

PLUS: 12 Trips for 2019

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JANUARY 2019

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EDITOR'S
NOTE

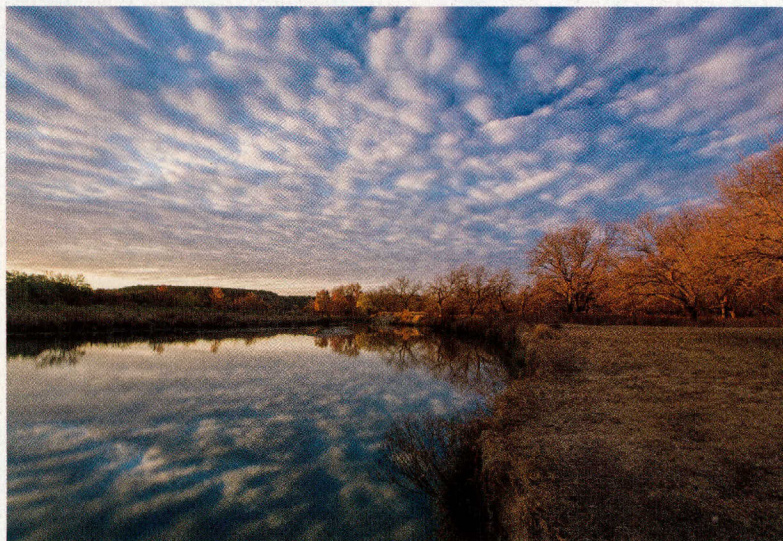
Travel Resolutions

Anyone who's ever made New Year's resolutions knows they're discouragingly hard to keep. Most studies reveal only 8 percent of people who make them stick with them. Maybe part of the issue is that we tend to focus on tackling problems rather than having more fun. So this year, our staff is making Texas travel resolutions instead.

I'm resolving to finally buy that Texas State Parks Pass so my kids can buck the trend of their generation, which spends more time indoors than any before, and glory in Texas' wide-open spaces.

Wes Ferguson, Managing Editor: For years I've wanted to drive my old Jeep Wrangler on the dirt roads of Big Bend National Park. I will need to do a whole lot of tinkering to get it running in time for a road trip this spring.

Matt Joyce, Senior Editor: Considering we live between droughts here in Texas, in 2019 I resolve to make the most of recent rains by getting out on the water—more swimming, more paddling, more fishing. In between, I aim to dry out by a crackling fire whenever possible, honing my tall-tale delivery with family, friends, and fellow sages of campfire smoke.



The annual Texas State Parks Pass offers holders unlimited visits to more than 90 state parks, including the South Llano River State Park in the Hill Country.

#TRUETEXAS2019

Share your Texas travel resolutions for the new year with us on social media or email us at letters@texashighways.com

Most studies reveal only 8 percent of people who make resolutions stick with them.

Kimya Kavehkar, Associate Editor: This year, I plan on taking a real summer beach vacation to the Gulf Coast, which I haven't done since I was a teenager. I've got Cinnamon Shore and lots of fried shrimp in my sights.

Jane Kellogg Murray, Events Editor: One of my goals in 2019 is to make it to one of the big three rodeos (Houston, Fort Worth, San Antonio). I've never been—an embarrassing realization for a native Texan. At my second rodeo, I'll finally stand in the light of truth when I say it's not my first.

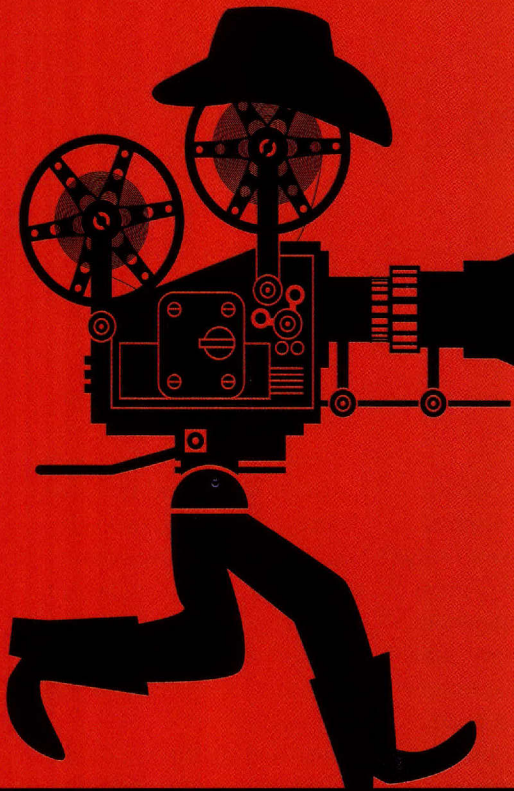
Read on for more inspiration for your 2019 travel resolutions and visit texashighways.com to view our new destination guides featuring editors' picks in your favorite Texas towns.

Emily R Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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VIDEO CONTEST

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Grab your camera (a cell phone will do) and give us a taste of your favorite **True Texas Travel Destination**. Your documentary must be 5 minutes or less, so be creative. Our favorite film will win a travel prize. The best of the best will be screened at the annual **Thin Line Fest** in Denton, April 10-14.

Selected film shorts will also be featured on texashighways.com

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For contest rules and deadlines visit texashighways.com

For more information about Thin Line Fest visit thinline.us

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JANUARY

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As Big as Texas

From pizzas to statues to roller coasters, everything really is bigger here. We highlight just a few record-breaking (and making) objects and oddities that you just have to see in person.

By John Lumpkin

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A Poet of the (Extra)ordinary

Legendary fine art photographer Keith Carter showcases the everyday magic in his hometown of Beaumont.

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12 Trips for 2019

A new year means new adventures. In 2019, make plans to check out a new festival in McAllen, sip suds in Marathon and Fredericksburg, hit the beach, and more.

PHOTOGRAPHER KEITH CARTER, who has a retrospective book coming out, has spent his career making art in Beaumont.



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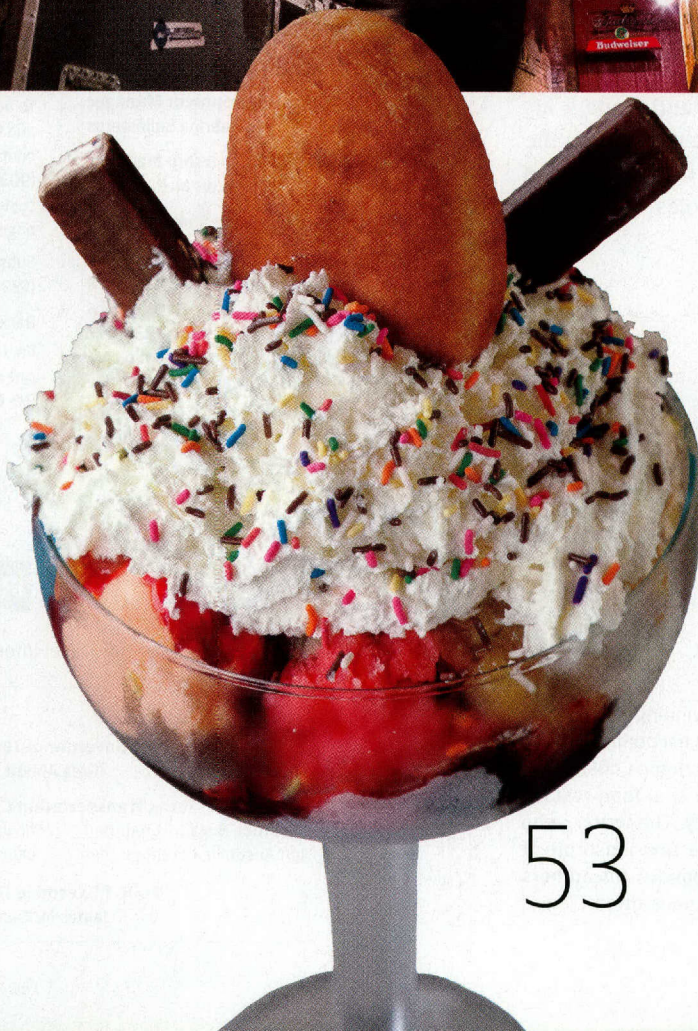
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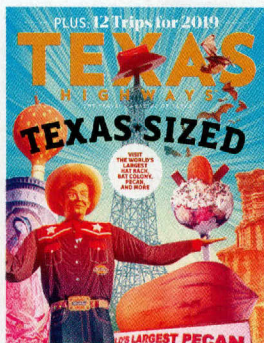
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Vintage

Remembering Frank Lively, the founding editor of *Texas Highways*



ON THE COVER

Illustration by Sean McCabe

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Behind the Scenes



While researching “As Big as Texas” (Page 26)—Texas’ various claims to the world’s largest—writer John Lumpkin heard some interesting stories. One of them comes courtesy of Austin sculptor Bob “Daddy-O” Wade, whose 35-foot-tall cowboy boots at North Star Mall in San Antonio have the distinction of being the World’s Largest Cowboy Boots, according to *Guinness World Records*. When Lumpkin interviewed Wade for the article, Wade recounted the memory of someone calling to tell him, “Sorry, Mr. Wade. Your boots are on fire.” “That’s not possible,” he retorted. It turns out someone had punched a hole in the heel of one of the boots and made it his temporary home. Smoke billowed out when the occupant lit a can of Sterno cooking fuel. “He was summarily evicted,” Lumpkin notes.

Featured Contributors



Jesse Sublett

The author, musician, artist, and raconteur wrote about his passion for birding in his essay “Big Whoop” (Page 12). In 1978, Sublett founded the seminal Austin punk and new wave power trio The Skunks, and in 2017, he published his 12th and 13th books, *Esther’s Follies: The Laughs, the Gossip, and the Story Behind Texas’ Most Celebrated Comedy Troupe* and *Armadillo World Headquarters: A Memoir*, with Eddie Wilson.



Cary Clack

The 17-year, award-winning *San Antonio Express-News* columnist penned a story about Mr. and Mrs. G’s Home Cooking and Pastries (Page 56), a soul food restaurant in his native city. The writer, who was inducted into the Texas Institute of Letters in 2017, has also worked in politics and authored books, including a collection of columns titled *Clowns and Rats Scare Me*.

DIRECTOR
Joan Henderson

EDITORIAL
Executive Editor
Emily Roberts Stone
Managing Editor
Wes Ferguson
Senior Editor
Matt Joyce
Events Editor
Jane Kellogg Murray
Associate Editor
Kimya Kavehkar
Editor-at-Large
Michael Hoinski

Contributing Editors
Heather Brand, Melissa Gaskill, E. Dan Klepper, Clayton Maxwell, June Naylor, Daniel Blue Tyx

Contributing Writers
Cary Clack, Paula Disbrowe, Cynthia J. Drake, Chet Garner, Jill Lawless, Pam LeBlanc, John Lumpkin, Laurel Miller, Joe Nick Patoski, Jesse Sublett, Rose L. Thayer

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Cindy Newsom

DIGITAL
Digital Strategies Manager
Peter Obering

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ADVERTISING
AJR Media Group
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PUBLISHER
Andrea Lin

ART
Creative Director
Mark Mahorsky
Art Director
Ashley Burch
Associate Art Director
Chris Linnen
Photo Editor
Brandon Jakobeit

Contributing Photographers
Christ Chavez, E. Dan Klepper, O. Rufus Lovett, Tom McCarthy Jr., Eric W. Pohl, Erich Schlegel, Dave Shafer

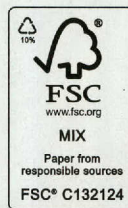
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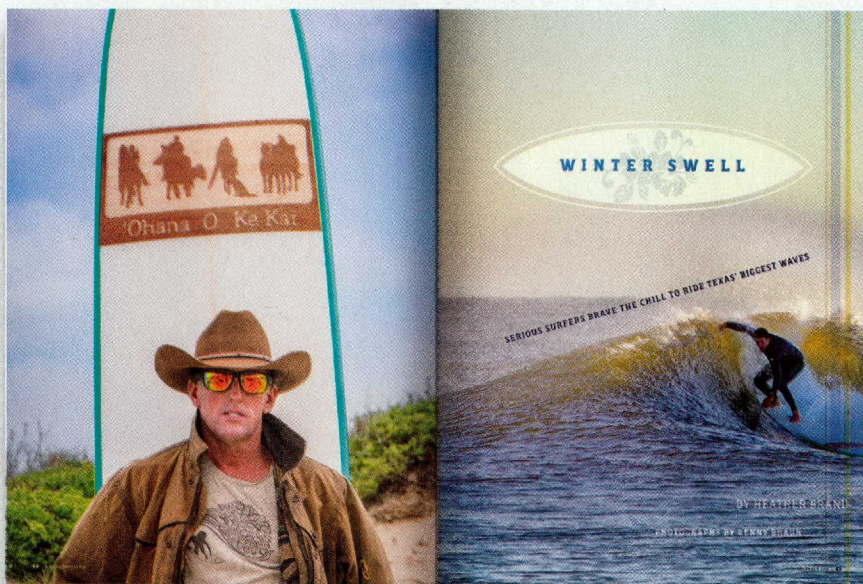
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READERS RESPOND

MERGE



Your redesign confirms *Texas Highways* continues to grow bigger and better with each issue. I plan to pack up and move back to Texas the next time our resident volcano erupts.

Milt Sylwester, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

Highways Heritage

TH: *The November death of Frank Lively, the founding editor of Texas Highways [see Page 73], prompted an outpouring of memories, including this one from a longtime contributing writer.*

I remember my first visit to Frank's office in about 1990. I was there by invitation to discuss some possible assignments. As I was waiting to see him, I could hear a typewriter pounding, periodically interrupted by curses and the sound of paper being ripped out of the machine, wadded up, and hurled at a wastebasket. I was not hopeful, but the meeting launched a long relationship with the magazine. My only regret is that I never got to taste one of his margaritas.

Larry D. Hodge, Athens

The Bites that Bind

I was in Sweetwater last weekend, and of course I swung by Mrs. Allen's ["Home Cookin' Highway," October]. While

paying out, I told Bill Allen that the original price his grandmother Lizzie had charged in her early days was 65 cents. Bill said he couldn't remember. And I said he wasn't even there then. As he gave me change for my \$4 purchase of two breasts, he pointed to the table closest to the cash register and said, "That's where your dad sat every day." You see, at Mrs. Allen's they serve memories as well as fried chicken and red beans.

Leigh S. Curry, New York

Road-Trip Reunion

Thank you *Texas Highways* and Sarah Hepola for the December Open Road essay ["Go West, Young Woman"]. My best friend, Beth, and I met while we were both living in Austin in 1995. Twenty-three years, two divorces, two kids, and approximately 17 dogs between us later, Beth and her 16-year-old daughter recently drove from Los Angeles to Texas to see our most romantic and

proud state, visiting us in Dallas along the way. Sarah's story and the memories we made, and plan to keep on making, brought tears of joy to my eyes!

Juliet Nations, Dallas

O! Mrs. Olle

Growing up in Flatonia, we walked to school on the sidewalk directly in front of the Olle Hotel ["Railroad Hotels," December]. Often, Mrs. Olle would be sitting on her front porch reading a paper and enjoying the outdoors. Thanks for the pleasant memories.

Franklin L. Kocian, Wharton

We want to hear from you!

Send feedback and recommendations to letters@texashighways.com; P.O. Box 11009, Austin, TX, 78714-1009.

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MONARCH MIGRATION

When we lived in San Felipe, the trees surrounding us would be covered in monarchs. As the sun would rise and hit the tree trunks, the butterflies would begin to undulate and stretch their wings before they took flight. Unbelievable beauty.

Becky McKeehan,
Virginia Beach, Virginia

The monarch migrations amaze me. I love seeing the migration through DFW—all the traffic, and they just keep going...

Celeste Johnson Doane,
Carrollton



Best Wishes

Chinese New Year traditions include releasing a wishing lantern into the air or casting it into the water to bring good luck or release worries. The latter is celebrated annually at the San Antonio River Walk, which holds its Confucius Wishing Lanterns event Feb. 9. The ceremony of floating gold-rimmed lanterns and lotuses is both joyous—some mark theirs with wishes, hopes, and dreams—and poignant—others honor a loss and find closure.



Granbury

A chat with Granbury's 'unofficial ambassador'

By Cynthia J. Drake



FAYE LANDHAM visits the Granbury Opera House, one of the historic buildings that give the downtown square its charm.



TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

9,520



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

27



YEAR FOUNDED:

1866



NEAREST CITY:

Fort Worth,
35 miles northeast



MARQUEE EVENTS:

Texas Independence Day, March 2-3; Granbury Wine Walk, April 26-27; Lighted Labor Day Boat Parade on Lake Granbury, typically the Sunday of Labor Day weekend.



MAP IT:

Granbury City Hall,
116 W. Bridge St.

During karaoke night at D'Vine Wine on the Granbury Square, Faye Landham works the crowd. Amid off-key singing and wine-fueled laughter, Landham, a regular at this lively gathering, greets friends and strangers alike with the latest town news and happenings. It quickly becomes clear why Landham is known around Granbury as an “unofficial ambassador.” Within the cozy confines of this North Texas town, Landham immerses herself in volunteering: She works with the Opera Guild of Granbury, the Ada Carey Family Violence Shelter, the Granbury Chamber of Commerce, and the list goes on.

