giddings with a variety of books—children's stories, crafts, poetry, Texas cookbooks, historical fiction, mystery, romance, music, gardening, and anything related to Texas. Authors sell their books and take questions. *Giddings Public Library and Cultural Center*, 276 N. Orange St. 979-542-2716; texaswordwrangler.com

Ingram

Texas Arts and Crafts Fair

Sept. 28–29

The 43rd annual fair has more than 100 artists, musicians, demonstrators, and food vendors. The Limerlites and Kerrville's Sentimental Orchestra headline the festival, and Doug Baum and his Texas Camel Corps make an appearance, offering living history lessons about the use of camels in Texas and across America in the 19th century. Fairgoers can pet camels and observe items handcrafted from camel hair. Artists at the festival include painters, sculptors, jewelry makers, and woodworkers. *Hill Country Arts Foundation*, 120 Point Theatre Road S. 830-367-5121; txartsandcraftsfair.com

San Marcos

Mermaid Parade and Faire

Sept. 21

Festivities are part of Mermaid Splash, an annual, multi-event

festival celebrating San Marcos' arts, culture, heritage, and the San Marcos River. Head downtown for the Mermaid Promenade, an eclectic spectacle full of floats, marchers, dancers, and music. Follow the floats to San Marcos Plaza Park for a free community festival of art, live music, food, and fun. *Downtown San Marcos/City Park*, 111 E. San Antonio St. 512-825-2819; mermaidsociety.smtx.com

San Antonio

Pachanga de Palabras: A Westside Book Festival

Sept. 28

Join Echale Books, a traveling, bookselling popup, for a book festival. There are poets, book and zine vendors (self-published magazines), free workshops and activities for all ages, and live music. *Plaza Guadalupe*, 1327 Guadalupe St. 210-328-1980

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Anson

Party in the Park

Sept. 21

Anson City Park comes alive with local food trucks, a craft show, live music, bounce houses, a five-horse carousel, and a petting zoo. This event is held in conjunction with the Jones County Fair and Livestock Show. *Anson City Park*, 2231 Avenue G. 325-823-3259

Arlington

Montopolis: The Legend of Big Bend

Sept. 22

Indie classical group Montopolis turns Texas tales into song with a free musical and visual experience. *Levitt Pavilion*, 100 W. Abram St. 817-543-4301; levittpavilionarlington.org

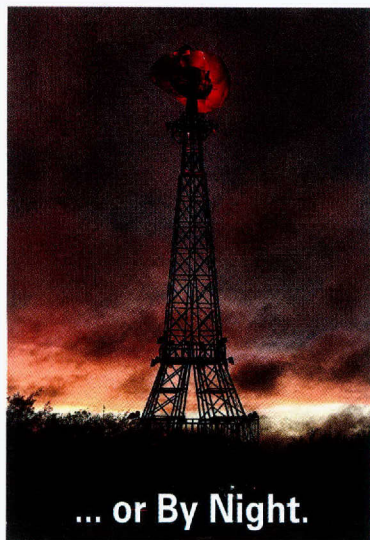
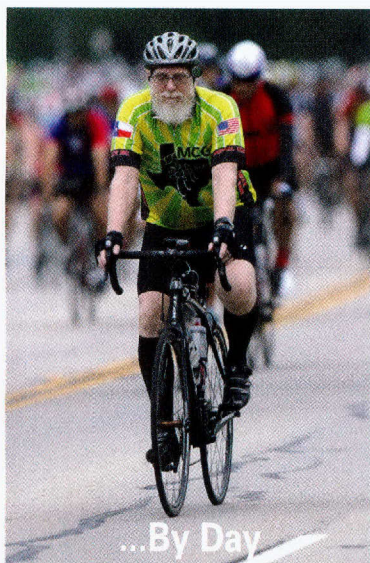
Dallas

El Greco, Goya, and a Taste for Spain: Highlights from The Bowes Museum

Sept. 15–Jan. 12

The development of Spanish art across three centuries—from large, gold-encrusted retable panels of saints to intimate portraits

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Photos Credit: Tony Corso

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and scenes taken from life—is explored through 11 selected masterpieces from England's largest collection of Spanish paintings. *Meadows Museum, 5900 Bishop Blvd. 214-768-2516; meadowsmuseumdallas.org*

Dallas

The Kinsey African American Art and History Collection

Sept. 21-March 1

This collection celebrates the achievements and contributions of African Americans from 1595 to present. It includes masterful paintings and sculpture, photos, rare books, letters, and manuscripts. *African American Museum of Dallas, 3536 Grand Ave. 214-565-9026; thekinseycollection.com*

Fort Worth

Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work

Sept. 14-Dec. 29

Organized by the National Gallery of Art in collaboration with The Gordon Parks Foundation, this exhibition highlights Parks' mastery of the camera to create an uplifting vision of African American life in the mid-20th century. *Amon Carter Museum of American Art, 3501 Camp Bowie Blvd. 817-738-1933; cartermuseum.org*

Gladewater

Arts and Crafts Festival

Sept. 21-22

Shop art, wood crafts, ceramics, dolls, needlework, jewelry, clothing, homemade goodies, and handcrafted items at the 46th annual festival. *Broadway School Campus, 200 E. Broadway. 903-845-5501; gladewaterartsandcrafts.com*

Granbury

Lighted Boat Parade

Sept. 1

Kick off Labor Day weekend and wrap up another summer on Lake Granbury. Dozens of boats travel from bridge to bridge to create a beautiful spectacle. *Lake Granbury, 505 E. Pearl St. 682-936-4550; granburysquare.com/2019-big-events*

Lubbock

Buddy Holly's Birthday Bash

Sept. 7

Celebrate Buddy Holly's 83rd birthday with an evening concert and festivities throughout the day. Entrance to the Buddy Holly Center is free on this day. *Buddy Holly Center, 1801 Crickets Ave. 806-775-3560; buddyhollycenter.org*

Sanger

Sanger Sellabration

Sept. 14

The 41st annual event welcomes more than 5,000 people. Festivities include live music, vendors, kid and teen zones, numerous stage performances, a pie-eating contest, an art show, wiener dog races, street dancing, and a variety of festival foods all in a street-fair atmosphere. There is no entry fee. *Historic Downtown Sanger, 300 Bolivar St. 940-458-7702; sanger texas.com/sellabration*

Sherman

Sherman Arts Fest

Sept. 21

The 38th annual event features live performances on two stages, chalk art, a huge Kids Alley, food and beverage vendors, arts and crafts vendors, a woodcarving exhibit, youth and adult art shows, art history displays, and the Sherman Education Foundation 5K. *Municipal Lawn. 903-892-7230; shermantx.org/event/2868 or facebook.com/shermantx*

Wichita Falls

Sculpture Garden After Dark

Sept. 5

Stop in for live music, entertainment, and free kid-friendly fun. Enjoy the Sculpture Garden exhibit and grounds, and take a tour of the galleries inside. *BYOB. Kemp Center for the Arts, 1300 Lamar St. 940-767-2787; artscouncilwff.org/sculpture-garden*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Spring

Grand Canyon Photographs: Celebrating the Centennial 1919-2019

Sept. 10-Jan. 11

This timely exhibition commemorates the establishment of Grand Canyon National Park 100 years ago. *Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts, 6815 Cypresswood Drive. 281-376-6322; pearl mfa.org*

WEST TEXAS

Alpine

En Plein Air: The Act of Painting Outdoors

Aug. 30-Sept. 2

Partake in workshops of plein air (outdoor) painting at several locations around the Alpine area, and enjoy an exhibit of the work produced as well as examples of plein air and portrait painting by established artists from state and

national painting organizations.