Founded in 1866, Granbury developed as a center for agriculture, and the arrival of the Fort Worth and Rio Grande Railroad in 1887 fueled a building boom that created a legacy of historic downtown buildings. Today these limestone brick structures—including the 1890 Hood County Courthouse—and attractions like Lake Granbury draw locals as well as visitors from nearby Fort Worth and Dallas looking for a small-town escape.

Next time you're in Granbury, keep an eye out for Landham, a retiree who moved from Arlington about six years ago. She'll be happy to bring you up to speed.

First impressions

“Before I moved here, I would come down on weekends and walk around the square. I was raised in a lot of small towns, and I've lived in big towns, too. It's mostly the people here that I love. The people here are so giving, whether it's donations for a cause or an item for an auction. I think this is the most giving town I've ever seen.”

The Square

“I think Granbury's pretty perfect like it is. We have a lot of activities, a lot of festivals; I love the things we do on the square. I'm a member of the Historic Granbury Merchants Association, which organizes a lot of activities on the square.”

The Opera House

“We have a beautiful opera house, and we're real proud of it. We hear people from Fort Worth say they'd rather drive down and go to our plays, that they're just as good and a lot less expensive.”

Everybody Knows Your Name

“Sometimes small-town life can be tough because there are a lot of people kin to each other here. I got myself in trouble sometimes when I first moved here.

You need to be real careful about what you say because that might be somebody's uncle or cousin.”

Land of the Free

“We have a large celebration for Texas Independence Day. Davy Crockett's wife, Elizabeth [Patton Crockett], is buried at the Acton Cemetery, and so we always have a big celebration for her. And people dress up in the correct costumes and tell stories about Texas' independence.”

Away in a Manger

“I have 1,500 nativity sets from all over the world, from 85 countries, that I put on display every December [at Langdon Concert Hall]. I arrange them by country, and I have an area where children can sit by the fireplace and play with nativity toys. I also have a vintage section, 1930s or older—they're my pride and joy, of course. People drive from all over, sometimes people come two or three times a week.”

Keeping it Local

“I'm really a fan of buying local because I want so much for Granbury to grow. I say, if they don't have it in Granbury, I don't need it.”

THE GRANBURY OPERA HOUSE

Among the historic buildings of downtown Granbury, the 1886 Granbury Opera House, renovated in 2013, is home to the Granbury Theatre Company. The 2019 season includes Broadway hits *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Mamma Mia!*, and *Grease*.

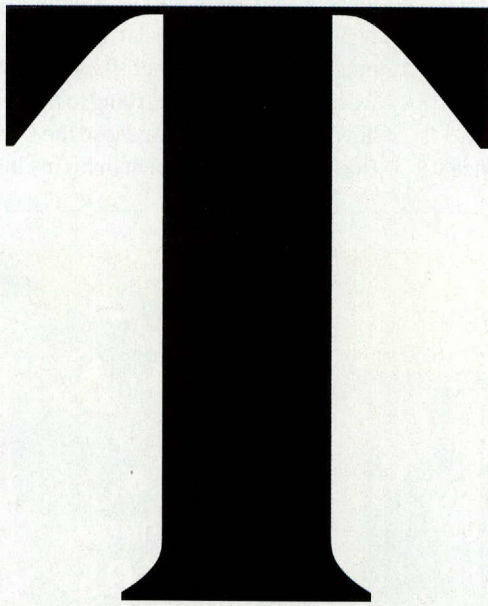


JESSE
SUBLETT #
2018

BIG WHOOP

A cancer survivor on the healing nature of birds

By Jesse Sublett



The first time I encountered whooping cranes, my wife and I were stationed on an observation tower on the dry section of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, the winter home of the last naturally migrating flock of whooping cranes in existence. A family of three plus another pair of adults grazed in the bay waters offshore, too far to see with the naked eye. A spotting scope borrowed from a kind stranger nearby made all the difference.

We could now see the red skull cap and black mask over the eyes, the dagger-like beak, and with the exception of the black wing-tips, the body completely covered

in snow-white feathers. I wasn't going to complain about the long-distance view. Most birders would have bought a ticket for a four-hour guided boat tour, but I was in no condition to ride in a boat. Physically drained and perpetually nauseated from chemotherapy, I was thrilled just to have made it up the observation tower ramp.

The trip had begun in Austin early that morning in March 1998. With my wife, Lois, behind the wheel, and our 4-year-old son, Dashiell, in his car seat, we drove down to the Coastal Bend, a distance of about 190 miles, for the specific goal of seeing the whooping cranes. That year, birders, conservationists, and nature lovers around the world celebrated the fact that the flock at the wildlife refuge had increased to 182 birds, up from 160 the year before.

To fully appreciate that number, realize that in 1941 there were only 15 in the Aransas flock, and the species was teetering on the brink of extinction. Thanks to federal intervention, in partnership with groups like the National Audubon Society and International Crane Foundation, their numbers slowly increased. Between 1964 and 1976, the count was around 50. In 1987, the flock finally broke 100.

Numbers and statistics had occupied my mind a lot in the five months leading up to our trip. Ever since receiving my cancer diagnosis in November 1997 I had been combing through sources on survival rates of people with stage 4 squamous cell carcinoma of the neck. What were the odds, I wondered, that a 43-year-old writer and musician named Jesse Sublett might become extinct in the next five years?

MY OTOLARYNGOLOGIST AND SURGEON, Dr. Melba Lewis, was a Rolling Stones fan and a competitor in amateur ballroom-dancing competitions. Those things factored into our compatibility, and her vast experience and reputation gave me confidence as we set off on this bizarre and terrifying adventure. Back in 1993 in Los Angeles, another surgeon had removed a lump from my neck and reported the happy news that it was benign. Not long after we moved back to Austin, the cyst returned, along with a number of other small masses in my neck.

Once again, various experts told me it was just scar tissue or

What were the odds, I wondered, that a 43-year-old writer and musician named Jesse Sublett might become extinct in the next five years?

something else I had no reason to be concerned about. When I finally met up with Lewis, she immediately ordered a battery of scans and other tests, including a re-check of the original cyst, which still

I can spend hours watching a great blue, standing in the shallow water, the picture of stillness—until it strikes like lightning at its prey.

resided in a lab somewhere in L.A. It turns out the previous pathology was in error; the cancer had originated in my right tonsil, and all those other masses were probably cancer, too.

When I met my chemotherapy oncologist, he said, “Oh, you’re famous. Everyone is talking about you.”

“Oh, well,” I said with a shrug. “You know, I had a band and I’ve written some crime novels and stuff.”

The oncologist smiled and shook his head. No, he hadn’t seen me play with The Skunks, my punk and new wave band, or The Violators, a rock group I performed in with Kathy Valentine prior to her joining the Go-Go’s. Nor had he read any of the books in my Martin Fender detective series. The fame the oncologist referenced rested in a manila folder in his hands.

“Normally,” he said, “someone with this kind of cancer wouldn’t be around anymore. You’re special.”

Would being “special” tip the scales in my favor or lead to a more torturous demise? The answer was unknowable, though Lewis radiated confidence.

I felt better just being in her presence. She not only managed the treatment side but helped with the intangibles: Fears I might die and my son would grow up knowing me only as a dim memory, fears I wouldn’t be able to sing again, fears I would become a disfigured invalid confined to the back room of my own home.

A few days before surgery, I read everything I could about my particular cancer. Adding in various factors, I came up with this: less than 9 percent chance of five-year survival. Still, Lewis had given me a degree of confidence that I’d do better than that, and I hoped luck and perseverance would take care of the rest.

Dec. 2, 1997, was surgery day. They wheeled me out of the OR after nearly 14 hours—minus a jugular vein, neck muscle, and lots of other tissue. Four weeks later, I was still trying to figure out how to eat solid food and lose the Donald Duck accent when I went in for my initial

rounds of radiation and chemotherapy. I lost 50 pounds in a few weeks. I threw up hundreds of times. We kept trying different meds to control the nausea and the pain. None of them worked very well.

I read voraciously during my recovery. Birds and bird lore were among my favorite topics. At the same time I was also reading about visualization techniques and meditation for recovery. The two subjects dovetailed in long nature walks I began to take on Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake) and Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve.

One day, during the week between my diagnosis and surgery, I meandered down the trail at Town Lake, watching a great blue heron. This had become my totem bird in the early '90s, when I worked on a documentary series about wilderness and national parks. On a scouting trip to the Everglades, I took an airboat ride through those exotic wetlands, where I

saw a fantastic wild bird with a wingspan like a Boeing 757 glide across the river, letting his wingtips slap the surface of the water every few yards.

I can spend hours watching a great blue, standing in the shallow water, the picture of stillness—until it strikes like lightning at its prey. After watching this heron for a few minutes, I heard a voice just behind my right ear: *This is going to be as hard for you as learning how to fly.* I looked over my shoulder. No one there. When I looked back at the heron, he spread his wings and moved across the lake. *This is going to be as hard for you as learning how to fly.* This was the first time I'd ever heard a phantom voice. I've never heard one since.

At that time I was a jogger, and I ran around Town Lake several times a week, but before the Everglades, I'd never noticed all the great blues around me. They're not uncommon birds, but you do

have to open your eyes and pay attention. After cancer, I really started paying attention. I guess you could say that's when I became a birder.

Whooping cranes would end up gifting me a startling realization. With the help of human beings, "whoopers" had miraculously defied the odds against their survival. This was a fact I found both humbling and inspiring. If they could make it, I could make it.

I wrote it down in my notebook: *If they could make it, I could make it.* I made a getting-well schedule with three main goals. 1. Three months after surgery, go see the whooping cranes. 2. Six months, buy a new Fender bass and play a gig. 3. Nine months, go to the Grand Canyon.

EVERY DAY, I spent time focusing on my goals during visualization and meditation sessions, which had to be crammed in between | continued on Page 69

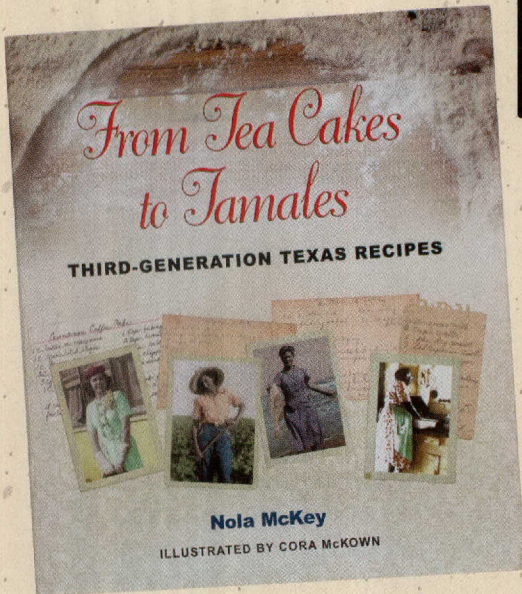


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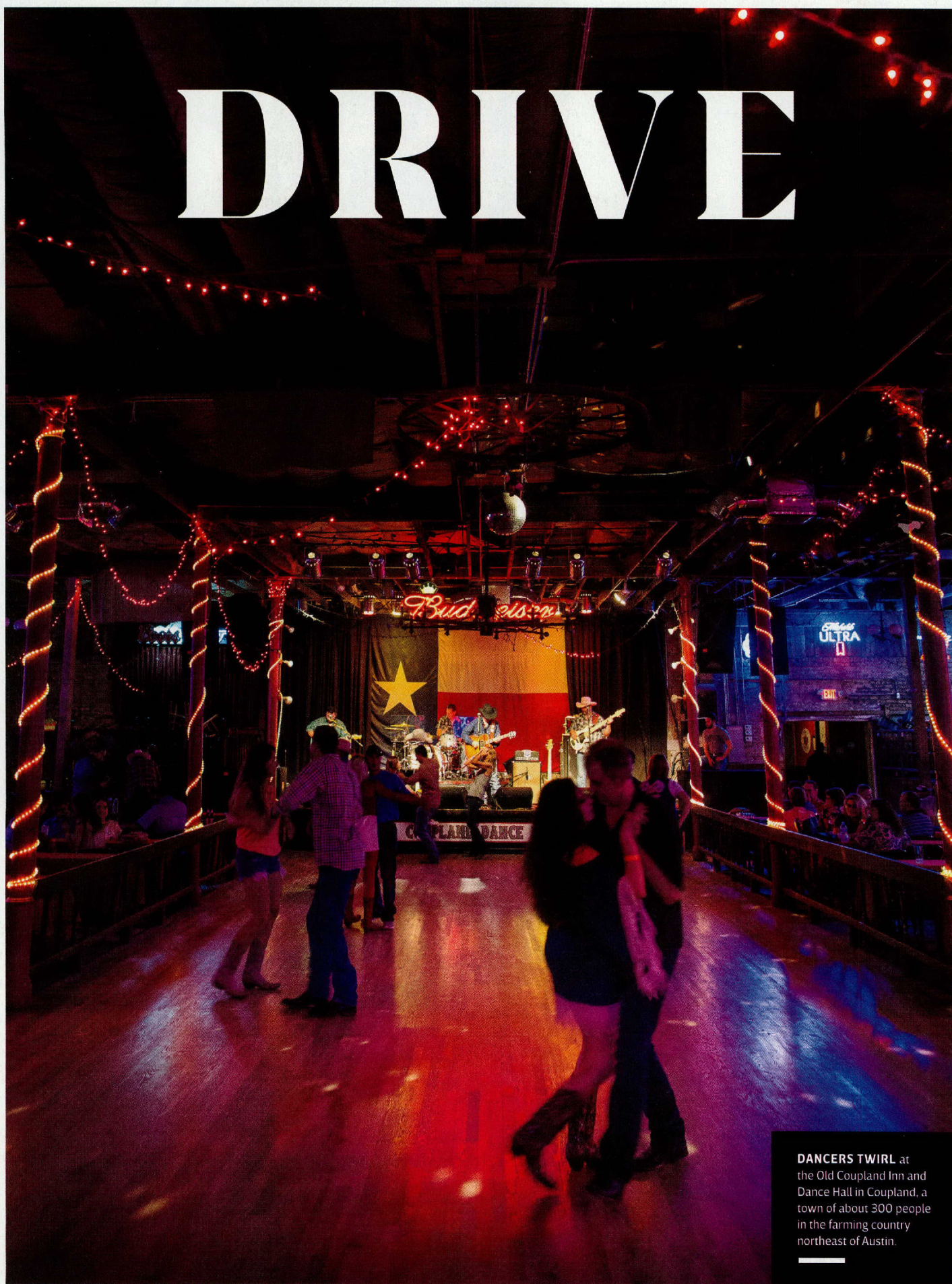
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DRIVE



DANCERS TWIRL at the Old Coupland Inn and Dance Hall in Coupland, a town of about 300 people in the farming country northeast of Austin.

Barbecue and Boot-Scootin'

A music-industry veteran breathes new life into a classic Texas dance hall and B&B

By Joe Nick Patoski

From the outside looking in, the Texas dance hall appears to be a pretty basic proposition: live music in a big building with a stage at one end and a dance floor in the middle. It's the other, smaller details that separate the classic dance halls from the rest.

Like a scenic road trip getting there. The right kind of Texas grub on-site to work up an appetite for foot-stompin' and boot-scootin.' A place to crash if you've had too much fun. And an engaging, hands-on proprietor to make sure everything runs like it's supposed to.

The Old Coupland Inn and Dance Hall checks all those boxes.

The landscape on the 30-mile drive northeast from Austin transitions from suburban sprawl to gently rolling fields of corn and cotton once you've passed the towns of Elgin and Taylor. By the time you've rolled into the tiny, not-so-easy-to-find town of Coupland, you feel you've gone back in a time machine. The sun-baked red-brick façade on Hoxie Street underscores the impression. This is one of those places that seems like it's been around forever.

Well, Old Coupland Inn and Dance Hall has been around practically forever, only

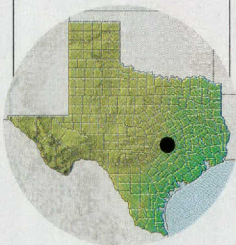


ABBEY ROAD (above) runs the dance hall, masters the barbecue pit, and operates a bed-and-breakfast in a two-story building dating to 1904.



THE OLD COUPLAND INN AND DANCE HALL

101 Hoxie St.,
Coupland,
512-856-2777;
coupland
dancehall.com



in different iterations. How it got to where it is at this particular moment on this particular Saturday night—with Kevin Russell, the big-boned leader of the band Shinyribs, impeccably attired in a pink suit and two-tone wingtips, leading a long conga line of mostly middle-aged fans weaving through the dance hall while the waitresses collectively catch their breath at the back of the room after another very busy night at the restaurant next door—takes explaining.

As does the dance floor filling with line dancers during a band break, enthusiastically performing choreographed steps to the sounds of the Steve Earle chestnut “Copperhead Road,” special “Teen Night” dances, and a church group of 60 who meet at the restaurant every once in a while.

“Community center—that’s the definition of a Texas dance hall,” says Abbey Road, the spunky proprietor of Old Coupland, which just like the 19th-century dance halls once scattered across this part of Central Texas and the rest of the state, functions as a local gathering place, being all things to all people including teens and church groups. “That’s why

dance halls were originally built," she says. Road, who goes by a professional alias, would know. She sits on the advisory board of Texas Dance Hall Preservation, the historic advocacy and preservation group, one of many notches on her belt that predated her purchase of the Old Coupland Inn and Dance Hall in 2017.

The two-story, half-block building that houses the dance hall dates to 1904, meaning it may not be as old as the dance halls in Gruene or Luckenbach, but it looks and feels old enough. The space was occupied by a mercantile, a doctor's office, a pharmacy, and a saloon before it became a dance hall in 1990, meaning Old Coupland is new enough for all the modern fixtures to operate as intended.

"It's air-conditioned, has electricity, and the bathrooms work," Road says proudly. Basic amenities, perhaps, but the dirty little secret of historic Texas dance halls, she'll tell you, is that even if some are well-preserved, the infrastructure is rarely upgraded, meaning not enough power for AC or modern bands, and not enough water pressure to handle multiple flushes in the restrooms.

It's been a long and winding road to becoming the Queen of Old Coupland for Road, who books the dance hall, smokes the barbecue, and runs the restaurant and the seven-room 1890s red velvet-walled, brothel-style bed and breakfast upstairs. Each previous stop prepared her for classic Texas dance hall ownership.

Music entered her life in the Lake Conroe area, where she and her husband ran an auto restoration shop from 1991 to 2006 and where she acquired her industry name. Roots rock band Reckless Kelly, "these 18-year-old boys who'd moved to Texas," needed service on their van, she says, and she ended up booking a couple of Houston-area gigs to help out Reckless Kelly's brother band, Micky

and the Motorcars in 2002.

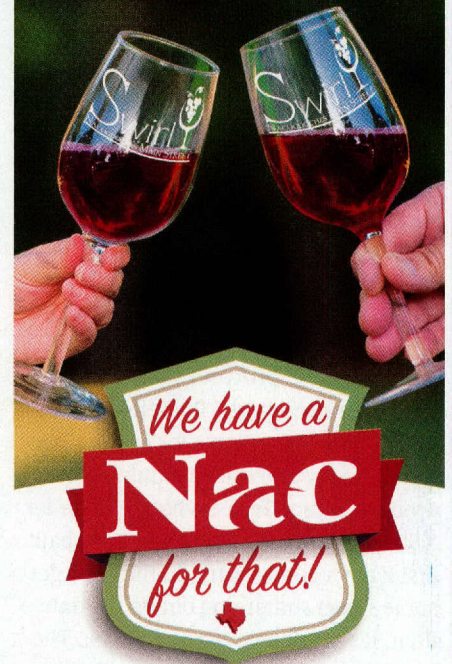
In 2007, she took the leap to Luckenbach, managing the ghost-town tourist destination made famous by the 1977 song by Waylon Jennings with Willie Nelson. "'Everybody's Somebody in Luckenbach'—you drink the Kool-Aid when you're there," she says of the Hill Country hamlet 10 miles southeast of Fredericksburg. "You see it on the backs of T-shirts every day. You eat, drink, and sleep that slogan. When you have people from all over the world coming to see your space, you definitely have to understand what that means. That's a life philosophy that applies to everything you do, not just dance halls."

Stints on the air at the Sun Radio station in Dripping Springs and KOKE-FM in Austin burnished her communication skills and expanded her Texas music knowledge. Working at Threadgill's in Austin, she got a close-up look at a genuine Texas cooking institution and booked a wider variety of music than she did in Luckenbach. A turn at Hill Country Barbecue Market in New York City reminded her why she loves Texas so much.

"Coupland affords me the life I want to live," she says of her latest love, pointing out her commute to work is 24 steps from the apartment upstairs. But running a dance hall, restaurant, and B&B is hard work. "The restaurant kicks my butt," she admits. "I could not do this seven days a week."

Former Threadgill's executive chef Jacob Martinez has taken over grilling duties at the restaurant, which like the dance hall is open on weekends only. Road mans the barbecue pit, slow-smoking brisket, ribs, and pulled pork with mesquite wood, which is no easy task. "I have Southside Market in Elgin 8 miles south," she says. "Louie Mueller's in Taylor is 8 miles north. Snow's is 30 miles east. It's incredibly important that if we're going to have

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DINNER AND DANCING

The Old Coupland Inn and Dance Hall opens Fri-Sat for dinner 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m. Live music begins at 9 p.m. (Dance hall doors open 7 p.m.) Bed-and-breakfast rooms start at \$135.

barbecue, that it can hold up.”

The dance hall holds up just as well. Russell has been playing Old Coupland since the early aughts—first with the roots-rock band The Gourds, and lately with his own eclectic roots and funk band Shinyribs—and appreciates how it functions. “When we see so many iconic places become history in the rubble of progress, or a parody of their former selves, it comforts me that Coupland is maintaining its place in the lives of the locals while reaching out to the murky, weird waters of Texas music,” he says, acknowledging Road’s willingness to book outside the box and bring in bands like Shinyribs.

“It truly is an authentic Texas dance hall. It’s supported by a culture around it that still uses it as a social gathering place to enjoy spirit and song and dance with their neighbors,” Russell says. “So it’s a unique experience for me as a performer to try and mix my fans from around Central Texas, who are there for a Shiny show, with the locals who really just want a good shuffle so they can get some sweet something out on the dance floor. It’s a palpable tension at first. The fun for me is winning them over to the Shiny side. That being said, I will learn a few more shuffles for next time.”

Along with big Texas dance hall names such as Randy Rogers, Pat Green, and Kevin Fowler, and country dance bands, Old Coupland showcases songwriters and original music like Shinyribs, Bob Schneider, and Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis, along with legacy artists such as Billy Joe Shaver.

Community, Road believes, is what separates Old Coupland from other dance halls. “This is still very much a rural farming community, unlike Fredericksburg, where the families have sold off everything in the name of the dollar; the peach orchards are [largely] gone, and everyone’s going crazy with wine,” she says. “Over here, these farmers are still actively involved with corn, wheat, and cotton, and they intend to keep that lifestyle.”

Just like Road intends to keep Old Coupland functioning like the classic Texas dance hall it is. **L**



Dallas Grandeur, Renewed

Three hotels benefit from reboots as big as Big D

By June Naylor

Stories of Dallas’ glamorous past unfold at three classic hotels where recent, significant updates make them as relevant as some of their much younger and flashier counterparts. To spend time exploring The Adolphus, The Stoneleigh, and The Statler is to appreciate the ways old becomes new again and to understand how these vintage jewels first shaped the Big D into an enjoyable place to visit.

Adolphus Hotel

“King of Beers” Adolphus Busch would surely be as proud today as he was when he built his palatial Texas hotel in 1912. A renovation completed in October of the 407-room downtown landmark honors Busch and his beer, Budweiser, in numerous ways.

A giant chandelier Busch purchased at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1904—and which resembles a crown festooned with the same kinds of eagles and hops that appear on the iconic Budweiser label—hangs over the escalator that leads from the lobby to a massive parlor called the Social Lobby. A majestic portrait of Busch is displayed near



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The Adolphus Hotel, built in 1912; a room at The Stoneleigh; and the rooftop swimming pool at The Statler.



elevators, which still exhibit gold leaf detail original to the hotel's debut.

New, contemporary elements work within the hotel's grandeur: The 1915-era Brass Tacks barbershop, which had been abandoned for decades, thrives again near the hotel entrance; and Commerce Goods + Supplies, a boutique just off the

Guests are transported to the 1950s at The Statler, where Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley stayed during visits to Dallas.

lobby, stocks locally made fragrances, leather creations, and hats by Stetson, one of which is unique to the Adolphus—a style called The Renard. One of the largest spas downtown now sits next to a new rooftop pool, where guests sip cocktails by the fire.

City Hall, the more casual of the hotel's restaurants, serves a menu of bright, exotic dishes hinting of Mediterranean influences. The renovated French Room, a vaunted Dallas institution for high-end dining, shows off 17th-century-style chandeliers crafted from hand-blown Murano glass. In the bar and salon just outside the restaurant, a collection of more than 40 original works by Texas artists adorns the walls. *1321 Commerce St. 214-742-8200; adolphus.com*

The Statler

A few blocks from the Adolphus, The Statler was an edgy, \$16 million masterpiece when it opened in 1956; famous guests included Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley. Shuttered in 2000, it fell into decay and barely escaped the wrecking ball. A lengthy \$255 million redevelopment created the showplace anew, welcoming guests to 159 rooms in fall 2017. Vintage elements include the classic midcentury's pioneering, cantilevered design; a large, stainless steel-and-gold-plated rotating sculpture by José de Rivera called *A Wishing Star* that rises from a patio overlooking St. Paul Street; and a striking, colorful 40-foot-long mural by artist Jack Lubin in the lobby. Throughout common spaces, from the lobby to hallways on guest floors, terrazzo flooring and mod light fixtures transport guests to the best of the 1950s.

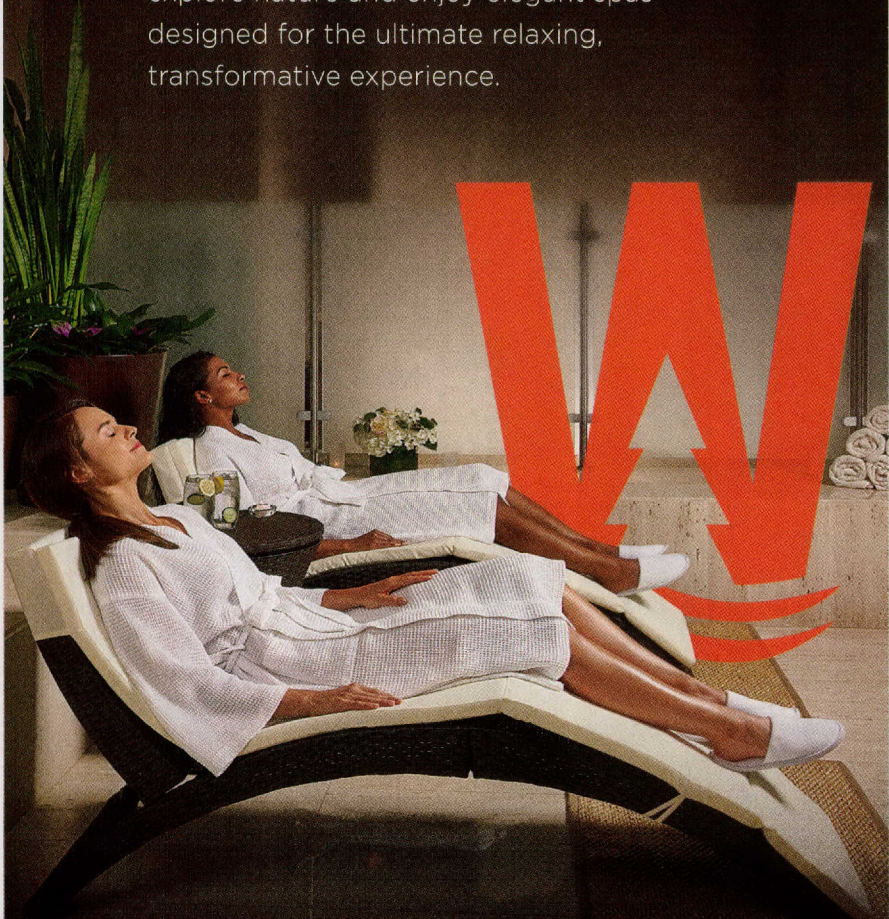
To one side of the lobby, the elegant Fine China serves a communal-style menu of reinvented American-Chinese cuisine, including dim sum, rice and noodle dishes, as well as high tea service. At the more casual and campy Scout, meals come with sides of bowling, pingpong, pool, foosball, and live music. Also off the lobby, Overeasy's all-day breakfast includes buttermilk biscuits with shaved honey ham, brisket hash topped with eggs and crispy okra, or a five-way deviled egg

“

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flight. Imbibers enjoy Bourbon & Banter, a basement bar with speakeasy tones and smooth-talking bartenders whipping up craft cocktails in a space that once held the hotel's barber shop; and the rooftop Waterproof, serving cocktails beside a long swimming pool that glows electric blue under a starry sky. *1914 Commerce St. 214-459-3930; thestatlerdallas.com*

The Stoneleigh

Known as The Stoneleigh Court Hotel at its 1923 opening, the handsome lodging in the neighborhood now called Uptown boasts 176 guest rooms and newfound confidence after a 2018 face-lift. Its darkish, dowdy lobby became a bright, crisp setting that flows easily into an open, airy bar and terrace lounge overlooking beautiful Maple Avenue. Guests move from cocktails and charcuterie at the bar into the new Perle on Maple, which serves Niçoise salad and duck confit pancakes. Walls hung with framed vintage hotel and neighborhood photos and an art installation comprising pen-and-ink drawings atop books of classic literature satisfy visual appetites.

Up top, a former penthouse residence offers luxury guest suites and a library and salon frequently used today as a party or meeting venue; it's well worth asking to see the finery, which has been restored to its original glory. Best of all, terrace views of downtown and one of the graceful Calatrava bridges spanning the Trinity River take one's breath away. Those with no fear of heights can look straight down to the new outdoor swimming pool area, complete with chic, comfy cabanas—perfect for enjoying an al fresco flute of bubbles and toasting the smart hotel reboots in Big D. *2927 Maple Ave., Dallas. 214-871-7111; lemeridien dallasstoneleigh.com*

DALLAS DECISIONS

Modern rooms at the Adolphus Hotel start at \$189. Embrace the midcentury at The Statler from \$183, or bask in The Stoneleigh's natural light from \$169.

Friday



3 P.M.

Claim a Colorful Cottage

It started with *Gilmore Girls*, James Sharp explains. First his wife, Sara, fell in love with the popular television series—and then with the dream of running an inn (as the main character does on the show). So last summer, the adventurous couple—passionate cooks and former school teachers from Killeen—purchased the Yellow House Bed and Breakfast in Salado from its previous owners. The B&B is a mini hamlet of cottages, historic houses, and four guest rooms in the main house. The option to have your own private porch swing makes an ideal setting for couples or small groups who want a serene rural setting, friendly hospitality, and proximity to gallery hopping downtown.



4:30 P.M.

Quaff Like a Local

It took a petition, an election, and some serious spirit rousing for husband-and-wife duo Graydon and KD Hill to open Barrow Brewing Company in Salado in 2016—Bell County's first micro-brewery. Grab a seat in the stylish tap room and notice the knotty pine walls (which are original to the structure, an old grain silo). Then kick back with a pint of Evil Catfish IPA—named after a local mermaid legend—or 784 Belgian Witte, an orange- and coriander-scented brew named after the number of residents who voted “yes” for a brewpub in 2014, enabling the brewery to establish itself downtown.

“Graydon and I knew we wanted to put down roots in Salado and were inspired by the

Bell County Bound

An abundance of craft brews, award-winning barbecue, and a generous helping of Central Texas history await in Belton and Salado

By Paula Disbrowe

Located in the heart of Texas, just off I-35 between Waco and Austin, Bell County is far enough from hipster joints and the urban hustle to provide a dose of small-town Texas—but close enough for a weekend getaway. For barbecue enthusiasts, Belton's stellar smoked meat purveyors provide reason enough to exit the interstate. But the area's appeal goes well beyond brisket: There is camping, fishing, and boating on Lake Belton; hiking in state parks; craft beer, and a free-spirited creative community; and plenty of shopping in nearby Salado. It's a diverse community where the camouflage population of Fort Hood intermingles with co-eds.

Early on, Belton's location on Nolan Creek fueled its growth. In the 1870s, most businesses were devoted to cotton and the numerous cattle drives on the Chisholm Trail. After a fire destroyed Belton's business district in 1879, locals rallied to build the town's first cottonseed oil mill (and more gins to follow). The best way to appreciate the area's charms and understand its rich history is to spend a weekend soaking it all up.

Austin

1 hour

Dallas

2 hours

San Antonio

2.25 hours

Houston

3 hours



local artisans and makers who call this village home,” KD says. “Craft beer has a way of bringing people together.”


6:30 P.M.
Brake for Brisket

Follow the aroma of mesquite coal-fired meats to Schoepf’s Bar-B-Que, the oldest barbecue restaurant in Belton. Owners Ronnie and Staci Schoepf purchased the business from Ronnie’s parents in 2007. Over its 25-year history, the family business has amassed a devoted following among locals, visitors, and even celebrities—they’ve prepared ‘cue for everyone from Oprah to Air Force One.

In addition to their bounty of smoked meats (brisket, chicken halves, bacon-wrapped quail, and their “big chop”—a massive, two-inch-thick pork chop), there are freshly made sides (like crispy cucumber salad) and Tex-Mex offerings, so good luck deciding between brisket nachos or the rib-eyes cooked to order on Friday and Saturday nights.

The restaurant has won numerous accolades, but Ronnie stays focused on the big picture. “We’re a restaurant, not a brisket store,” he says. “There are lists of the best this and the best that ... but I think we offer the best overall barbecue experience you can find.” Indulge in a slice of homemade caramel cake—you can dance it off in their backyard venue, which hosts live music on occasion.

 **STAY**

 **EAT & DRINK**

 **SHOP**

 **EXPLORE**

Saturday

9 A.M.
Breakfast and Belton

After fueling up on The Yellow House’s breakfast (which might be bacon cheddar bread pudding or peach croissant French toast), head to Belton. The best way to appreciate the charms of its historic downtown is on foot, so park your car and start at Cochran, Blair & Potts, the oldest operating department store in the state. The store’s interior shows its age in all the best ways, thanks to a recent restoration of the original brick walls, wood floors, and tin ceiling. It’s a pretty setting to peruse merchandise that ranges from practical (denim shirts and work boots) to home décor.