Various locations. 432-294-1313; bigbendartscouncil.org

Alpine

Five Centuries of Mexican Maps

Sept. 20-21

View 500 years of Mexican cartographic history at the Museum of the Big Bend. The exhibit features rare and original maps of Mexico from the Yana and Marty Davis Map Collection. *Museum of the Big Bend, 400 N. Harrison St. 432-837-8143; museumofthebigbend.com*

El Paso

Felipe Esparza: The Bad Hombre Tour

Sept. 27

The comedian and actor is best known for his recurring appearances on *Superstore*, *The Eric Andre Show*, and *Last Comic Standing*, plus his newest HBO stand-up special *Translate This*. *Plaza Theatre, 125 W. Mills Ave. 915-534-0660; elpasolive.com*

San Angelo

Frontiers: An Artistic Exploration of Space Travel, Technology, the Age of Discovery, and More

Through Sept. 8

Artwork related to exploration is exhibited in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, 1 Love St. 325-653-3333; samfa.org*

San Angelo

Bus Stops: Photos of the Middle of Nowhere by Michael Kruscha

Sept. 19-Dec. 1

The German artist debuts a series of photographs showing bus stops he found while traveling over many years. His photos show the variety of architectural styles and constructions that exist in different countries, from iron sculptures, wooden or mud-brick shelters, and tin-roof huts, to monstrous concrete constructions. Every shelter tells its own story. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, 1 Love St. 325-653-3333; samfa.org*

Food & Drink

CENTRAL TEXAS

Buffalo

Buffalo Stampede

Sept. 20-21

Compete in a Lone Star Barbecue Society-sanctioned barbecue

competition and culinary arts exhibition. There are vendors, a car show, children's games, arts and crafts, food vendors, and a bounce house. *Leon County Expo Center, 3637 CR 305. 903-322-5810; buffaloexchange.com*

Caldwell

Kolache Festival

Sept. 14
Celebrate the revitalization of Czech heritage. Learn Czech philosophy, dance to polka music, and sing along to traditional tunes. There is an arts and crafts show with more than 200 vendors, and more than 40 vendors of authentic Czech foods. *Downtown Caldwell, 301 N. Main St. 979-567-0000; burlesoncountytx.com*

Fairfield

Big T Memorial Barbecue Cookoff

Sept. 13-14
The ninth annual competition and kids cookoff features a domino tournament and national-qualifying cornhole tournament, as well as live music. *W.L. Moody Reunion Grounds, 400 Oak St. 903-431-3611; bigtmemorial.com*

New Berlin

Sausage Festival

Sept. 1
The 68th annual event offers homemade sausage plates, a silent and live auction, bingo, a raffle, rides, children's games, and a country store. There is also a free dance with live music by Clint Taft and the Buckwild Band. *New Berlin Community Center, 8815 FM 775. 210-343-9570*

Salado

Salado Culinary Festival

Sept. 20-22
Local businesses and artists offer one-of-a-kind experiences to share their crafts and flavors. This year's theme is chocolate. Start with a chocolate dinner or a fun experience with the local fudge maker, and attend Salado Winery's fourth annual Grape Stomp and Harvest Festival. *Village of Salado, Main Street. 254-947-8634; visitsaladotexas.com*

San Antonio

Drift and Dine

Sept. 24-26
Decorated dinner boats carrying 16-20 passengers each float along the river and make six restaurant stops along the voyage. *Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, 900 E. Market St. 210-227-4262; thesanantonioriverwalk.com/events*

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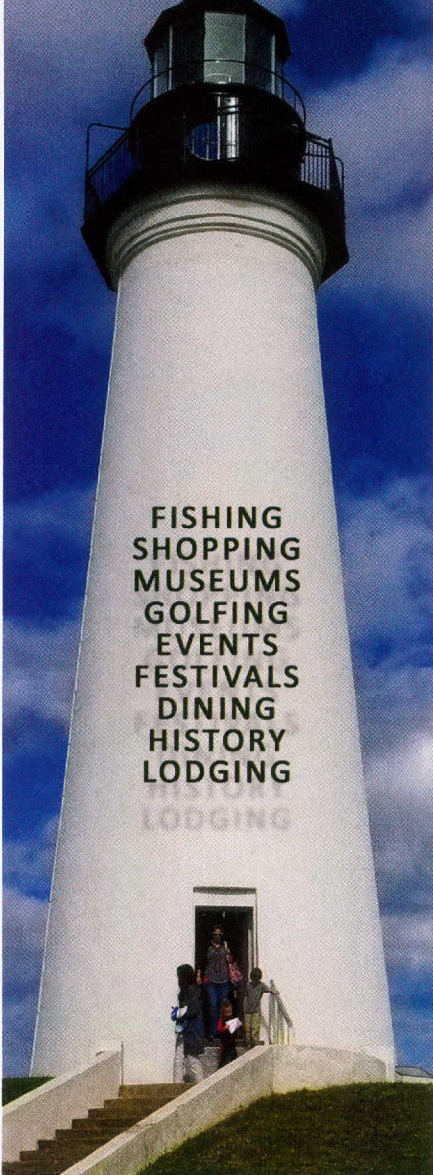
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Waco

Heart of Texas Wine and Food Festival

Sept. 21
This festival is the major fundraiser of the Humane Society of Central Texas. Patrons may taste more than 200 wines and sample food from more than 30 restaurants. Event activities include live entertainment, a large silent auction, and the famous "Cork Pull." *McLane Stadium, 1001 S. M.L.K. Jr. Blvd. 254-754-1454; wacowinefestival.com*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Amarillo

Good Times Celebration Barbecue Cookoff

Sept. 12
The cookoff brings together more than 100 cooking teams with thousands of barbecue fans. *Amarillo Chamber of Commerce Grounds, 1000 S. Polk St. 806-373-7800*

Dallas

Chocolate Festival

Sept. 6-8
The 10th annual festival brings in more than 60 chocolate makers and chocolatiers from around the world for 3,000 attendees to learn, taste, shop, and experience the artistry and craftsmanship of quality chocolate. The expo on Saturday and Sunday features samples, shopping, demonstrations, a kids' area, and food trucks. Hands-on workshops, including guided tastings and chocolate-making classes, are also available. *Fashion Industry Gallery, 1807 Ross Ave. 214-559-0122; dallaschocolate.org*

Grapevine

GrapeFest: A Texas Wine Experience

Sept. 12-15
The 33rd annual event is the largest wine festival in the Southwest United States. *Various locations. 817-410-3185; grapevintexasusa.com/grapefest*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Beaumont

Craft Beer Fest

Sept. 14
The fourth annual festival showcases Texas and national craft breweries. Event attendees must be 21 or older. *The Event Centre, 700 Crockett St. 409-838-3435; discoverbeaumont.com*

Galveston

Galveston Island Shrimp Festival

Sept. 27-28
This year's event features a cookoff, gumbo tasting, live music, and a children's area. *Historic Strand District, Strand and 23rd streets. galvestonshrimpfestival.com*