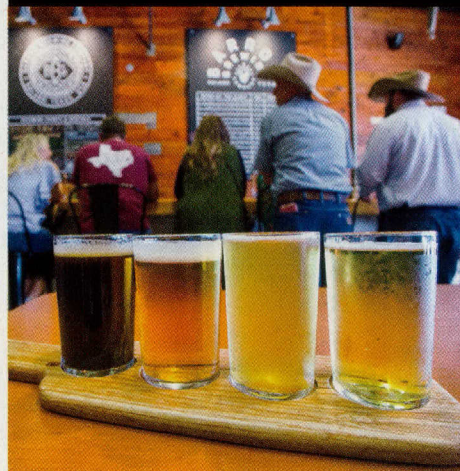
Across the street, a red neon “Texas” sign illuminates the entrance at Exchange on Central, a rabbit’s warren of around 75 vendors selling vintage kitchenware, handmade gifts, and upcycled furniture. Down the street, the three-story, Renaissance Revival-style 1885 Bell County Courthouse is a stunning example of the Golden Age of Texas courthouses.

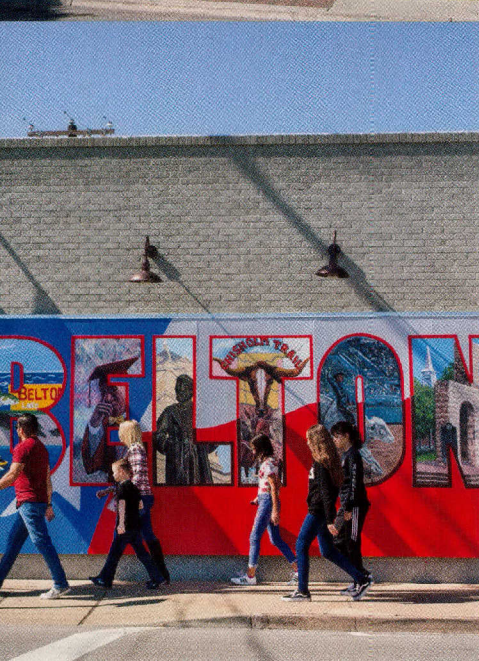
11 A.M.
Caffeine and Smoke

You need to keep your strength up, so join the queue at Miller’s Smokehouse, a family-owned operation that first opened in 2008 and relocated to its swanky corner digs in 2016. Exposed brick, an Italian espresso machine, and refrigerator cases brimming with takeout options bring a contemporary edge to the traditional Texas barbecue prepared by father-son pitmasters Dirk and Dusty Miller. Dirk’s wife, Lisa, oversees from-scratch desserts like chocolate pudding cake, sopapilla cheese-cake, and banana pudding.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: At Miller’s Smokehouse, richly flavored brisket, sausage, pulled pork, chicken, and more are sold by the pound; Belton has been the county seat since 1851; a mural outside Cochran, Blair & Potts in Belton; Barrow Brewing, Belton’s first microbrewery; the Little River Log Cabin at the Bell County Museum.





12:30 P.M.
Time Travel

With its handsome 1904 Carnegie Library façade, the Bell County Museum is a stately place to delve into the area’s history. A mix of permanent and traveling exhibits encourage visitors to play archaeologist in the interactive Gault Site exhibit and learn about people and places that shaped the region, like Bell County native Miriam A. Ferguson, one of Texas’ first ladies and the first female governor of Texas. Don’t miss the Little River Log Cabin—a reconstruction of a one-room house built in the 1850s near Little River, the county’s earliest Anglo settlement—and the museum’s whimsical collection of moustache tea cups. Popular during the second half of the 19th century, when prominent moustaches were in fashion, the cups feature an inner shelf across the top edge that protected one’s moustache from coffee, hot chocolate, or tea.

4 P.M.
Wet Your Whistle

A few blocks away (past Belton’s original Katy Depot, built in 1882), settle in with a pint of Lake Day Lager or a flight of new brews like Jalapeño Cream Ale at Bold Republic Brewing Company. Expect a friendly crowd, sports on television, and a mix of beer geeks and families gathered at picnic tables with pizza or playing cornhole outside. Farm-to-table enthusiasts should head to Ramble in Salado for chef Jacob Hilbert’s seasonal, locally sourced cuisine like roasted shiitake mushrooms with guanciale, garlic, and honey reduction; Gulf blue shrimp with a corn and saffron veloute; or 44 Farms beef filet. With desserts like warm apple and pecan galette and dulce de leche macarons, you’ll want to save room.

Sunday

9:30 A.M.
Meet your Makers

Head to Salado for a cup of “Salado blend” coffee at Strawberry Patch, and peruse the shop’s selection of pickled foods, salsas, preserves, and souvenirs. Then get to know the town’s eclectic mix of makers, especially Ro Shaw Clay Studio, which is housed in a corrugated tin shed, and Mud Pies Pottery, where you can take a class and throw your own masterpiece. At Salado Glassworks, you can watch owner and artist Gail Allard shape signature vessels and custom lighting options, or sign up for a family-friendly glassblowing class.

1 P.M.
Mimosas and Brunch

Any good getaway should end with brunch, and Belton’s Gin at Nolan Creek—housed in a 1927 brick cotton gin that’s been carefully restored and converted into a beautiful restaurant complex—serves Texas-inspired comfort food like chicken-fried steak, Texas cheese-steak made with shaved rib-eye, and donut bread pudding.

“We have so many good neighbors—shopping, spas, top-rated barbecue, and pizza—all good people working together for the benefit of downtown,” managing partner Evan Morrison says.

The eatery anchors a cluster of other casual restaurants that lead to the creek’s newly restored waterfront—designed for kayaking, tubing, and family fun. Try to decide between the ham and cheese omelet or “Cotton Balls” (bacon-wrapped and jalapeño cheese-stuffed chicken bites) and crispy waffles. Don’t fret for too long though. Chances are, Belton will have left its mark, and you’ll be back for another taste soon. **L**

A collage of textures in blue, orange, and red. The text 'AS BIG AS TEXAS' is written in large, white, serif capital letters, centered on the page. The background consists of various fabric-like textures in shades of blue, orange, and red, creating a layered and vibrant effect.

AS BIG AS TEX AS



“EVERY- THING’S BIGGER IN TEXAS”—

how often have you heard that? The *New-York Tribune* is said to have coined the phrase more than a century ago. Though not quite everything in the Lone Star State qualifies as the world’s largest, tallest, longest, or widest, plenty do. Hitting the road to find them is a gargantuan trip in itself.

The world’s largest rattlesnake statue? Behold the coiled serpent in the South Texas town of Freer. The largest mosaic of the Virgin Mary? Gaze up at a 40-foot-high representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe by artist Jesse Treviño on San Antonio’s West Side.

Guinness World Records recognizes at least a dozen Texas claims, ranging from a fly fishing pole exceeding 70 feet in Port Isabel to the largest commercially available pizza (“The Bus,” a behemoth rectangular pie measuring 8 feet by 32 inches, at Moontower Pizza Bar in Burleson).

Other Texas venues boast of being the world’s biggest without Guinness’ affirmation, like the 14-foot, 6-inch jackrabbit statue in the South Plains community of Ralls. It eclipses Odessa’s 8-foot version, which was the previous record-holder.

Some claims have an obvious connection to their location—the largest mule shoe in Muleshoe and the largest Bowie knife in Bowie, though the world’s tallest spur is in Lampasas and not in the Dickens County town of Spur. Some are disputed—Purdue’s “Big Bass Drum” and the University of Missouri’s “Big Mo” are alleged to be larger marching band drums than the University of Texas–Austin’s Big Bertha, though Purdue once asserted its dimensions are a trade secret.

Texas icons populate the All-World list: Big Tex, the largest cowboy statue, is displayed 22 days a year at the State Fair of Texas; the largest Texas flag, 100 by 150 feet, unfurls at Texas Longhorns football games; San Jacinto Monument, the largest masonry shaft, is taller than the Washington Monument by 15 feet; and a size-328D pair of leather cowboy boots sits at El Paso’s Rocketbuster Handmade Custom Boots, which attracts drop-ins like actor Ethan Hawke and visitors from Australia and Russia.

“People want to see everything about Americana,” Rocketbuster owner Nevena Christi says. “They are interested in cowboys in general, and boots are so much a part of that.”

When travelers spot the 5-foot hulks, “We also get a smile.”

BY JOHN LUMPKIN

Tale of Two Pecans

“We had it, we lost it, and we got it back.”

So says tourism director Kyle Kramm of Seguin’s quest for the world’s largest pecan sculpture. The first rendition, 5 feet long and still on display at the Guadalupe County Courthouse, was erected in 1962, honoring settlers’ reliance on wild-growing pecans.

Along came farmers in Brunswick, Missouri, who built a 7-by-12-foot concrete pecan, but Seguin wouldn’t be denied. An 8-by-16-foot whopper constructed of fiberglass debuted in 2011 north of town at the Pecan Museum of Texas.

That’s not all. Pape Pecan House has what it claims is the world’s largest collection of nutcrackers—more than 8,000—in its store on State Highway 123. Outside, Pape displays what it says is the “world’s largest mobile pecan”—a 10-foot-long version on wheels.

As many as 3 million pounds of pecans are harvested annually in Guadalupe County, making it one of the largest producers in the country.

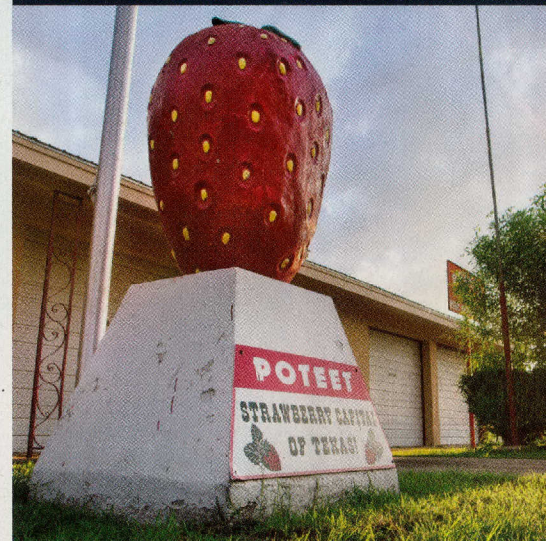


TOWER PLOYS

Outdone by a larger strawberry statue in Strawberry Point, Iowa? No problem for Poteet, whose first tribute to its cash crop has stood for years in front of the volunteer fire station. The solution: paint Poteet’s water tower to resemble a strawberry, thus becoming the world’s tallest strawberry at around 130 feet tall.

Luling’s competitors for celebrating its watermelon heritage include an elongated propane tank in the Midwest painted like a watermelon. So Luling’s public works department had the top of its 154-foot water tower painted to resemble a ripe green beauty, becoming the world’s tallest watermelon. In the Hill Country’s unincorporated community of Oatmeal, its 20-foot-tall water standpipe portrays a Three Minute brand canister, and without any competitors to speak of, it’s quite likely the world’s largest oatmeal box.

Paris, Texas, can claim the world’s tallest cowboy hat rack because a shiny red model tops its 65-foot copy of the original in Paris, France, though Las Vegas’ Eiffel Tower, sans hat, is eight times higher.



WORLD'S LARGEST ROAD TRIP

For a map of Texas' record-holding destinations and additional photos, head to texashighways.com.



A Boot Story

The world's largest cowboy boot sculpture first stood in a vacant lot in Washington, D.C. Artist Bob "Daddy-O" Wade constructed the boots in the nation's capital in 1979 to emulate his *Lone Star Iguana* statue he built the year prior in New York City.

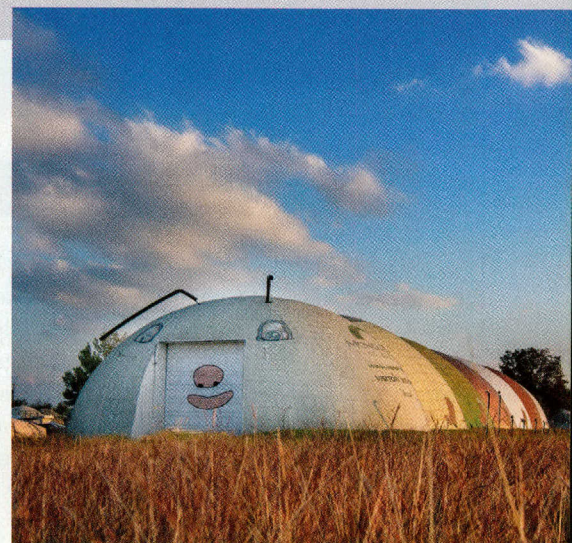
Neither locale worked out. Wade's 35-foot-tall boots, recognized by Guinness World Records, moved to San Antonio's North Star Mall in 1980. The world's largest iguana statue, nicknamed "Iggy," took longer to migrate to its Texas home, the top of the Fort Worth Zoo's Reptile House.

"There are a lot of good-looking public art structures, but they're abstract," says Wade, who notes the boots and the 40-foot-long iguana "have recognizable qualities, so you relate to them."

DRIVING BY

You don't have to leave the interstate to experience three of Texas' "World's Largest" venues. Along I-35E near the Italy exit looms *Bruco*, no doubt the largest structure resembling a caterpillar. The headquarters of a manufacturer of domed buildings, *Bruco's* connected orbs stretch 240 feet, decorated with antennae and painted feet wearing cowboy boots.

Guinness recognizes the car wash at mega-travel center Buc-ee's location on I-10 in Katy as the world's longest at 255 feet. Pulled by a conveyor belt, vehicles pass through 25 brushes in about five minutes. Buc-ee's also claims its 68,000-square-foot outlet on I-35 in New Braunfels is the world's biggest convenience store.





WHAT A PIZZA!

Patrons ordering “The Bus” at Burleson’s Moontower Pizza Bar must give 48 hours notice, though it takes only 30 minutes to bake. Cost for a one-topping 3,072-square-inch pie is \$299.95 plus tax. Cheese and toppings can weigh 10 pounds or more.



Batting for Texas

Recognized by Guinness World Records, the world’s largest bat colony resides in Bracken Cave near San Antonio. Home to up to 15 million Mexican free-tailed bats, it is off-limits to casual visitors. But with a \$45 membership to Bat Conservation International, the cave’s owner since 1991, enthusiasts can attend members-only nights at Bracken during the summer.

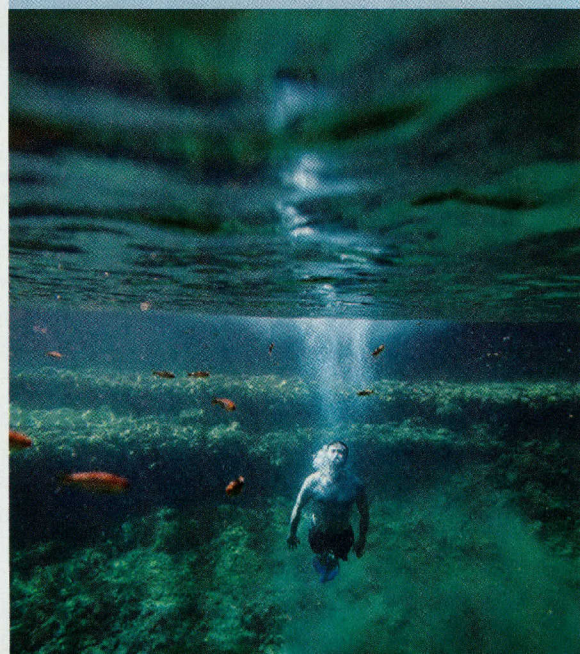
Austin sustains the world’s largest urban bat colony—an estimated 750,000 to 1.5 million of the creatures—under the Congress Avenue Bridge. No cost is required to view their evening exodus by standing on Lady Bird Lake’s shores.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Rockport’s *Big Blue Crab* statue, the world’s largest, fell victim to Hurricane Harvey, while another Texas “World’s Largest” designee, Balmorhea State Park’s spring-fed 1.3-acre pool, closed in 2018 after years of erosion.

Balmorhea’s recovery will cost an estimated \$2 million, complicated by the presence of endangered desert fish. Repairs commenced last August and should be complete in early 2019.

The resurrection of Rockport’s *Big Blue Crab* is less certain. Residents have organized fundraisers for its restoration, with an estimated \$85,000 or more needed.





Honorable Mentions

Paisano Pete, the popular 22-foot-long roadrunner that serves as Fort Stockton's mascot, was once the world's biggest roadrunner statue, only to be outdone by a 40-foot version in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Rocketbuster Boot Co. in El Paso retains the distinction of the world's largest pair of cowboy boots, though a cobbler in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, fashioned a single boot three feet taller from the hides of five cows. When Columbia, South Carolina, built a fire hydrant statue that was taller than Beaumont's by roughly 16 feet, Beaumont's supporters renamed the town's Dalmatian-spotted structure as the world's largest *working* hydrant. Guinness reports India has the world's largest horseshoe, about eight feet wide, but the Chinati Foundation's *Monument to the Last Horse* appears to exceed that. Longhorns, real or fabricated, strive for All-World designations: a rusty steel Longhorn statue in Throckmorton; a 12-foot-high fiberglass rendition of UT-Austin's mascot behind the University Co-Op; and an extensive collection of the breed's characteristic horns at a resort in Lajitas.