Houston

Houston Jerk Fest

Sept. 14
Bringing community and culture together with food, family, music, and fun, the event centers around a Caribbean jerk food cookoff. There are also other foods, vendors, a kids zone, and family activities. Don't miss live performances by world-renowned reggae artists. *Midtown Park, 2811 Travis St. 832-922-7264; houstonjerkfestinc.com*

Houston

Texas Hot Sauce Festival

Sept. 21-22
This festival celebrates 20 years of serving hot sauce, salsa, dips, peppers, marinades, jams, pickled products, condiments, and wing sauces. Thousands of attendees come to sample products from award-winning chefs and vendors from across the country. Cool drinks combat the heat, and live music, a kids area, and arts and crafts complete the festival. *Bayou City Event Center, 9401 Knight Road. 281-802-2776; texashotsaucefestival.com*

WEST TEXAS

McCamey

Wind Energy Capital of Texas Cookoff and Festival

Sept. 27-28
This annual event has a barbecue competition, live music, children's activities, vendors, and a cornhole tournament. There are 46 campsites for competitive cooks. *Santa Fe Park, 604 Santa Fe Road. 432-652-8202; windenergycapitaloftexascookoff.com*

History & Heritage

CENTRAL TEXAS

Fredericksburg Pacific Combat Living History Reenactment

Aug. 31-Sept. 1
See equipment and weapons used

during WWII and a battle reenactment set on an island in the Pacific with flamethrowers, tanks, uniformed actors, and more. *National Museum of the Pacific War—Pacific Combat Zone, 508 E. Austin. 830-997-8600; pacificwarmuseum.org*

Gatesville

Spurfest

Sept. 14
Enjoy old-time demonstrations, contests, music, a book signing by author Waylon Corgill, and more than 6,000 spurs in the Lloyd Mitchell Spur Collection. Admission is free. *Coryell Museum and Historical Center, 718 Main St. 254-865-5007; coryellmuseum.org*

Serbin

Texas Wendish Festival

Sept. 22
Learn about the Wendish, who emigrated to Texas from Lusatia (part of Germany) in 1854. Enjoy Wendish Easter-egg decorating, sauerkraut and noodle making, vintage machinery, spinning, quilting, blacksmithing, sausage stuffing, a washer-pitching contest, a cross-cut saw competition, and children's activities. *Texas Wendish Heritage Museum, 1011 CR 212. 979-366-2441; texaswendish.org*

Temple

Homespun History Day

Sept. 7
Step back to a time before modern machinery and automation. See how craftspeople create hand-made works of art and household goods through traditional methods like weaving and metalworking. *Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum, 315 W. Avenue B. 254-298-5172; templerrhm.org*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Bonham

Farming Heritage Day

Sept. 21
Learn farming activities such as how to gin cotton, spin wool, make corn husk dolls, churn butter, and milk cows. See farm animals and antique tractors up-close. *Sam Rayburn House State Historic Site, 890 SH 56 W. 903-583-5558; samrayburnhousemuseum*

Frisco

Shawnee Trail Cowboy Day

Sept. 28
Activities include stagecoach rides, Old West gunfights, armadillo races, pony rides, and a petting zoo. Experience how

things were done in "the old days" with a quilt show, blacksmith shop demos, whittling, butter churning, spinning, corn grinding, and a steer-roping station. *Frisco Heritage Museum, 6455 Page St. 972-292-5266; visitfrisco.com*

Grand Prairie

American Indian Pow Wow

Sept. 20-22

See colorful tribal dances, arts and crafts, tipis, and honoring ceremonies at this 57th annual event. Shop from more than 3,200 vendors, and enjoy more than 10 carnival rides. *Traders Village, 2602 Mayfield Road. 972-647-2331; tradersvillage.com/grand prairie*

Honey Grove

Davy Crockett Festival

Sept. 28

Legend says Davy Crockett wrote home about this special spot after finding honey in the trees here on the way to fight at the Alamo. He said when he got through with this little skirmish, he planned to come back and settle this little honey grove. As history tells us, Crockett did not survive the Alamo, but his friend Samuel Erwin moved to the area and named the place Honey Grove in his honor. For the past 50 years, this festival has celebrated that legend with a pancake breakfast followed by street vendors and music around the square, a kids bike rodeo, a mutt strut, and occasional sightings of old Davy himself. *Downtown Square. 903-378-3112; honeygrovechamber.org*

Lewisville

Western Days

Sept. 27-28

This event showcases the history and spirit of the West for 20,000 attendees. There are five stages of entertainment, a tamale-eating contest, and a car show. Admission is free until 7 p.m. each day. *Wayne Ferguson Plaza in Old Town, 150 W. Church St. 972-219-3401; lewisvillewesterndays.com*

Waxahachie

Chautauqua Assembly

Sept. 28

The history of the Chautauqua movement is celebrated with reenactments, exhibits, and entertainment. *Chautauqua Auditorium, 400 S. Grand Ave. 469-309-4040; waxahachiechautauqua.org*

Waxahachie

Farm Heritage Day

Sept. 29

Enjoy a free afternoon celebrat-

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ing the living history of farm life and skills of late 19th and early 20th century family farms, with an emphasis on fun, educational children's activities. *Ellis County Rural Heritage Farm Inc., 130 Cunningham Meadows Road. 972-937-0681; ruralheritagefarm.org*

EAST TEXAS

Mineola

Iron Horse Festival
Sept. 27-28

Honoring the railroad heritage of Mineola, this festival has mini-train rides, vendors, live music, games and contests, a car show, and a beer and wine garden. *Downtown Mineola, South Johnson and Commerce streets. 903-569-2087; mineolachamber.org/events*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Goliad

The Calm Before the Storm
Sept. 7-8

Living historians and reenactors bring to life the tense moments just before the Texan War for Independence. Learn about the daily life of a Mexican soldier stationed at the Presidio. *Presidio La Bahia, 217 US 183. 361-645-3752*

Port Arthur

Mexican Heritage Fiesta
Sept. 14

Enjoy cultural programs, folkloric dancers, live music, pageants, and food and craft vendors. *Robert A. "Bob" Bowers Civic Center, 3401 Cultural Center Drive. 409-985-8801*

Victoria

Czech Heritage Festival
Sept. 22

Enjoy live polka music, a Tarok tournament, traditional arts and crafts. Czech foods, a homemade beer and wine show, live demonstrations, and exhibits. *Victoria Community Center, 2905 E. North St. 361-649-2243; victoriaczechs.org*

Music & Dance

CENTRAL TEXAS

Austin

Texas Music Museum International Music Festival
Sept. 7-8

The ninth annual festival features a diverse set of accomplished Texas performers specializing in dance, music, and song. Cultural traditions represent Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, India, and the Middle East, and performances include distinctive instruments and costumes. *George Washington Carver Museum, Cultural and Genealogy Center, 1165 Angelina St. 512-203-4875; texasmusicmuseum.org*

Bianco

Raise the Roof Fundraiser Festival
Sept. 27-28

This annual event of music, food, and fun is the largest fundraising event of the year for the historic Twin Sisters Dance Hall, one of the oldest and longest-running dance halls in Texas. There is music all day Saturday with a silent auction, vendors, and cultural programs. *Twin Sisters Dance Hall, 6720 US 281 S. 830-733-2037; twinsistersdancehall.com*

Driftwood

Outside Austin City Limits Music Festival
Sept. 21

Held on Vista Brewing's 21-acre ranch, music lovers enjoy a great lineup of local Texas bands playing classic Texas country, Western swing, and bluegrass. Enjoy the brewery's award-winning beers, farm-fresh food, and a wine garden. *Vista Brewing, 13551 FM 150. 512-766-1842; vistabrewingtx.com*

Ingram

Ingram Boot Scooting Street Dance
Sept. 21

This street dance has food trucks, vendors, and live music. *Old Ingram Loop. 830-367-5115; cityofingram.com*

Lockhart

Western Swing and Barbecue Festival
Sept. 27-29

This annual festival celebrates the official music of Texas in the Barbecue Capital of Texas. Events include the Texas Western Swing Hall of Fame Show, where pioneers of Western swing are inducted; music on seven stages; and the official festival dance under the stars. *Downtown Lockhart, 110 S. Main St. 512-745-0659; lockhartfest.com*

San Antonio

Mariachi Lab
Sept. 15

Showcasing mariachi talent from

San Antonio including high school, all-female, and top-level professional performers, the event also hosts informational workshops for children to learn about the rich history and culture behind the genre. *Pearl Brewery, 303 Pearl Parkway. atpearl.com*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Amarillo

Yellow City Sounds Music Festival
Sept. 1

Enjoy a daylong concert featuring a variety of bands, vendors, and food trucks. *Memorial Park, 2501 S. Washington St. 806-371-5222*

Bedford

Bedford Blues and Barbecue Festival
Aug. 30-Sept. 1

The event features Grammy-winning blues performer Boz Scaggs, and a barbecue cookoff. *Across from Bedford City Hall, 1951 L. Don Dodson Drive. 817-952-2128; bedfordbluesfest.com*

Corsicana

Texas Country Legends in Concert
Sept. 12

Gary P. Nunn, Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Jack Ingram song swap, tell stories, and perform within the walls of the historic Palace Theatre, a restored 1921 vaudeville house downtown with an intimate setting of only 500 seats. *Palace Theatre, 112 W. Sixth Ave. 903-874-7792; corsicanapalace.com*

Lewisville

Texas International Pop Festival
Aug. 31-Oct. 19

Relive the groovy music experience of the festival's 50th anniversary celebration on Labor Day Weekend, 1969. The exhibit commemorates the festival that drew 120,000 visitors to see performances by rock legends such as Janis Joplin, Led Zeppelin, Grand Funk Railroad, and B.B. King. *Medical City Lewisville Grand Theater, 100 N. Charles. 972-219-3401; visitlewisville.com*

Mansfield

Music Alley
Sept. 7

This music and arts festival has four stages of live music, a kids area, an old-school '80s arcade, artist exhibitions, and food trucks. *Historic Downtown Mansfield, 109 N. Main St. 817-728-3382; mansfieldmusicalley.com*

Parker

Music Fest at Southfork Ranch

Aug. 31-Sept. 2

At the second annual festival, enjoy three days of musical talent featuring blues, country, jazz, Latin, R&B, and Southern soul. Enjoy good food and browse unique arts and crafts. *Southfork Ranch*, 3700 Hogge Drive. 972-442-7800; musicfest-southforkranch.com

Stephenville

Urban Cowboy Night

Sept. 26

Enjoy a free concert under the stars featuring Riders in the Sky. The two-time Grammy winners perform varying tunes from *Toy Story* and salute Will Rogers. *Birdsong Amphitheater* at Stephenville City Park, 709 Riverside Drive. 254-965-6190; ctfac.com

EAST TEXAS

Tyler

Pat Benatar and Neil Giraldo in Concert

Sept. 10

Responsible for some of rock's most memorable hits including "We Belong" and "Love Is A Battlefield," the Grammy-winning pair has sold more than 30 million records worldwide. This summer, the duo embarks on a tour for their 40th anniversary. *UT Tyler Cowan Center*, 3900 University Blvd. 903-566-7424; cowancenter.org

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

San Benito

South Texas Music Festival

Sept. 21

Celebrate the Valley's rich musical heritage with a mix of Tejano, conjunto, country-western, and norteño music. *W.H. Heavin Memorial Park*, 705 N. Bowie St. 956-361-3830; sanbenitoevents.com

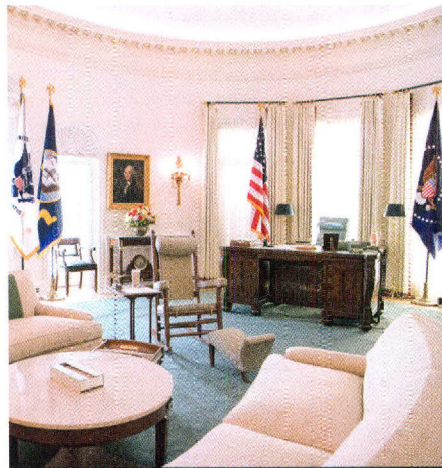
WEST TEXAS

El Paso

Chopin Music Festival

Sept. 28-Oct. 26

This is the 25th annual festival highlighting the music of Frederic Chopin. This year, two young artists present encore performances. *Chamizal National Memorial Theater*, 800 S. San Marcial St. 915-584-1595; facebook.com/elpasochopinmusicfestival



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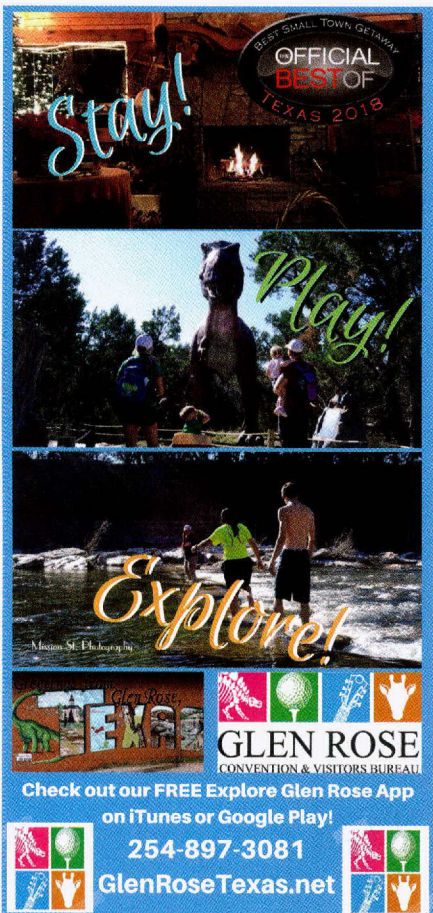


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Nature & Outdoors

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Abilene
Big Country Balloon Festival
Sept. 27-29
The 25th annual event includes hot air balloons, live entertainment, children's games and inflatable rides, vendors, and a balloon glow on Friday and Saturday nights. *Red Bud Park, 3125 S. 32nd St.* abilenevisitors.com/calendar

Dallas
Dino Fest
Aug. 31-Sept. 1
Activities invade all five levels of the museum, from fossil hunts and dissections to dinosaur dig pits, T. rex sports challenges, paleo demonstrations, live music, and art activities. *Perot Museum of Nature and Science, 2201 N Field St.* 214-428-5555; perotmuseum.org