Photos: Rob Greebon (*Big Blue Crab*), Rolf Nussbaumer (bat), Jeff Wilson (Balmorhea), Will van Overbeek (*Paisano Pete*), Dave Shafer (skyscraper), provided by Six Flags (SkyScreamer)



BEST OF THE REST: THE WORLD'S LARGEST IN TEXAS

Swing Carousel

The Texas SkyScreamer at Six Flags over Texas in Arlington is nearly 403 feet high and pulls riders in a 124-foot circle at its widest extension.

Beer Can House

Adorned with 50,000 flattened beer cans by its now-deceased occupant, the Houston domicile has been preserved by a foundation dedicated to visionary art.

Killer Bee

Worried that actual killer bees would hurt the city's reputation, Hidalgo commissioned a \$20,000 20-foot-long statue instead.

Armadillo Sculpture

Welded by artist Marc Rankin, *Killer* is 48 feet long, visible to passers-by at Fall Creek Farms near Granbury.

Foam Finger

The Guinness record-holder at 1 foot thick and 20 feet tall, it stands in the Dell HQ lobby in Round Rock, celebrating being "No. 1" among privately held technology companies.

Garden Spade

Garden-ville, supplier of organic garden products, displays the 40-foot-high shovel at its San Antonio location.

Jute Bag

Fabricated at Woolsacks Inc., the bag is kept at the Fredericksburg Fairgrounds. "We had a lot of fun doing this with our 4-H kids," Woolsacks owner Timothy Koock says.

Water Coaster

Schlitterbahn Water Parks' Galveston location debuted the 82-foot-tall MASSIV Monster Blaster in 2016.

SMALL TALK

Bucking the everything's bigger trend, a phony 40-foot "skyscraper" in Wichita Falls strives for the opposite. Constructed in 1919, it was designed to attract unwitting investors with scaled images of the edifice. The swindle embarrassed residents, but travelers from around the nation now seek it out.

Texas also claims a connection with the world's tiniest roadworthy car, which was constructed by Austin Colson, a temporary resident of the Dallas suburb of Carrollton. The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles certified its size in 2012 at 2 feet, 1 inches high and just over 4 feet long. Colson took it back to his home in Phoenix, Arizona, but kept its Texas license plates, which read, "IM BIG." 🐾



How Beaumont's Keith Carter redefined the art of photography



**A Poet of the
(Extra)ordinary**

By Wes Ferguson

Keith Carter has a problem.

He's one of the world's great photographers, with a legendary sense for the mystery in the mundane. But right now he's at home in Beaumont, and his longtime assistant, Cathy Spence, is calling for help from a side door.

"She's out there putting textures on a dead snapping turtle, and it's not going too well," he says.

There's usually one critter or another to fuss with in Carter's corner of Southeast Texas, a place he likes so much because it's "flat, tangled, wet, deeply green, and full of really good storytellers." He's also a fan of possums and poetry. For his photographs, Carter prefers the arcane, the imperfect, the muddy, and what he calls the gumbo culture of Beaumont—a blend of "white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, Hispanic imagination, African American experience, Vietnamese industry, rednecks, and peckerwoods," all of them inspiring in their own way.

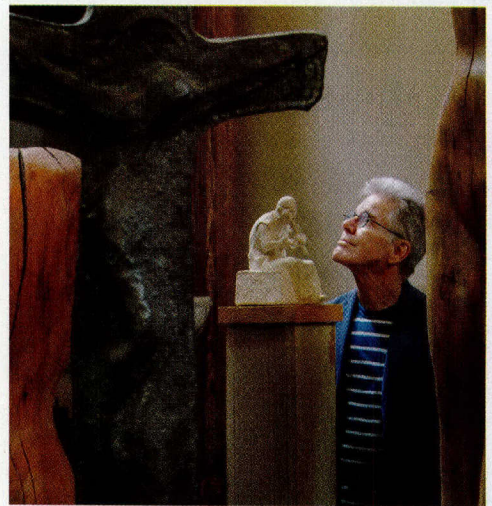
Carter excuses himself only to return a moment later, the fate of the snapping turtle as mysterious as so much of his work. He slides into an antique armchair bathed in window light as Mexican ballads play through his old, stone house in the Oaks Historic District, a Southern Gothic neighborhood of sprawling trees and creeping vines in this riverport city of nearly

OPENING SPREAD: Blind in his left eye, Keith Carter gazes with his right eye from behind a curtain in his backyard studio in Beaumont; THIS SPREAD, FROM LEFT: Carter in his living room and among sculptures made by his neighbor David Cargill.





“Keith is not just taking pictures. He’s making art, and that’s different. You look at his images, and they’re absolutely magical.”



120,000. Rising from the coastal marshes east of Houston, Beaumont is probably best known for its petrochemical industry and the Spindletop gusher that blew in Texas’ first oil boom in 1901—not so much the international art scene. But Carter has lived here since he was 5 years old. He travels widely and could live anywhere, but he always comes back. Now 70, a petite man with an urbane air and ironic wit, Carter is enjoying a new round of appreciation: A half-century retrospective of his most enduring images is making the gallery rounds, and this month he published his 12th book, *Keith Carter: Fifty Years*.

Carter maintains a fairly low profile in Beaumont. Although he has taught for two decades at Lamar University, where six of his images are on permanent display in an honors college building, his name drew blank or uncertain stares from a hotel concierge, a few restaurant servers, a bartender, and a karaoke singer when I visited last fall. But Carter is revered by photographers and art collectors worldwide. His work has been shown in more than 100 solo exhibitions in 13 countries, and it resides in permanent collections from the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. In 2009, he was awarded the Texas Medal of Arts.

“He’s just a true artist,” says writer and collector Bill Wittliff, a close friend. “Keith is not just taking pictures. He’s making art, and that’s different. You look at his images, and they’re absolutely magical.” Roy Flukinger, a curator emeritus at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, describes Carter as “one of the most original photographers in Texas to have come our way in the last couple

“Being in a small town, there were very few people to talk to. I lived to find somebody new, whose work made me think differently.”

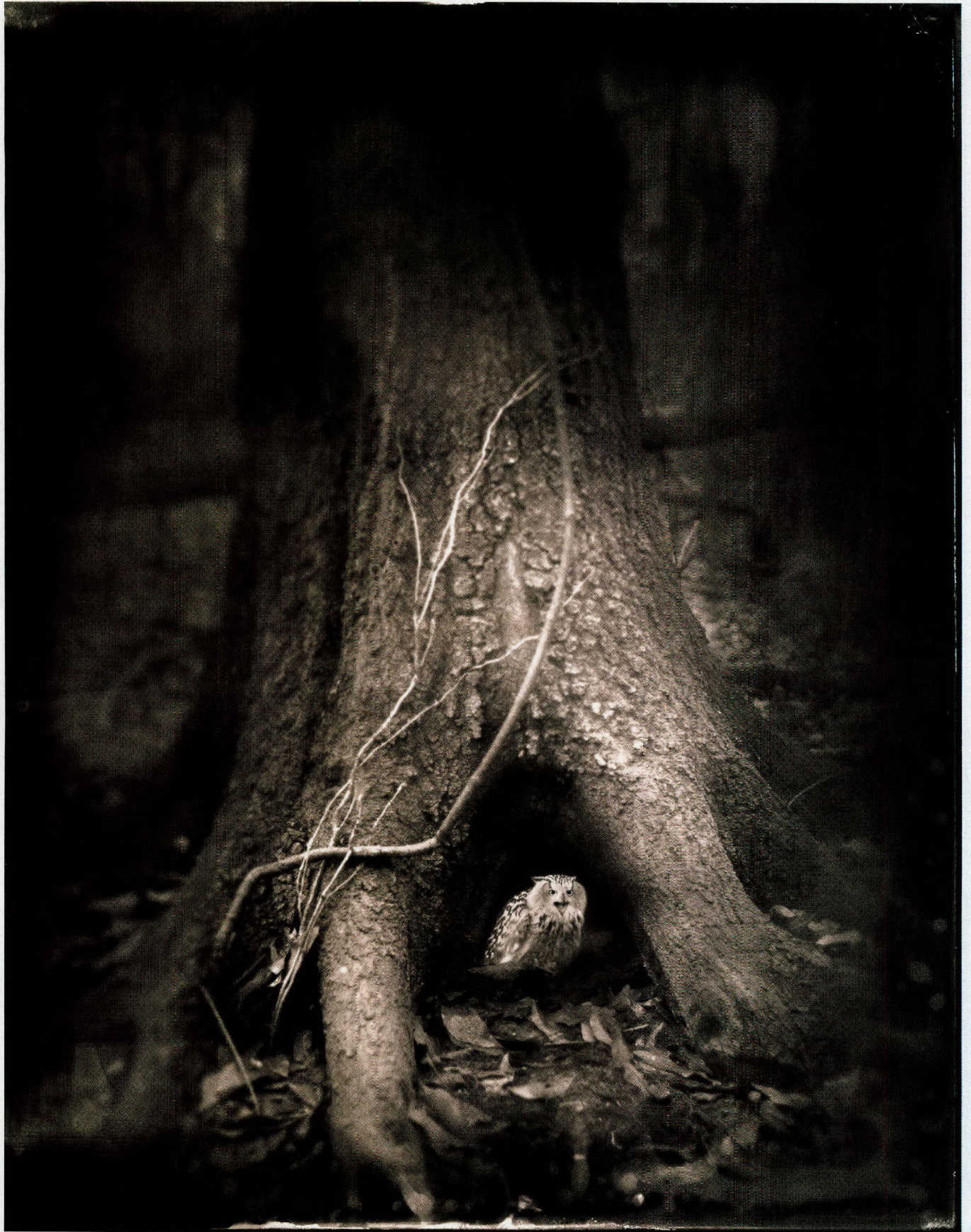
of generations.” And to O. Rufus Lovett, an East Texas photographer and educator, Carter is a pioneer. “Keith really paved the way for a lot of us to go about a more personal approach.”

Surprisingly, Carter says he did not shoot a single picture until he was 19, despite growing up around photography. His mom, Jane Carter, made a living as a portrait photographer in Beaumont after his father deserted their family when he was 6. “Things were unstable,” Carter recalls. “My mom really worked hard, and I would hang out at the studio, just because that’s where you went after school.” Carter never thought to take his own pictures. He was a “shallow, unfocused youth,” too busy surfing and playing guitar or reading. His life changed when he was about to graduate with a business degree from Lamar. He borrowed his mom’s camera one afternoon and snapped a few photos of men fishing from the banks of the Neches River, then paid to have the film developed at a drugstore. “Honey, you have a good sense of light,” Jane told him when she saw the results. “You have a good eye.”

With his mom’s encouragement, he found focus, and he borrowed photography books from his neighbor, a sculptor and mentor named David Cargill. “Being in a small town, there were very few people to talk to,” Carter



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Fireflies* (1992), one of Carter’s “favorite accidental images;” *Tree Roots* (2014), an owl at the base of a water tupelo; and *Jack Witt* (1987), who rehabilitated orphaned and wounded animals near Beaumont.



says. “Any time you saw a small exhibition, or you saw somebody’s work that was so much better than yours, it was just like an epiphany. I lived to find somebody new, whose work made me think differently.”

Carter assisted his mother for a couple of years. He married Patricia Staton, a well-read, no-nonsense widow who’d grown up in Trinity, and they opened a studio. Pat ran the business, and Carter became a workaday portrait photographer like his mom. But he always had an itch to do something more. Then he attended a public talk in Galveston by Horton Foote, the screenwriter for *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Tender Mercies*. Foote advised his audience to “belong to a place”—to make art from what you know. Carter bolted upright in his seat. “I was on fire,” he recalls. “I thought, I’m going to go home, and I’m going to photograph these few counties that nobody pays any attention to. I’m going to learn the folklore. I’m going to learn the animals. ... I’m going to photograph all of the music in the churches, and everything that’s in this rural culture because that’s what I know.”

Carter had always felt most comfortable in rural places. To celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary, he and Pat decided to travel to 100 small Texas towns with interesting or odd names, like Pep and Birthright. Carter made a photograph at each stop. The resulting book, *From Uncertain to Blue* in 1988, put him on the map. *The Los Angeles Times* declared him the “poet of the ordinary” for his quietly off-kilter images of children, animals, and timeless rural scenes. The “ordinary” description has followed Carter ever since.

Carter on Display

An exhibition of Keith Carter’s work, showing at A Gallery for Fine Photography in New Orleans through Jan. 31, moves to the PDNB Gallery in Dallas in March and will be at Lamar University’s Dishman Art Museum in Beaumont later in 2019.





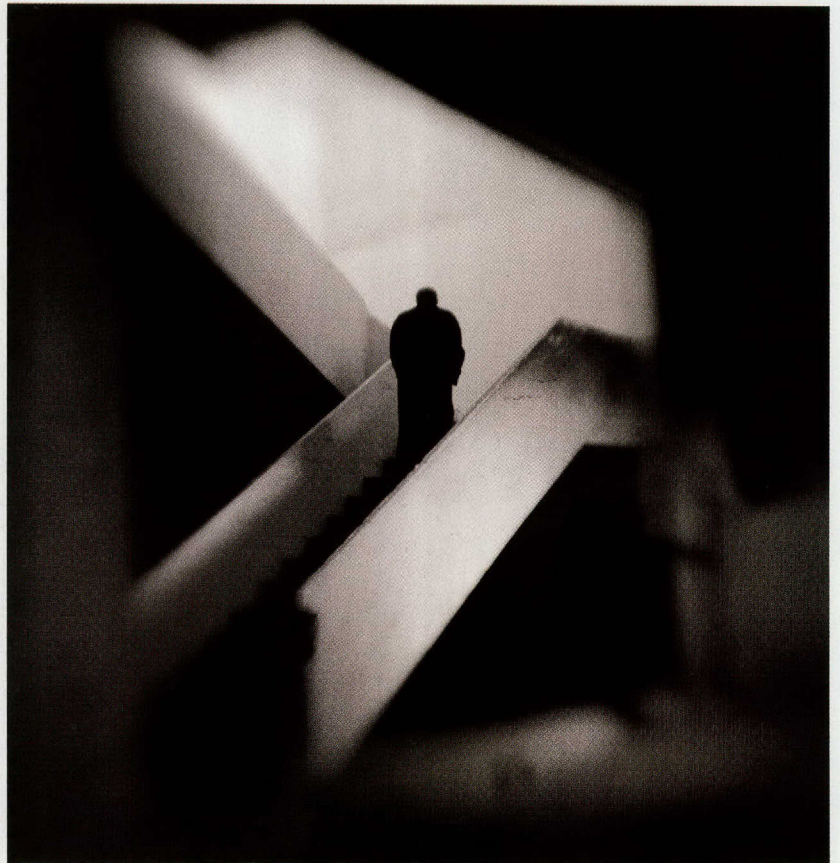
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Radio Flyer* (2000), at the “Boneyard,” a repository of grounded Air Force planes in Arizona; *Owl’s Nest* (1990), the tallest tree for miles outside Marfa; and *Levitation* (2001), photographed in Rome, Italy.

“I was trying hard to destroy what I loved, what I thought was precious, in the hopes of bringing forth something new.”

Commissioned work began to pour in. But Carter pivoted, the result of dumb luck: Around dusk one evening in 1992, he was trying to photograph two little boys catching fireflies in a jar. The boys wouldn't hold still long enough for him to make a decent picture, and when he developed the negatives, they were out of focus. Carter was depressed. Pat told him to print the picture anyway; then she told him to print it bigger. It became Carter's most famous image, *Fireflies*.

“It's the blur that made the whole thing work, that passage of time,” Carter says. “It was no longer specific in detail. It was about open-ended narratives. It changed my whole life, but I didn't see it at first. I thought it was a mistake. It was Pat who saw it.”

His work grew more personal, more haunting. Experimenting with vintage equipment and arcane printing processes, he was no longer trying to document the real world, as a traditional photographer would. Yes, he was using a camera, and these were certainly photographs. But the resulting images go deeper. They're memories. They're dreams. “Before that, I was making literal, specific photographs of vernacular culture and scenes,” he says. “After that, I began to look for subtle, mysterious moments, when the world was perfectly



FROM TOP: *Stairway* (2005), in an industrial area near Venice, Italy; and *Paradise* (1985), two brothers playing on their porch in Paradise, a tiny town northwest of Fort Worth.

Keith Carter's Beaumont

LUNCH

Carter swears by the chicken salad at Katharine and Company, a lunch spot in an ornate former drugstore that anchors the historic, Spanish-style Mildred Building. Standout specials include the corn-meal-crusted redfish topped with crawfish etouffee. 1495 Calder Ave. 409-833-9919; katharineandcompany.com

SEE AND DO

Beaumont preserves its history in museums such as at the opulent, 1906-era McFaddin-Ward House (below) and the Fire Museum of Texas, which boasts the world's largest functioning fire hydrant (painted white with black spots to resemble the world's largest Dalmatian). Along Hill-ebbrandt Bayou just off Interstate 10, the Cattail Marsh Scenic Wetlands is 900 acres of wetlands, woodlands, levee trails, and bayou on the migratory flightpaths for a number of feathered species. "There's lots of alligators and birds," Carter says, not to mention a 520-foot boardwalk and an elevated education center that features a covered wraparound porch for bird viewing across the marsh.