McKinney
Dinosaurs Live!
Aug. 31-Feb. 17
Encounter the 46-foot tall T. rex and nine new life-size animatronic dinosaurs along the nature trails at the 14th annual exhibit. This year, experience an outdoor fossil dig. *Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, 1 Nature Place.* 972-562-5566; heardmuseum.org

Plano
Plano Balloon Festival
Sept. 20-22
This year marks 40 years of ballooning in Plano. The event offers live music and entertainment, a parachute team exhibition, a kids fun zone, food, merchandise and handmade products, and more than 40 hot air balloons. *Oak Point Park & Nature Preserve, 2801 E. Spring Creek Parkway.* 972-867-7566; planoballoonfest.org

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Lake Jackson
Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza
Sept. 14, 21
Watch thumb-size hummers dart in and out of nectar-producing flowers, or spy them sipping nectar at feeders hanging from tree limbs and building awnings. See a bird-bander hold a tiny hummingbird while taking mea-

surements and clamping a thin, number-coded band on one of its teeny-weensy legs. *Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, 299 SH 332.* 979-480-0999; gcbo.org

Rockport-Fulton
HummerBird Celebration
Sept. 19-22
The 31st annual event has workshops, bus and boat tours, exhibits, bird banding, and lectures presented by world-renowned experts. *Various locations.* 361-729-6445; rockporthummingbird.com

Sports

CENTRAL TEXAS

San Marcos
Texas Junior Water Safari
Sept. 21
This 16-mile water adventure lets canoeists and kayakers test their skills, gain experience in the water, and prepare for the big Texas Water Safari in June. *San Marcos City Park, 170 Charles Austin Drive.* 512-738-6607; texaswatersafari.org

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

The Colony
Red Bull Soapbox Race
Sept. 28
This international event challenges both experienced racers and amateurs alike to design and build outrageous soapbox dream machines and compete against the clock in a downhill race. Red Bull has held more than 100 soapbox races around the world since the first one in Brussels in 2000. *Austin Ranch, Windhaven Parkway.* 972-624-5253

Dumas
Texas Tumbleweed 100 Bike Ride
Sept. 28
Cyclists descend upon Dumas, located 50 miles north of Amarillo, every September to experience beautiful High Plains terrain. Routes include 12-, 35-, 67.2-, and 100-mile options. *McDade Park, 14th and Durrett streets.* 806-935-4136; txtumbleweed100.com

Frisco
National Soccer Hall of Fame Induction Weekend
Sept. 21
Celebrate the 2019 National Soccer Hall of Fame induction

class with events and concerts by OneRepublic and The Fray. *Toyota Stadium, 9200 World Cup Way.* 972-292-5266; visitfrisco.com

Garland
Garland Guzzler 0.5K Race
Sept. 28
That's no typo, this is a .5K, which is only 546 yards, 500 meters, or 1,638 feet—perfect for couch potatoes or those too busy to train. This year's race includes Oktoberfest-themed festivities such as games, food, and live music. The event is dog-friendly, so bring your pup in costume to help you dash across the finish line. *Downtown Garland Square, 520 W. State St.* 972-205-3896

EAST TEXAS

Palestine
El Camino: The Texas Gravel Adventure Bike Ride
Sept. 28
There are three distances to this ride: 35, 65, and 105 miles. Rural roads are paved near towns so the longer the ride, the more dirt and gravel you encounter. All rides are loops, offering constantly changing scenery, challenges, and varied terrain. *Oxbow Bakery, 301 E. Crawford St.* 903-594-8200; camino205.com

WEST TEXAS

Fort Davis
Cyclefest
Sept. 21-22
This scenic bike tour has beautiful vistas, easy novice routes, and challenging hills. There are three distance routes: 25, 55, and 75 miles. *Prude Ranch, 201 Prude Guest Ranch Road.* 432-426-3015; active.com/fort-davis-tx/cycling/fort-davis-cyclefest-2019

Rodeos & Fairs

CENTRAL TEXAS

Bandera
Bandera Roundup
Aug. 30-Sept. 1
Bandera honors its cowboy and Western heritage with a Longhorn Cattle Drive Parade on Saturday, arts and crafts, music, gunfight reenactments, and a ranch rodeo.

Various locations. 830-796-3045;
banderacowboycapital.com

Boerne

Kendall County Fair and Rodeo

Aug. 29-Sept. 1

For more than 100 years, the Kendall County Fair Association has maintained its agricultural mission for the region. This annual festival includes vendors selling food, jewelry, and handcrafted items; a pageant; a rodeo and livestock show; and a parade on Main Street on Saturday morning. Kendall County Fairgrounds, 1307 River Road. 830-249-2839; visitboerne.org

Brenham

Washington County Fair

Sept. 13-21

Celebrate the 151st county fair—the oldest in Texas—with Nashville entertainment, a carnival, crafts, food, livestock and poultry auctions, and commercial exhibits and attractions.

Washington County Fairgrounds, 1305 E. Blue Bell Road. 979-836-4112; washingtoncofair.com

La Grange

Fayette County Fair

Aug. 29-Sept. 1

Enjoy a true Texas county fair with a pageant, carnival, parade, livestock shows, horseshoe and washer pitching, a fun run, barbecue cookoff, food, music, and loads of entertainment. Country music star Josh Turner headlines. Fayette County Fair Grounds, 400 Fair Grounds Road. 979-968-3911; fayettecountyfair.org

Uvalde

Palomino Fest and Pro Rodeo Labor Day Weekend Celebration

Aug. 29-Sept. 1

This celebration started in 1996 as a dream by a local group of musicians who, as young brothers from a small town, dared to pursue their musical goals. The event has live music, a carnival, rodeo events, and a parade. Uvalde County Fairplex, 215 Veterans Lane. 830-591-9040; palominofest.com

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Abilene

West Texas Fair and Rodeo

Sept. 5-14

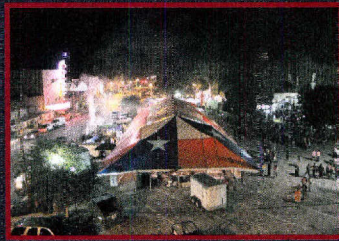
This annual old-fashioned county fair features children's activities, entertainment, livestock and horse shows, carnival rides, exhibits, a PRCA rodeo, and a wide variety of food. Taylor

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© 2017 Jerry Dantzig/Jerry Dantzig Archives. All rights reserved. Billie Holiday with Bernice Weissman, Newark, NJ, April, 1957.