DINNER

Laid-back Tia Juanita's Fish Camp cleverly mixes up Cajun and Tex-Mex dishes, drawing big local crowds. The blackened crab nachos are a hit, as are the blackened scallops and jumbo shrimp heaped onto cheesy enchiladas. More of a traditionalist? Opt for po'boys, fried seafood baskets, or fish tacos. 5555 Calder Ave. 409-434-4532

NIGHTLIFE

The Logon Cafe has mostly outlived its days as an internet cafe and morphed into more of a "funky restaurant-bar-coffee shop," Carter says, with live music and karaoke, a checkerboard dance floor, games, lots of art, and a sign out front touting mediocre service and good times—a promise it keeps. 3805 Calder Ave. 409-833-6950; logoncafe.net



Photo: O. Rufus Lovett

natural and vivid, and at the same time a little mysterious. In my mind, it gave the viewer much more credit for intelligence, to let them see what they wanted to."

In recent years, photography has been a constant through a series of difficult transitions in Carter's life. He photographed his mother as her mind succumbed to Alzheimer's. About a decade ago, a form of melanoma blinded him in his non-dominant left eye. He responded with a series of "dirty pictures" doused in chemicals to represent his loss. "I was trying hard to destroy what I loved, what I thought was precious, in the hopes of bringing forth something new," he says. And when Pat became ill from cancer, he made a progression of portraits that transfix the viewer with her intelligent, unwavering gaze. She died in 2014 at the age of 82.

As always, he kept making art, applying lessons he'd learned from reading Foote years earlier: "It made me understand how important it was to love other people, and how sometimes, things just fell apart and you couldn't put them back together. But you kept going."

Carter likes to visit the marshes on the south side of Beaumont. There's a city wastewater plant nearby. When treated effluent is released from the plant, it passes through a succession of eight "cells," known collectively as the Cattail Marsh Scenic Wetlands, each cleansing the water a little more. He rides his bicycle or walks the trails that circle the reclamation area. It doesn't always smell pristine, but Carter has never felt comfortable with perfection. Perfection is boring.

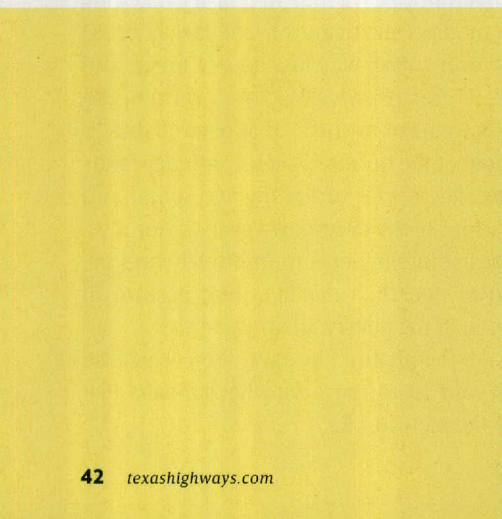
He strolls onto a wooden boardwalk extending onto the marsh, past wood ducks and other waterfowl. An alligator noses across the surface toward an egret, pounces, and misses. Beyond the blue water, the land is flat, almost featureless. "Before we got whacked by these monster hurricanes in the last 15 or 20 years, everything was just deeply green and wooded," Carter says. "We lost a third of the trees in Rita. For my taste, that worked fine."

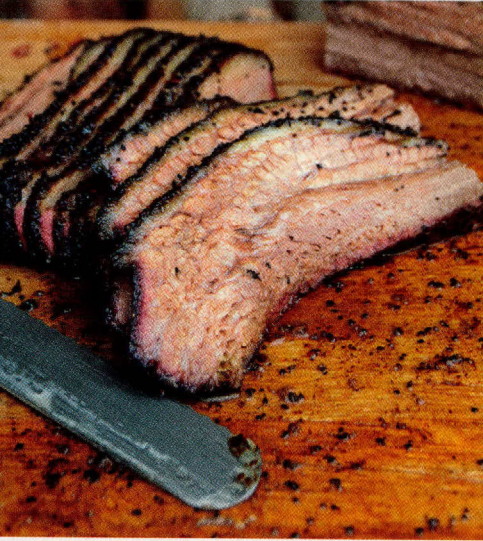
A poet of the ordinary seeks ordinary landscapes. The secret to finding the subtle and mysterious in the everyday world, Carter says, is to resist intelligence, to intuitively and instinctively feel the value in a small gesture, in the light, in the poetry all around us.

"Make the picture," he says. "You've got the rest of your life to figure out what it means. Just make the picture." ■



12 TRIPS





Fresh new
travel ideas
for a fresh
new year



FOR 2019

A new year and an empty calendar.

Does inspiration know any finer muse? When it comes to travel, the arrival of January fuels daydreams of adventures and far-flung exploration—at least it does in the halls of a travel magazine. Here we explore 12 new and evolving travel opportunities across Texas, everything from cold springs to hot fiddling and craft beer to modern art. And with the exception of two—McAllen's MXLAN festival in July and the Festival of Texas Fiddling in December—these ideas aren't tied to a specific date, making them worthy of a trip any time of year. Start marking up that calendar now.



1



Cloud Column, MFAH

The Houston Museum District Evolves

Southwest downtown Houston near the Texas Medical Center.
mfah.org; menil.org; hmh.org; houguse.org

With 19 museums, the Houston Museum District is in a perpetual state of growth and evolution, offering something new for lovers of art and culture. Along those lines, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston recently opened its eye-catching new Glassell School of Art, fronted by a plaza with a splash-pad fountain and *Cloud Column*, a sculpture by internationally acclaimed artist Anish Kapoor. This elliptical stainless-steel work stands about 30 feet tall and attracts selfie-seekers with its shiny, reflective surface.

About 1.5 miles away, the Menil Collection reopened in the fall after closing for a renovation that included gallery spaces showcasing a collection ranging from ancient artifacts to contemporary art. The neighboring Menil Drawing Institute, which opened its doors in November, is the first of its kind in the nation—devoted exclusively to modern and contemporary drawings (in pencil or ink, but also in paint). The 30,146-square-foot building offers a serene space for viewing key examples from the Menil's collection, as well as special traveling exhibitions.

And coming this summer, Holocaust Museum Houston will more than double in size with a \$33.8 million expansion. The enlarged building will cover 57,000 square feet and serve as a place to elevate awareness of the past and promote social justice in the present.—*Heather Brand*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** Year-round

2

A West Texas Gem Reopens

16453 Park Road 3, Fort Davis.
432-426-3254; tpwd.texas.gov

During Indian Lodge's 10-month closure, Davis Mountains State Park officials fielded daily calls from visitors clamoring to return to this perennial West Texas favorite. The wait ended last summer when the lodge reopened with exterior plaster and roof repairs, a new HVAC system, and a fresh coat of paint. But that doesn't mean it's any easier to get a room at the spiffed-up Civilian Conservation Corp.-built adobe treasure: Park officials recommend booking nine to 11 months in advance. Along with hiking in the state park, grabbing a burger at the Black Bear Restaurant, and cooling off in the scenic on-site pool, guests can venture over to the nearby McDonald Observatory to check out the exhibit on the Hobby-Eberly Telescope in the George T. Abell Gallery.—*Emily Roberts Stone*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** June–August for the temperate summer climate

3

FIDDLE MANIA

6720 US 281, Blanco. 512-441-9255;
thefestivaloftexasfiddling.com

Small, portable, and adaptable, the fiddle plays a central role in a huge variety of musical styles—and Texas is a prime case study in the instrument's versatility. The Festival of Texas Fiddling, which takes place on the first weekend of December in Blanco's historic Twin Sisters Dance Hall, displays that diversity with a lineup of performers, workshops, and dancing. "Pretty much anything that's fiddle-related in Texas—that's what we're showcasing," says Dan Margolies, the festival's artistic director. That means fiddlers sawing popular styles like old-time, country, Western swing, and Cajun, but also lesser known fiddle styles such as Texas Polish, blues, Tejano, Creole, and Son Huasteco. Entering its fifth year in 2019, the festival aims to keep these traditions alive by bringing together fiddlers from all corners of Texas. You won't find this anywhere else.—*Matt Joyce*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** The festival takes place the first weekend of December





Balmorhea's New Beginnings

9207 State Highway 17, Toyahvale.
432-375-2370; tpwd.texas.gov

Expect big changes at Balmorhea State Park in West Texas, which will reopen its swimming pool this winter after major repairs and unveil a revamped motor court and upgraded campground this spring.

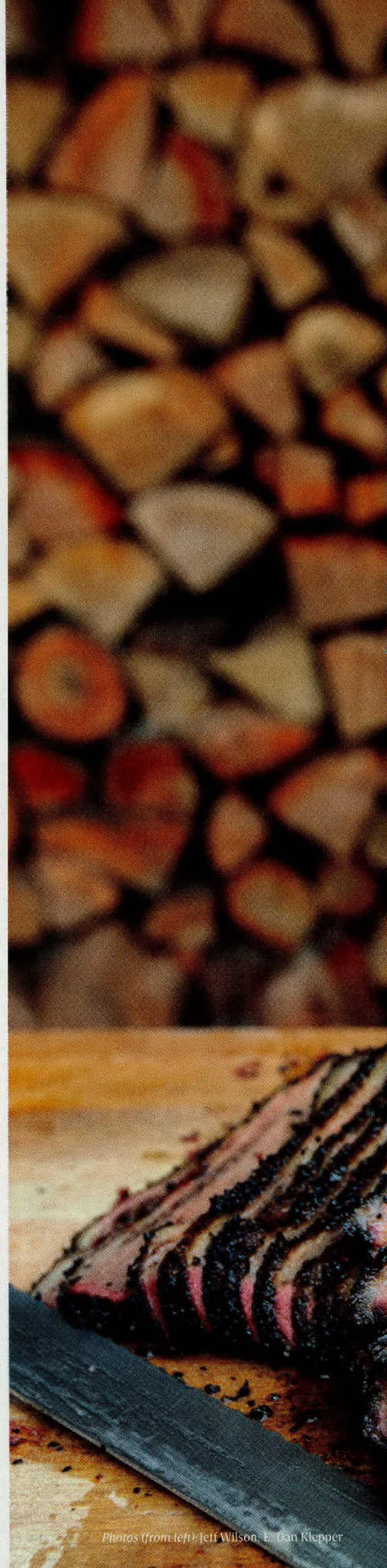
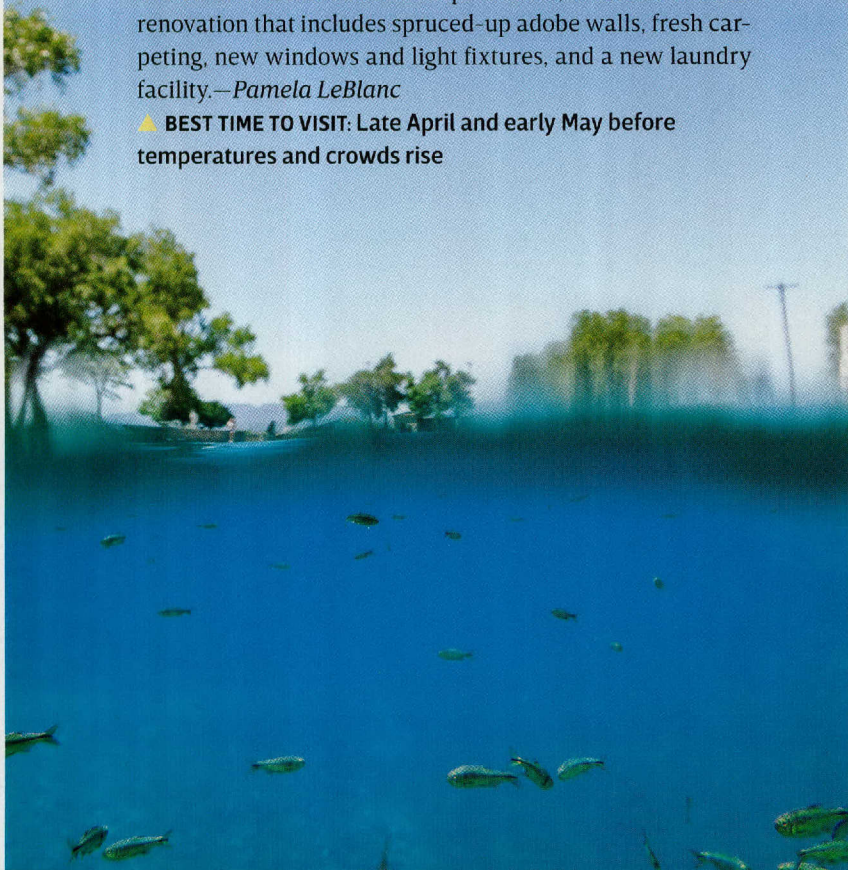
Renovations of the lodging facilities had already started when, in May 2018, crews discovered an eroding wall near the high dive in the pool. Officials shut down the swimming hole, dry-docking visitors looking for a respite from the heat for the entire summer.

The good news? Pool repairs started in September and should be wrapped up in time for you to take a flying leap into the crisp, fish-filled water by the time temperatures heat up again.

Repair crews built a cofferdam around the affected area so they could keep water in the pool while they did their work, and went to lengths to protect the endemic Comanche Springs pupfish and rare Pecos gambusia.

As for the campground, the park is installing new electric, water, and cable services, plus a new restroom facility. You'll notice a more retro look at the 18 motel rooms, completed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1938, with a \$7 million renovation that includes spruced-up adobe walls, fresh carpeting, new windows and light fixtures, and a new laundry facility.—*Pamela LeBlanc*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** Late April and early May before temperatures and crowds rise



Photos (from left): Jeff Wilson, E. Dan Klepper



5

BREW & CUE AT THE GAGE

The Brick Vault Brewery and Barbecue, 102 NW First St. (US 90) in Marathon, is open Thu–Sun. 432-386-7538 or 432-386-4205; facebook.com/brickvaultbrewery

There's always something new in the works at the Gage Hotel, where low-key luxury meets scenic solitude on the high desert of West Texas. Located in the ranching town of Marathon—a 330-mile drive west of San Antonio and 250 miles southeast of El Paso—the Gage tosses a wide lasso to round up guests seeking a remote getaway or a pampered rest stop near the border of Big Bend National Park.

In 2018, the Gage opened the Brick Vault Brewery and Barbecue, an eatery set in a renovated gas station serving meats such as Central Texas-style smoked brisket and homemade sausage, and savory cabrito braised in house-brewed pecan porter. Head brewer Brodie Pierce's on-site nanobrewery produces a rotating selection of six beers, including a refreshing cream ale, wheat beer, and various seasonals.

The Brick Vault joins the Gage's V6 Coffee Bar, a 2-year-old café that slings robust java drinks to accompany tasty breakfasts and lunches. Gage Hotel General Manager Carol Peterson says the new offerings are meant to complement the high-end 12 Gage Restaurant and cozy White Buffalo Bar and make remote Marathon all the more palatable for city folks curious about the West Texas heritage embodied in the 1927 hotel.

This year—when the Gage celebrates its 92nd anniversary with an August party—watch for the pending restoration of the local First Methodist Church as a wedding venue along with an expansion of the hotel's spa and gym. In the summer, the Grilling at the Gage Culinary Series (June through August) featuring high-profile Texas chefs and the Marathon Songwriters Festival (Aug. 16–17) are scheduled in part to beckon visitors who may otherwise be unaware of the town's temperate summer clime.—M.J.

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** February to May and July to October, as well as the holidays

6

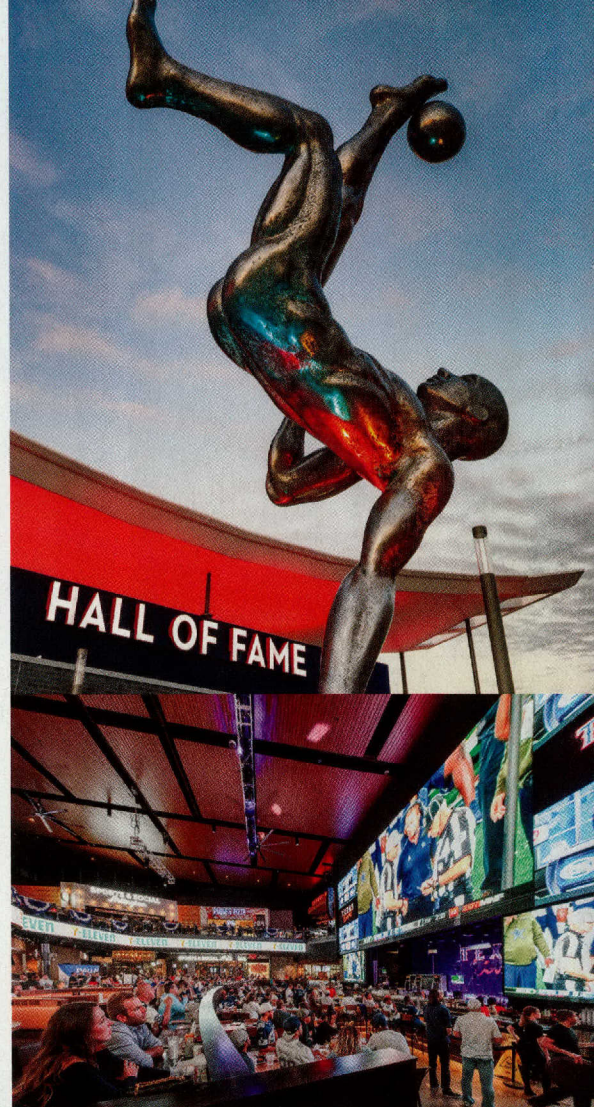
A Double-Dip for Sports Fans in DFW

nationalsoccerhof.com; texas-live.com

Sports-crazy Frisco has added another player to its roster of athletic attractions with the opening last November of the new National Soccer Hall of Fame. Located at Toyota Stadium, home of FC Dallas, the Hall of Fame pays tribute to the country's soccer greats and houses more than 400 artifacts, including the ball Brandi Chastain famously used to score the winning penalty kick in the championship of the 1999 Women's World Cup. Upon entry, visitors can choose whether to be photographed and are given the chance to record their favorite teams using a touch screen. The interactive exhibits take over from there, using facial recognition to produce individualized portrayals of visitors in exhibits about shooting goals and the like.