Free drop-in gallery tours are offered Thursday at 6:30 PM and Sunday at 2:30 PM

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Amarillo

Tri-State Fair and Rodeo

Sept. 13-21

The largest family event in the Texas Panhandle, this fair and rodeo has livestock shows, a carnival, and great fair food. It was nominated in the top five medium-sized rodeos in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. Tri-State Fairgrounds, 3301 SE 10th Ave. 806-376-7767; tristatefair.com

Dallas

State Fair of Texas

Sept. 27-Oct. 20

The 24-day fair celebrating all things Texas has more than 110 daily attractions and activities including the Texas Auto Show, four musical stages of Texas music, a nightly starlight parade, and Big Tex to greet visitors from near and far. Fair Park, 3921 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 214-565-9931; bigtex.com

Hillsboro

Cotton Pickin' Fair

Sept. 27-28

The 28th annual event starts with a street dance and concert by Meagan Burkhart-Vaughn. The fair opens the next morning with an IBCA-sanctioned state championship barbecue cookoff, and Inflatable Alley featuring inflatable rides and activities. More than 100 vendors offer every type of fair food imaginable along with arts and crafts. Hill County Courthouse Square, Franklin and Covington streets. 254-582-5499; hillsboromainstreet.org/cottonpickinfair

Seasonal Celebrations

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Addison

Oktoberfest

Sept. 19-22

One of the most authentic Oktoberfest experiences outside of Munich, this event celebrates Bavarian cuisine and culture over four entertainment-filled days. Addison Circle Park, 4970 Addison Circle. 972-450-2800; addisonoktoberfest.com

Arlington

Six Flags Over Texas Fright Fest

Sept. 28-Nov. 3

Thrills by day and fright by night are

back. Enjoy activities throughout the day and come back for an evening of spine-chilling scares after the sun goes down. *Six Flags Over Texas*, 2201 Road to Six Flags. 817-640-8900; sixflags.com/overtexas

Dallas

Autumn at the Arboretum

Sept. 21-Oct. 31

The garden is a spectacular show of color with 150,000 fall-blooming plants; the internationally acclaimed Pumpkin Village, featuring more than 90,000 pumpkins; and Rory Meyer's Children's Adventure Garden. This year's theme is "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown." *Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden*, 8525 Garland Road. 214-515-6615; dallasarboretum.org

Fort Worth

Spooky Spectacle

Sept. 14-15

This kickoff to the Halloween season features paranormal enthusiasts; ghost hunters; and sci-fi, cosplay, and fantasy characters. *Will Rogers Memorial Center*, 3401 W. Lancaster Ave. 817-559-0849; spookyspectacle.com

McKinney

Oktoberfest

Sept. 27-29

Enjoy authentic German music, food and drink, traditional costumes, dancing, children's activities, and weenie dog races. The "bier garden" covers a total of 14 blocks downtown. *Historic Downtown McKinney*, 111 N. Tennessee. 972-547-2660; mckinneytexas.org/664/oktoberfest

Waxahachie

Screams Halloween Theme Park

Sept. 27-Oct. 26

The world's largest Halloween theme park is open on weekends, complete with major attractions that you can tour as many times as you like, scores of professional actors, activities, food and drink, and games. *SCREAMS Halloween Theme Park*, 2511 FM 66. 972-938-3247; screamspark.com

EAST TEXAS

Tyler

Lanes Chapel Pumpkin Patch

Sept. 29-Oct. 31

One of the largest pumpkin patches in East Texas, the fifth annual event showcases thousands of pumpkins, decorative corn, and gourds all grown on the Navajo reservation in northern New Mexico. Enjoy free family activities including games, face painting,

train rides, and family photos.

Lanes Chapel Methodist Church, 8720 Old Jacksonville Highway. 903-561-5703

SOUTH TEXAS | GULF COAST

Port Aransas

Beachtoberfest

Sept. 13-Oct. 30

With smaller crowds and the best weather of the year, Port A's Beachtoberfest is a must for every Texan. Events on seven consecutive weekends include the Texas Super Chef Throwdown Series, the Harvest Moon Regatta, Fishing for the Fallen Veterans Benefit Tournament, Old Town Fest and Surf Fest, and Shoptoberfest. *Various locations*. 361-749-5919; visitportaransas.com

Shopping & Antiques

CENTRAL TEXAS

Round Top

Fall Antiques Show

Sept. 19-Oct. 6

Shop more than 100 antique venues across Round Top, Carmine, Burton, Warrenton, and the Winedale area. *Various locations*. 979-249-4042; explorroundtop.com/antiques

NORTH TEXAS | PANHANDLE

Grandview

Antique Alley Texas and 30-Plus Miles of Shopping

Sept. 20-22

What started in 1999 as a sidewalk sale in Grandview and a yard sale near Cleburne has grown into a 30-plus-mile biannual event scattered among Grandview, Cleburne, Alvarado, Maypearl, Venus, and Sand Flat. *Various locations*. 817-666-5024; antiquealleytexas.com

EAST TEXAS

Huntsville

Antique Show

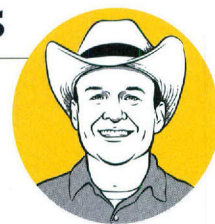
Sept. 21-22

More than 65 dealers offer antiques to suit every budget and taste. Finds include vintage items, holiday collectibles, glassware, furniture, sterling silver, and jewelry. *Walker County Fairgrounds*, 3925 SH 30. 936-661-2545; huntsvilleantiqueshow.com

THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Jacksonville

The juiciest stops in the former Tomato Capital of the World



BY CHET GARNER

From the local Tomato Bowl football stadium to the countless painted concrete tomatoes that adorn businesses and parks all over town, Jacksonville is bursting with tomato pride. But what one might not expect is that a day trip here is as ripe and flavorful as the town's signature crop.

Texas Basket Company

Carrying tomatoes is delicate work. And as the tomato industry boomed here in the early 1900s, so did this historic basket company—100 years old this year and one of the largest commercial basket manufacturers in the U.S. Stop in and get a bird's-eye view of the factory floor as the makers create these incredible works of functional art. Don't skip the shop, where you can buy baskets of all colors, shapes, and sizes to carry all of your own bushels and pecks. *100 Myrtle Drive*, 903-586-8014; texasbasket.com

Tomato Shed

If you need something to put in your basket and you want a fresh taste of the tomatoes that made Jacksonville famous, then this is the stop. Operating out of an old railroad shipping warehouse, this seasonal farmers market carries the freshest produce and 'maters in town. Some are surprised to discover that tomatoes come in many more varieties than just red; my advice is to buy one of as many kinds as they're selling, and then spend the next hour savoring and comparing each one. You may be surprised at how much the taste varies from one tomato to the next. *461 Alabama Ave.*, 903-589-0094

Ritual

One step inside Ritual, and you'll feel like you're in a small café on the streets of Paris. The French-inspired cuisine at this luncheonette takes your taste buds on a similar journey. The croissant sandwiches are amazing, but don't miss the dessert case. If authentic French food in East Texas isn't odd enough, upstairs you'll find a yoga studio where you can zen-out in a group class while pondering if enough time has passed to enjoy a second dessert. *214 S. Main St.*, 903-284-6880; ritualonmain.com

Love's Lookout

While most views in East Texas are covered by towering pine trees, this is the exception. Stop at this roadside park on US 69 for a 30-plus-mile view of Cherokee County. The view is best at sunrise, which I know is rough, but once the sun peeks above the eastern horizon and turns the entire sky a dazzling pink, you won't regret one second of lost sleep. *43822 US 69*, 903-586-4868; jacksonvilletexas.com/loves-lookout

Sadler's Kitchen

My favorite way to eat tomatoes is fried and green, and you won't find a better batch than those coming from this Southern kitchen. Mixing elements of soul food and Texas tradition, Sadler's creates its own brand of East Texas comfort food out of the old renovated jail and police station. The brisket enchiladas always hit the spot, while the pie would make a worthy last meal. *101 S. Bonner St.*, 903-589-0866; facebook.com/sadlerskitchen

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. To view the Jacksonville episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.