About 30 miles southwest in Arlington, the new Texas Live! entertainment complex welcomes fans to a sports-bar paradise of walls covered in huge TVs and outsized action photos of legends like Dallas Cowboy Troy Aikman and Texas Ranger Pudge Rodriguez. Both Aikman and Rodriguez have namesake restaurants in the \$250 million, family-friendly facility, which is located between the Cowboys' AT&T Stadium and the Rangers' Globe Life Park. Take a food tour of the complex's eight restaurants, including Sports & Social, where fans can play Skee-Ball, table tennis, and table shuffleboard. Outside, try your hand at the huge foosball table, which uses steering wheels for levers and a ball the size of a cantaloupe.—*John Lumpkin*

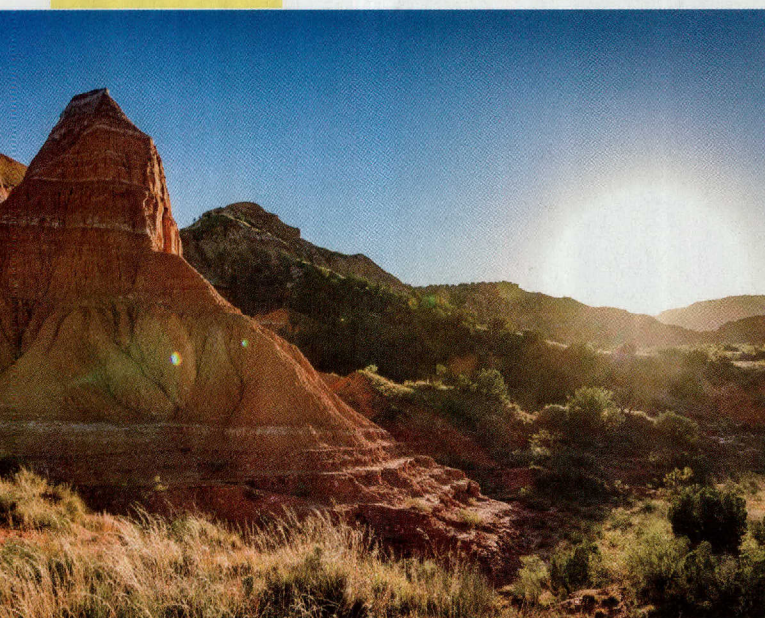
▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** Before kickoff or first pitch



7

New West Luxury on the Canyon Rim

806-557-8998; dovesrestcabins.com



When the owners of Doves Rest Resorts began building cabins on the west rim of Palo Duro Canyon in 2015, they found hundreds of arrowheads and flint tools littering the pale-brown dirt. Their discoveries align with historical accounts of this land as a Comanche buffalo butchering ground some 150 years ago. It's also where legendary rancher Charles Goodnight entered the canyon on cattle drives to Colorado.

The solitude of the 17-acre property—offering unparalleled views of Palo Duro Canyon State Park—makes it easy for visitors renting one of the retreat's nine cabins to feel like they've stepped back in time. But the interiors of the Texas Panhandle-chic abodes are decidedly modern and luxurious. Rates range from \$225 to \$675 for cabins sleeping four to seven guests and offer amenities including fully equipped kitchens, covered patio and grill, and complimentary Champagne. In March, the owners will open an outdoor banquet facility perched on a 600-foot cliff, and future plans call for a meeting and event center, pool and spa, and additional cabins.

Of course the best feature of Doves Rest is its proximity to the country's second-largest canyon, a 25,000-acre park for hiking, horseback riding, geocaching, bird watching, and ziplining.—*E.R.S.*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** April and October, when high temperatures average about 77 degrees.



S

LIVING HISTORY IN MARSHALL

707 N. Washington Ave.
903-927-1400; theginocchio.com

Downtown Marshall recently welcomed a blast from the past with the opening of The Ginocchio restaurant and bar.

Italian-born Charles Ginocchio built his eponymous hotel in 1896 to provide meals and rooms for railroad passengers. Eventually falling into disuse, the building found a savior in entrepreneurs Alan Loudermilk and Paresh Patel, whose two-and-a-half-year restoration project culminated with the opening of The Ginocchio in late 2017.

Admire the building's distinctive curly pine woodwork and enjoy Chef Reynaldo Jandre's renowned baked oysters and other sophisticated fare. While downtown, don't miss the 1912 Texas & Pacific Railway Depot, the 1901 Historic Harrison County Courthouse, and the colorful MADI Art Wall on the Wood Building.—*M.J.*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** On Second Saturdays from March to November, downtown hosts a farmers market, classic car show, vendors, and concerts. During the holidays, downtown and the courthouse twinkle with millions of lights during the annual Wonderland of Lights.

9

Meet at the Beach

nps.gov/pais; visitcorpuschristix.org;
mustangislandtexas.org; sanjoseislandtexas.org

Explore five landmark beaches on Texas' Coastal Bend, where resilient locals are eager to show off their glittering stretches of sand and surf, post-Hurricane Harvey.

At Padre Island National Seashore, Malaquite Beach offers a pavilion, covered picnic areas, and a broad expanse of kid-friendly sand that's off-limits to vehicles. In Corpus Christi, near Padre's northern tip, check out the 14-foot-high, mile-long paved public seawall for walking, biking, or gazing at the endless waves lapping on the Whitecap and South Packery Channel beaches.

To many, the best surfside experiences on Mustang Island's 18 miles of uninterrupted sand are south of Port Aransas off SH 361 or at condos like Port Royal Ocean Resort and Cinnamon Shore, which have reopened post-Harvey and offer boardwalks to traverse the island's dunes.

Harvey made its first landfall nearby at San José Island—aka St. Jo—a privately owned island with public beaches that can be reached by ferry from Port Aransas. Left to their own devices, St. Jo's shifting sands have stabilized in the aftermath of the storm. Take sunscreen, water, food, beach towels, and a floppy hat to discover its reputation as "Texas. Undisturbed."—J.L.

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** Summer vacation; or October and November, when wildflowers are at their peak, the fishing is good, and crowds are minimal



10

McAllen launches MXLAN

McAllen Convention Center, 700 Convention
Center Blvd. 956-682-2871; mxlan.com

This summer, McAllen inaugurates a five-day festival celebrating the Texas-Mexico border as a place where cultures meet and new traditions begin. The festival's name, MXLAN, combines the abbreviation for Mexico and Aztlán, the mythical birthplace of the Aztecs. Participants in the family-friendly event held July 24-28 can experience daily street parades with 150 traditional *La Guelaguetza* dancers from Oaxaca, Mexico; spark-filled, low-rise fireworks shows; live music and dance; an artisan market; and a tequila, mezcal, and *Catrin* festival. A food tour will include a cooking demonstration by renowned Zapotec chef Abigail Mendoza, along with contemporary variations on classic Mexican dishes by chefs from the Rio Grande Valley's fast-rising culinary scene.—Daniel Blue Tyx

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** The festival launches July 24-28

Photos (clockwise from top left): Larry Ditto, Dave Shafer, Eric W. Pohl, courtesy MXLAN

11

Bayou Blessings in Orange

2111 W. Park Ave. 409-670-9113; shangrilagardens.org

Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center's setting on Adams Bayou imbues the 252 acres of wilderness—including 25 acres of ponds and manicured gardens—with a rustic peacefulness in the midst of urban Orange. But the riparian location also comes with risks, as when Hurricane Harvey pushed the bayou 12 feet above flood stage and completely submerged the gardens.

In September, following a year of repair work, Shangri La Gardens reopened just in time for school field trips and community programs designed to foster appreciation and understanding for the natural world.

Director Rick Lewandowski says the flood necessitated infrastructure fixes, but visitors won't notice any changes to the gardens themselves. The plants fared amazingly well, largely because it was a freshwater flood and not a saltwater storm surge.

The massive "survivor tree," an ancient pond cypress featured on the garden's Outpost Tour, weathered the flood just fine. "Of course, living here for almost 1,300 years, it has been able to deal with the climate and variations," Lewandowski notes.—*Rose L. Thayer*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** During the spring bloom in March and April



12

A Texas-size Biergarten for Fredericksburg

6120 US 290. 830-304-2337; altstadtbeer.com

Looking like a grand baron's castle plucked right out of Bavaria, Altstadt Brewery raises the bar for Luber-German experiences around Fredericksburg—and that's saying something. The brewery opened last fall about 6 miles east of downtown, offering a beer destination that's just as much about good food, live music, and true biergarten revelry. Along with tours, the brewery boasts a dozen signature brews—including the popular kolsch, schwarzbier, German IPA, and hefeweizen—and chef-driven dishes that go beyond common pub grub, such as pork tenderloin in chimichurri sauce. Order a flight of beers to sample. It's too hard to choose just one.—*June Naylor*

▲ **BEST TIME TO VISIT:** October during Hill Country Oktoberfest celebrations 🍻





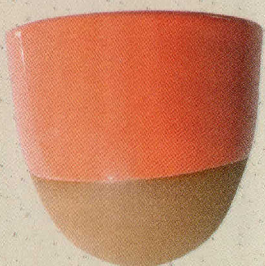
MEET OUR MAKERS

Rhyno Clayworks



POTTER RYAN LUCIER and graphic designer Melanie Pavao joined forces to form Rhyno Clayworks in Austin in 2011. Together, they update classic ceramic forms with contemporary surface treatments, sometimes glazing only part of a vessel while leaving other parts exposed. They offer an array of stoneware for home and garden, including birdhouses and planters, crocks and tumblers—and even a set of mugs printed with line-drawings of the heroes of the Texas Revolution. “I think I finally just reached a point where I knew I wanted more freedom and that I needed to be designing and creating as a full-time potter,” he says. “I was passionate about what I was doing. The rest I would figure out along the way.”

Shop more Rhyno Clayworks products at shop.texashighways.com



Ceramic Wall Planter, \$36.00
Item #37782

PLATES



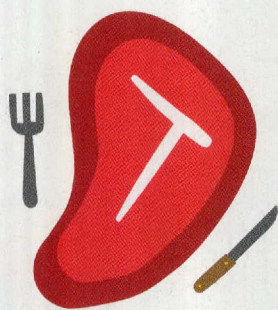
EAT YOUR WAY
THROUGH the state while picking up cash and prizes, or simply watch others take part in these outsize eating challenges.

Man vs. Food

The biggest eating challenges in Texas

By Laurel Miller

Texans are never ones to back down from a challenge—even so, these six food competitions from across the state are pretty daunting. From 4.5-pound steaks to 20-scoop sundaes, Texas has enough gut-busting contests to keep competitive eaters and curious, hungry folks satisfied—or potentially sent into a food coma. Consider the following restaurants and festivals worthy of a detour the next time you're feeling a bit peckish.



Free 72-Ounce Steak,
The Big Texan Steak Ranch, Amarillo

Founder RJ “Bob” Lee opened this iconic restaurant in 1960 and launched the infamous “Free 72-Ounce Steak” challenge the same year. The idea came from his father, a Platte City, Missouri, restaurant manager who offered a fried chicken competition at Red Crown Tavern to returning World War II veterans as a way of drawing business. At the Big Texan, which is run by RJ’s sons, Bobby and Danny Lee, competitors pay \$72 for a shot at glory, which means eating an entire steak, plus a shrimp cocktail, baked potato, salad, and a buttered roll in under one hour. Competitive eater Molly Schuyler is the current champ: In 2015 she devoured three steaks plus all the sides in just 20 minutes. 7701 Interstate 40 East. 806-372-6000; bigtexan.com

Chow champs: According to Bobby Lee, on average there are “3.5 daily attempts. Generally, one in six men and one in two women finish.”

The prize: A refund of \$72, plus a T-shirt and certificate of achievement

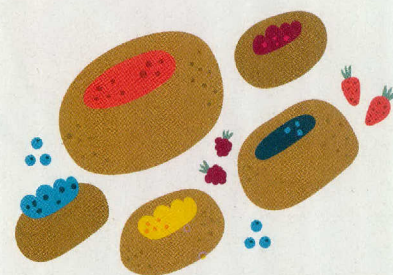


World Tamale Eating Championship,
Lewisville

A 54-year celebration of “the history and spirit of the West,” Western Days Festival happens every September and includes the only tamale-eating competition sanctioned by Major League Eating (MLE), the organization behind many North American televised food challenges. Contestants have 10 minutes to eat as many husked, 2.5-ounce pork tamales as possible. Current champion Darron Breden from Orange, Virginia, set a new world record in 2018 by consuming 70 tamales. *Old Town Lewisville.* 972-219-5082; cityoflewisville.com

Chow champs: Famed competitive eater and reigning Nathan’s Famous International Hot Dog Eating Contest winner Joey Chestnut set the record for the 12-minute competition by eating 102 tamales back in 2012. (The MLE lowered the time limit to 10 minutes in 2018.) He retained his title through 2014.

The prize: First place wins \$1,500; second place wins \$1,000



Westfest Kolache Eating Contest,
West

Westfest pays homage to Texas’ Czech heritage and culture every Labor Day weekend with dancing, singing, and *taroky* card game tournaments. Naturally, kolaches play a starring role, with an eating competition dedicated to the fruit-filled pastries, which are provided by Gerik’s Ole Czech Bakery. The four divisions—Men’s, Women’s, Boys’, and Girls’—have four-minute trials (three-minute trials for Boys’ and Girls’) in which the competitors must consume as many whopping half-pound kolaches as possible; the Velky Vitez (“Big Winner”) is an eight-minute event. *Westfest Festival Grounds.* 254-826-5058; westfest.com

Chow champs: In 2018, Kelsey Meisenholder of Austin downed 4.5 kolaches in four minutes, and Velky Vitez Brent Ricord of Fort Worth ate 13 kolaches in eight minutes.

The prize: A trophy and other prizes; Velky Vitez winners also receive a dozen kolaches per week for one year from Gerik’s



**The Mt. Hypnotic Challenge,
Hypnotic Emporium, Dallas**

Even lactose lovers are apprehensive about consuming 20 scoops of ice cream in 15 minutes. The challenge came about after the owner of this ice cream joint and candy shop discovered they could fit everything on the menu in an over-size margarita glass. The Mt. Hypnotic includes a scoop of every flavor—including perennial favorites like Jack-and-Coke and honey-and-lavender-flavored Bee’s Knees—and is garnished with a candy bar, a cookie, hot fudge, caramel, whipped cream, peanuts, and a doughnut. “Our advice to challengers is, be sure you’re not susceptible to brain freezes,” manager Chris Hobbs says. Duly noted. 9005 Garland Road. 214-354-3414; hypnoticemporium.com

Chow champs: About one out of five attempts succeed.
The prize: A refund on the \$38 tab



**The World’s Largest Rattlesnake Roundup,
Sweetwater**

This event attracts “rattlesnake hunters” to the Rolling Plains for a hunt that harvests an average of 5,000 snakes every March. Though the roundup is controversial among animal advocates, the Sweetwater Jaycees has organized it since 1958 at the behest of

local farmers, ranchers, and town doctors. Up to 30,000 onlookers also show up, making this Rattlesnake Roundup the world’s largest. Organizers say the principal goal is population control, but they also record the snakes’ stats for research purposes. The contest rules are simple: Eat as much deep-fried *crotalus* as possible in two minutes. Nolan County Coliseum, 220 Coliseum Drive. rattlesnakeroundup.net

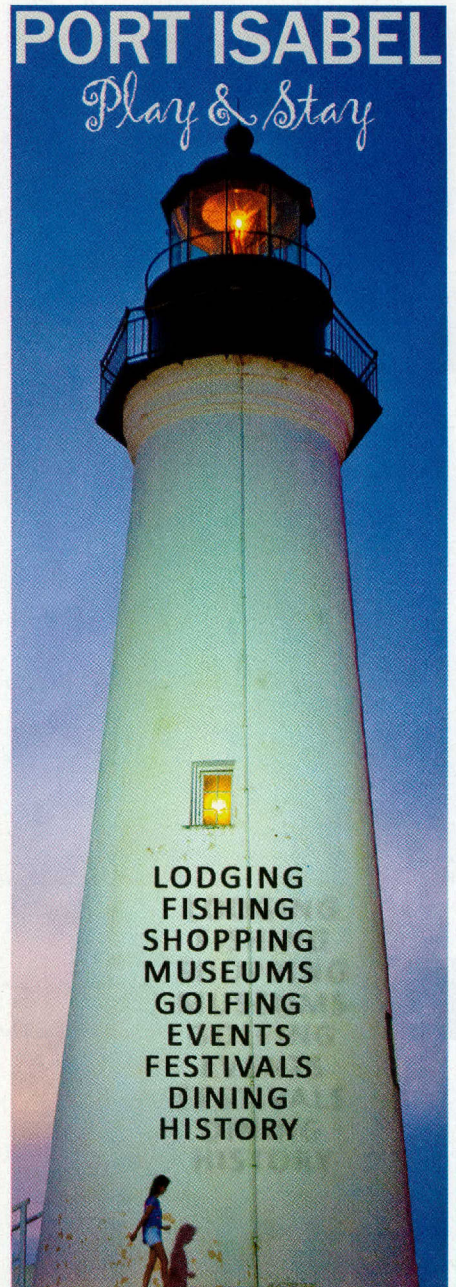
Chow champs: The winning quantity varies every year, but longtime observers say the contestants don’t actually eat more than a few ounces of snake meat because they spend most of their time picking out the bones.
The prize: A trophy



**The Almighty Chacho’s Taco,
Chacho’s Tacos, Corpus Christi**

At this family-owned eatery and drive-thru, 27 hungry folks have successfully scarfed down a 3.5-pound taco in 10 minutes since the challenge’s inception in 2001. For the Almighty, Chacho’s packs a 14-inch housemade flour tortilla with carne guisada, egg, potatoes, bacon, beans, and cheese. “My sons, Arnulfo Jr. and Mike, came up with the idea for the challenge when we opened, and now we have people coming from all over the world,” owner Mary Gutierrez says. “We chose ‘the Almighty’ because we wanted a version that was different from every other taco in Texas.” 3700 Ayers St. 361-888-7378

Chow champs: 27
The prize: A T-shirt, a spot in the eatery’s Hall of Fame, and a \$10 refund



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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: William Garner in front of his San Antonio restaurant; Mr. and Mrs. G's serves soul food, cafeteria-style.