Restoring and Preserving Our History

The Friends of Gillespie County Country
Schools

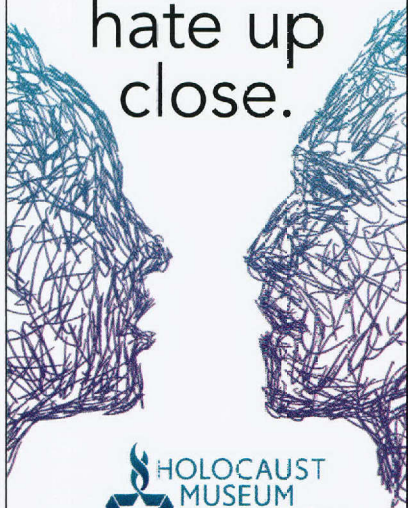
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OPEN ROAD | continued from Page 17

the one-night-only friendships, the titillation that comes from a secret with a stranger—but why is that so appealing?

On one level, it's a nice reminder that, despite our loneliness, humans are deeply connected and interdependent in ways we still don't fully understand. It's why you can be moved to tears at a funeral for someone you've never met. It's why friends often get pregnant in groups, why suicides happen in clusters, why the words of a stranger can completely change your mood. In hotel bars, you can feel that connectedness in the scented air.

But it's also an escape from reality. It's a reprieve from the dreads and regrets of our everyday lives.

All three bars on this trip blend haunting history with modern opulence: a blue-collar brewery-turned-five-star-hotel in San Antonio, a lavish saloon for powerbrokers in Austin, a landmark of generational wealth in Dallas. Built in 1912, the Adolphus has hosted presidents, monarchs, and magnates.

Walking in, I notice the glowing fireplace in the French Room Bar and the lighting in every room: dim enough to feel like the hues of a dream. The Adolphus actually has two bars on the ground floor. I find a spot at the City Hall Bar in the social lobby and learn there's a conference in town, something to do with the future of plastics.

It seems like there are 20 different conversations happening here, most of them weaving together, overlapping. One man wearing a thick gold bracelet says he's from Michigan. There's a woman from Maine. A group of businessmen from Collin County. Two guys from Arizona see me taking notes in a small notebook and drunkenly joke that I must be "writing raps." Some of the men and women here are corporate leaders. Some are aspiring entrepreneurs. It makes for a chaotic blur of names and places and micro-conversations.

Somehow I start a side conversation with an artificial-intelligence expert from Austin, here for the conference. There are

jokes about robots uniting to overtake humanity, but the AI guy says he doesn't think that's likely. He describes some of the most recent breakthroughs in the industry in ways that make me feel like I actually sort of understand a little bit.


Soon this AI guy and I are talking about life in general. He used to be in a heavy metal band; now, he's married with a toddler. He tells me that so much of his life is about this balance he's striving for. He wants to accomplish great things, something that will benefit humanity and leave his mark on the world. That takes time and a deep concentration bordering on mania. But he also wants to spend quality time with his family. Nobody's found an algorithm for that yet.

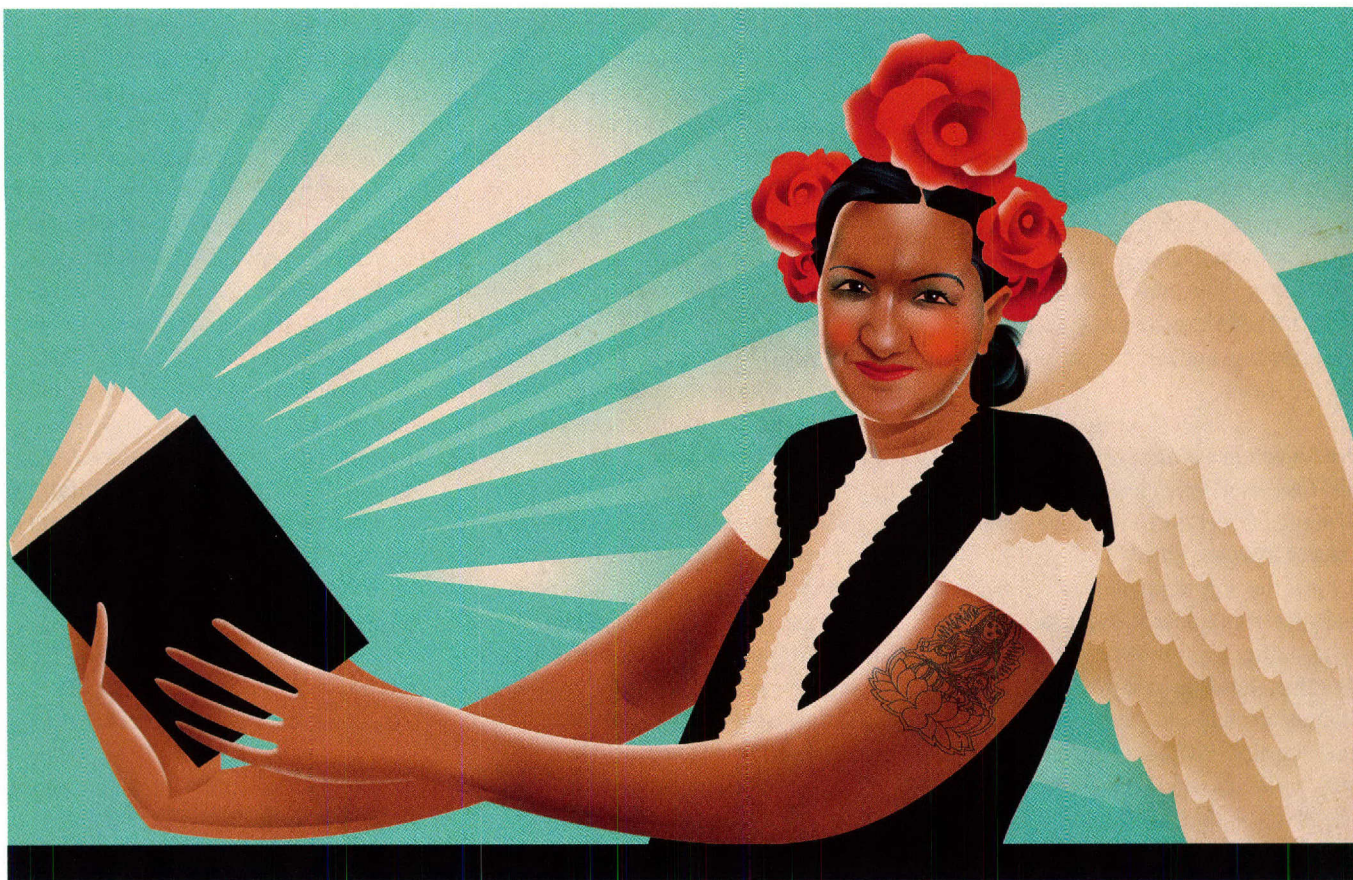
I explain that I feel the same way, that I have similar struggles. I rarely have the time to write all the things I most want to, and I don't spend enough time with my family. We're two strangers trying to make sense of this world, together. That's what hotel bars are all about.

We go on like this for a while. After the bar closes, there's talk of going somewhere for pancakes. But no, it's late, and we both know we have obligations in the morning. We follow each other on social media but never communicate again.

I realize, of course, that these are not the connections in life that matter. Family matters. Close friends matter. The relationships that are deeper, more complicated. The people who know nearly all of your secrets and love you anyway. And I know that when you accomplish something in life, it's not because you lied to strangers at a hotel bar. It's usually because you worked toward a goal—often longer and more intensely than you initially imagined possible.

Still, the anonymity of a hotel bar is alluring, intoxicating. There's something compelling about stories from the life of a stranger: the desperate man fighting a silent phone, the barback with a broken heart, the woman who sells fantasies, the man who ponders the future for a living.

Then there's the worst part of a hotel bar: the moment you pay your tab, get up from your stool, and return to real life. 



Her Own Drummer

Author Sandra Cisneros on fearlessness—in travel, writing, and Texas

By Michael Hoinski

Last spring, the writer Sandra Cisneros returned to San Antonio to meet with her accountant, address some computer issues, and have her mother's fur hat professionally cleaned. Cisneros has lived in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, since 2013, but she resided in San Antonio for most of the 29 years prior, living in the King William District, where she stirred controversy for painting her Victorian cottage periwinkle. Her visit coincided with Fiesta San Antonio, and Cisneros appeared on the float "March To Your Own Drummer"—a fitting theme. "I think I can quote Fidel Castro here," she says. "History will absolve me."

In 1984, the same year her lauded debut novel *The House on Mango Street* was published, Cisneros moved from Chicago to San Antonio to serve as literature director at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. She drew on her Texas experiences in her writing and, while in San Antonio, also founded the Macondo

"I think everybody, every young person, should be given a grant to travel to a place where you don't speak the language."

Writers Workshop, dedicated to community-building and social change. Cisneros' works—in 2015, she released a career-spanning essay collection *A House of My Own*—have earned her high honors, including the MacArthur Fellowship, a Texas Medal of the Arts, and during her spring visit, a Texas Institute of Letters Lifetime Achievement Award.

Q: How are writing and traveling alike?
A: I think that reading is traveling. Reading happened to me because I was trying to get out of Chicago. I was trying to get out of my neighborhood. I was trying to

get out of my depression. And reading allowed me to do that. Eventually reading would lead to writing, and writing still allows me to disappear. If I'm somewhere and I want to be invisible, I just pick up my pen and I feel invisible, and I'm transported without having to get in a vehicle. It just takes me to other realities, to other times, to memories, and to the future. So to me, writing and reading are the best ways to travel.

Q: *As a young woman, you went to Athens, Greece, to finish writing *The House on Mango Street* and have since become a world traveler. Why?*

A: I was the only daughter in a very conservative, traditional Mexican family. My father was always concerned for my safety. He wanted to protect me. So he made me feel like I was incapable of traveling alone, without a man. I lived in neighborhoods where my brother had to walk me to the bus stop on the corner because it was so dangerous. So, I understand his fear, but as a young woman, I was growing up during the women's movement, the civil rights movement. I just wanted to be a modern woman, and it seemed like if I followed my father's traditions I was never going to get there. One of the things I wanted to do with my life was to be able to be fearless, and one of the big fears I had was about traveling. So, I bought myself that one-way ticket to get over the fear.

Q: *What are your thoughts about women traveling alone?*

A: I think everybody, every young person, should be given a grant to travel to a place where you don't speak the language. We have to go outside our zones of comfort because it's when we're in zones of discomfort that we're challenged to grow in our lives. It's like four years of college rolled into a season when you travel because it teaches you to expand your mind. Like Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." So I would say it's very important that all women travel, but

we need to train them how to not take risks, not to trust people, and to never be unguarded. I think it's important that there be seminars about training women and understanding the culture you're going to because the culture is going to see you in a way you don't see yourself. And I would always say travel, if you can, with a friend.

Q: *Was moving to Mexico, the land of your heritage, an attempt to come full-circle?*

A: I think I'm following my mother's ancestors because my mother's family is from the region where I live. We never knew much about them because they fled during the Mexican Revolution. And I came back a hundred years later to that region. I'm not in the same town because they were in the countryside near the airport, but I feel very much a spiritual connection with the ancestors. And I do feel, the older I get, I recognize more that connection with the spiritual world and with my own spirituality. So I think I'm being called back. I don't know why, and I know to accept where my intuition takes me. When I was younger, I had a lot of doubts about my life. But the older you get, the more you start seeing patterns, and you realize that there's some divine providence that's leading you.

Q: *How does place affect your writing?*

A: I'm very much a product of where you put me. When I lived here in this neighborhood [the King William District], South Texas voices crept into my writing. *Woman Hollering Creek* was written in this neighborhood, and a lot of my poetry is from this neighborhood. So I'm really a product of what I hear. People's dialogue and voices and dialects and language and slang come into my writing.

Q: *How did your time as a writing fellow at the Dobie Paisano Ranch cultivate you?*

A: Big time. It changed my attitude about Texas. After my first year here, I was

marching away. I was in hair-on-fire mode in San Antonio—*this is the most difficult place I've ever lived and I'm never coming back*. I was literally wrapping a flower pot in newspaper when I got the phone call. And instead of being thrilled, I remember my dismay. I thought to myself, oh no, I have to stay in Texas. It was scary. I'm from the city. And once I was out there in the country, I thought, this is like a healing sanatorium where the universe sent me. I just kind of remember sitting out there in these Adirondack chairs and looking at this huge sky and thinking, what a beautiful place. So it was very healing. It kept me in Texas. It shifted me and made me realize that Texas is not a bad place.

Q: *What are you working on now?*

A: I got a Ford Foundation Fellowship last year. I've been interviewing people on the issue of the undocumented: people who are hiring the undocumented, people who are Dreamers, people who are undocumented themselves, people who work with them, people who voted for this administration, people who didn't. So, I've been listening. I think it's essential because we're living in a time when no one listens, but everyone has an opinion. I've got to put them together in a script. Maybe it will become a play, maybe it will become an opera.

Q: *Do you consider yourself a free spirit?*

A: I think of myself as being a person who lives by her intuition, and I think of myself as a spiritual being. But other people see that as eccentric or free spirited. I think of everyone else as being sheep that don't listen to their hearts. I've always been guided by my heart. ♣

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VINTAGE



Legends of the Fall

NOV. 24, 1938

The Texas Longhorns had lost 10 straight games when they welcomed the Texas A&M Aggies to Memorial Stadium in Austin for the 1938 edition of the annual Thanksgiving rivalry. Longhorn fans didn't harbor much optimism for a win, considering the varsity team had lost a scrimmage to its own freshman team a week earlier. But with halfback Nelson Pruett's diving touchdown (pictured), Texas took the lead and held on for a 7-6 win, blocking an Aggie extra-point attempt with 20 seconds to play. Texas coach Dana Bible later called it "the happiest day in all my years of coaching," writer Bobby Hawthorne recounted in *Longhorn Football: An Illustrated History*. Texas A&M didn't suffer for long, though, because the following year, the Aggies beat Texas as part of an undefeated season that culminated in a Sugar Bowl victory over Tulane and a No. 1 ranking in *The Associated Press* writers poll. **L**

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