Heart and Soul

Even after losing its matriarch, Mr. & Mrs. G's in San Antonio continues to serve its community

By Cary Clack

Wearing a red apron and blue “Retired Air Force” cap, William Garner walks out of the kitchen of Mr. & Mrs. G’s Home Cooking and Pastries in San Antonio. It’s the lunch rush, and the phone is ringing as the 81-year-old takes his usual seat behind the cashier. “Hello,” he answers. “Pot roast? Yes, we do.”

Hanging up, Garner notices a young girl waiting in line with her mother. He gives her two pieces of candy then shakes hands with a regular customer who introduces him to an out-of-town visitor proclaiming his love for the soul food restaurant—all evidence of the warm glow of kinship that has developed over three decades in business in the city’s East Side neighborhood.

“Even if you’re eating alone, it feels like home,” says Frank Dunn, a businessman who’s been a regular customer for 28 years. “It’s like family.”

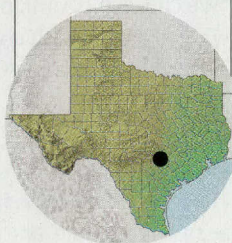
Garner and his wife, Addie, who passed away in September

2017 at 82, had been welcoming the community to their namesake eatery—and to their family—since they opened the place in 1990. In a city where the population is just over 7 percent African American, they established one of the finest soul food restaurants in the country, even landing on *USA Today*’s “10 Great Places for Soul Food” list in 2013.

“Soul food is the common term for black cooking, something like chitlins or pigs’ feet based on home-style Southern cooking,” Garner explains in the raspy cadence of a preacher expounding on scripture. “It’s home cooking just like you go home to get—black-eyed peas, ham hocks, a home-cooked meal. Soul food came from when mama, grandma, and auntie gave it their all, with heart. It was prepared soulfully. You know what I’m saying?”

Mr. and Mrs. G’s dishes have become legendary: fried chicken, catfish, pork chops, ham hocks, ribs, smothered steaks, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, lima beans, green beans, black-eyed peas, cakes, pies, banana pudding, peach cobbler, and more.

MR. & MRS. G'S HOME COOKING AND PASTRIES
2222 S. W.W. White Road, San Antonio, 210-359-0002
Open Mon-Fri, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.



The restaurant is Garner's homage to his past and his ancestors, but it's also his love letter to the city of San Antonio. An experience he had as a 20-year-old trainee at Lackland Air Force Base in 1958 gave him perspective on the healing potential of kindness and a home-cooked meal.

Garner had taken a bus with six other trainees—three white and three black—in search of something to do downtown. The young men walked across the railroad tracks into the city's historically black East Side, past the cemeteries. They stopped at a hamburger place where the white owner said that only the three white airmen could enter. They refused to go in without their friends, so they all continued down the street. Soon, a familiar aroma brought Garner back to his hometown of Hartselle, Alabama.

"I thought somebody was cooking Sunday dinner," he says. "It smelled like somebody's good home cooking."

It came from a small restaurant where the owner, a black man, welcomed the group, who dined on fried chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, french fries, corn bread, and colas.

"I wish there was a way for me to repay this to the city," Garner recalls thinking after the meal. "He allowed us to eat there and was so cordial."

Garner served in the Air Force for 20 years and worked at Lackland's commissary for 12 more. He married Addie

in 1986, and it was her idea to open the restaurant. As local renown grew into national recognition, Addie became the public face, flashing her smile from table to table, greeting customers, and being interviewed on TV and in newspapers. For many years, Garner cooked everything using his own recipes, and still does for special dishes. These days, he oversees the kitchen and can also be found sitting in an office chair by the cashier and at the end of the serving line, passing out candy to children.

"It was the twoness of the one," Garner says, poetically, of their relationship.

"They reflected off each other," agrees Toni Moorhouse, a former city councilwoman and a neighbor of the Garners.

When Addie died, the response was widespread and emotional, her death and funeral covered by the local media. It became clear what the couple meant to the city. Since Addie's death, the restaurant continues serving nearly 300 customers a day, offering hospitality as plentiful as the food. Still, it's not quite the same.

"You expect to see her, still, greeting you with that smile," Moorhouse says.

When asked if he's paid back the gratitude he felt for a great meal received 60 years ago, Garner bats away the question with a slight wave of his hand.

"I need to go to the kitchen," he says, rising to make sure everything is done the way it's always been done: soulfully and with heart. **L**



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Star Power

Internationally renowned chef José Andrés bets on Frisco with his restaurant Zaytinya

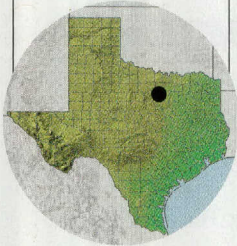
By June Naylor

Frisco's entertainment complex at the Dallas Cowboys' headquarters, The Star, exudes all the glitz one expects from a Jerry Jones-adjacent operation. One boutique, for instance, sells a kid-size sparkly blue Ford F-150 emblazoned with a silver star for \$15,000. But Zaytinya, the Mediterranean restaurant from chef José Andrés, shines in a different way.

Andrés, a Spaniard who's credited with bringing the concept of small plates to the United States, might as well be an honorary Texan. He shopped for groceries and organized professional chefs to cook thousands of meals to feed Hurricane Harvey victims through his nonprofit World Central Kitchen, which provides support and supplies to areas struck by natural disasters across the globe. Because of his efforts in Houston and post-Hurricane Maria Puerto Rico, Andrés has been nominated for a 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. But his hands-on work to help the hungry hasn't slowed the growth of his restaurant empire.

THE KNISA LAMB CHOPS dish at Zaytinya, featuring grilled lamb chops, smoked yogurt tzatziki, and caper dill *salsa*, exemplifies Mediterranean flavor.

ZAYTINYA
6655 Winning Drive,
Suite 600, Frisco,
972-324-3060;
zaytinya.com



Four Things to Do at The Star

While visiting Zaytinya, check out a few of the diversions offered at The Star, an upscale entertainment complex that opened March 2018.

1

Take the VIP Guided Tour of the Dallas Cowboys World Corporate Headquarters, which includes access to the Ford Center, an indoor stadium; the War Room, where the Cowboys conduct their NFL draft; Nike Star Walk, following the team's top 10 milestones, with a look at the team's uniform evolution since 1960; and a Super Bowl memorabilia display. \$27.50 for kids and seniors; \$32.50 for adults.

2

Stay at the 16-story Omni Frisco, decorated with photos and illustrations of star Cowboys players.

3

Check out the Lucchese boutique, which features boots ranging from humble brown leather to knee-high ostrich.

4

Work out at Cowboys Fit, a 60,000-square-foot gym that includes yoga, barre, cycling, and other fitness classes.



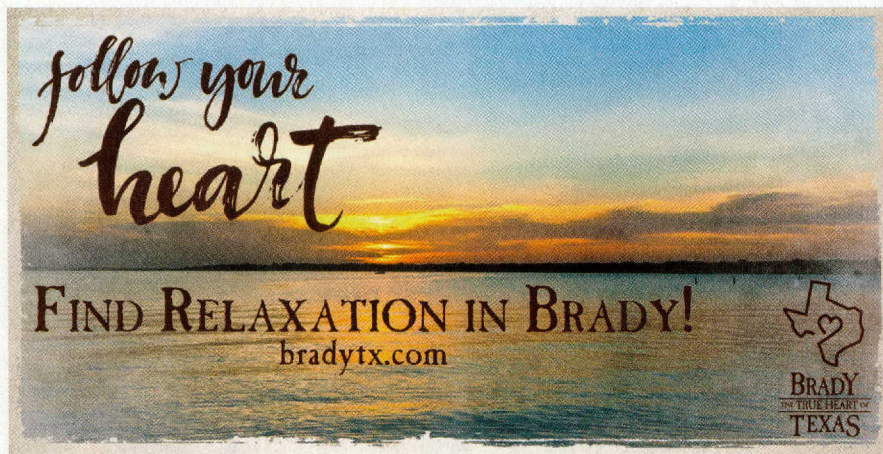
Zaytinya Frisco, which opened in February, is the 29th restaurant from ThinkFoodGroup, Andrés' international hospitality company, and is the second Zaytinya location after the original in D.C., which opened in 2002. That he'd select a suburb of Dallas before more cosmopolitan locations like Los Angeles or Las Vegas seemed curious, but Andrés says it was an easy choice.

"We wanted to try the concept in a different place than we've been before. This is a growing area, and we appreciate the brand-new-world feel about Frisco," he says, adding, "This is not a one-year investment. We are looking down the road; we know this will be one of the hottest areas in time."

Indeed, Frisco is now the fastest-growing city in the U.S., according to recent census bureau numbers, and nearly two dozen restaurants opened in just under a year at The Star. Zaytinya fits into the overall dining zeitgeist, too, as its Greek, Turkish, and Lebanese dishes are perfect for grazing and sharing.

On a Friday evening, the space is abuzz with happy couples, groups, and a few families filling tables, as well as pillow-strewn banquettes and booths. By 7 p.m., nearly all the seating throughout the airy, expansive space—the restaurant and lounge can accommodate 250—is taken. The modern design features whitewashed walls and a series of curved ceiling elements shadowed by blue light, bringing to mind colors of the Greek isles. Pendant light fixtures add to the contemporary feel, while a wood-fired oven delivers both literal and figurative warmth to the tableau. Details matter, too: Dishes in lovely blue-and-white designs come from Kütahya Porselen in Turkey, and pre-dinner aperitifs arrive on ornately patterned silver trays.

Noteworthy among the drinks is the Turkish Pickleback. A trio of glasses hold the traditional serving of chilled raki, a clear brandy pungent with anise; a single square cube of ice; and magenta-hued pickled turnip juice, the perfect sour foil for the herbaceous and sharp raki. A sip of raki, mixed with a sip of the bright

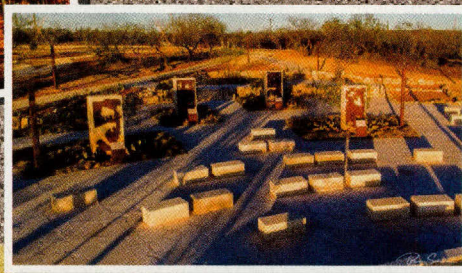


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PLATES

pink juice, swirled over the ice, prepares the palate for a series of savory flavors to follow.

Diners accustomed to Greek food will easily find favorites, but items that originate in Turkey or Lebanon may be less familiar. In nearly every instance, dishes are easily split between fellow guests and hover around \$15 for appetizers and \$40-\$90 for family-style entrées.

One standout appetizer is *h'tipiti*, a tart dip of bright red roasted peppers, mingled with crumbled feta and thyme, served with an oversized lavash chip broken into pieces for scooping. The Turkish-style *pastirma* features a salad of crunchy radish, sweet minced apricot, and mint to roll up inside paper-thin beef loin strips spiced with cumin and paprika. The satisfying vegetarian *banti-jan bil laban*, with roots in Lebanon and Morocco, includes lightly battered and fried eggplant rounds served warm with creamy roasted garlic yogurt, crushed pistachios, barberries, and cardamom-dusted mint. The magnificent showpiece entrée is a spit-roasted lamb shoulder presented on a platter with lettuce leaves and cucumber tzatziki.

Though the menu is almost a duplicate of the D.C. original, Andrés entrusted Frisco-based executive chef Jon Thompson—a veteran of noted Dallas restaurants such as Stampede 66 and Samar—to create a few items particularly for his Texas audience. Among these are the wagyu *kibbeh nayeh*, a Lebanese-style beef tartare; and wood-grilled rib-eye steak, both of which utilize meat from Bar N Ranch in nearby Celina. “A large part of dish creation [here] depends on the local market and sourcing,” Thompson says. “When given the chance to create dishes for [this] location, I had the opportunity to incorporate Texas beef.” Such dishes suit Cowboys fans just fine.

With the culinary genius of Andrés at the helm, Zaytinya promises to deliver winning plates for years to come. And with the lure of a such a big fish in this expanding pond, Frisco promises to become a significant culinary destination—sooner rather than later. **L**

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THE PRESNALL-WATSON HOMESTEAD opens to the public monthly for hiking, biking, trail riding, and more.

Texas Time Warp

Along the Medina River in San Antonio, the Presnall-Watson Homestead spans Texas history

By E. Dan Klepper

HIGH AND DRY

In the 1990s, San Antonio abandoned plans to build a reservoir on the site, allowing for the eventual creation of a preserve.

A seemingly incongruous site greets Saturday afternoon visitors at the Presnall-Watson Homestead, a rambling 19th-century farmhouse along the Medina River in south San Antonio. Kids on bicycles kick out tricks as horseback riders in cowboy regalia round the corner, creating a surprising mash-up of three centuries crammed into one.

Time warps are not all that unusual for the Presnall-Watson Homestead, which is the centerpiece of a 1,200-acre preserve managed by the nonprofit Land Heritage Institute. With its 1850s farm site, the homestead represents a well-preserved example of Texas frontier life. But a deeper exploration reveals this territory's connection to a wide swath of Lone Star history—from prehistory to statehood. And on the second Saturday of each month,



EQUESTRIAN TRAILS harken to the region's agricultural past, including cattle ranching and pigeon houses.



record of prehistoric occupation, evident in layers of extensive stone-tool production, campfire hearths, and freshwater shells. Archeologists excavated the find from 1989 to 1991, using bone and shell analysis and carbon dating to study the lives of prehistoric people. Although the excavation has been covered with soil to preserve any surviving archeological record, installations along the trail display photos of recovered stone points and tools.

The documents that record the homestead's deed and sale highlight another major chapter in the story of Texas and the preserve. The acreage that would one day become the Presnall-Watson property was part of a 13,284-acre land grant that Spain awarded to royalist Juan Ignacio Pérez. Pérez raised livestock on the ranch, exporting horses and cattle as far away as Louisiana and Coahuila, Mexico. He died in 1823, leaving the ranch to his son José. But the Texas Revolution forced José to take his family south to safety, giving the Republic of Texas an opportunity to appropriate and divide the property. In June 1837, the

the preserve opens to give history buffs, mountain bikers, hikers, equestrians, and nature enthusiasts an opportunity to converge and explore.

"The property is where people from many cultures found the natural resources to live and prosper—the water of the Medina River, fertile soil, and plentiful game, as well as timber and stones for building," says Peggy Oppelt, a Land Heritage Institute board member and volunteer who's also the great granddaughter of John Watson, who farmed the site in the 19th century. "It bears the mark of the people

who lived here; a clashing and blending of cultures that produced the independent, modern-day Texan."

The homestead rests above the south bank of the Medina River among stands of prickly pear and honey mesquite. Hunter-gatherers once thrived where equestrians and bicyclists now explore the 20-plus miles of the multiuse Los Caminos Naturales Trail System. The preserve protects six archeological sites, including the Richard Beene site, an ancient campground named for a field inspector who found the ruins. The site represents a rare 10,000-year

young nation gave one-third league (1,476 acres) to Bruno Martinez, who sold it in short order to John W. Smith for \$300. The property changed hands several times until the 1840s when José Pérez returned to the Republic and filed suit for his inheritance. The suit triggered a legal battle that lasted until 1851, when the Texas Supreme Court denied Pérez's claim.

Construction of the farmhouse began shortly after Louisiana cotton farmer Harrison Presnall and his brother-in-law Stephen Applewhite purchased the parcel in 1852. Presnall and Applewhite raised cotton with slave labor on the property before switching to cattle after the Civil War. Presnall built the two-room home with yellow sandstone blocks and mud mortar, adding a central chimney, two fireplaces, and a two-room basement accessed by masonry stairs. About 30 years later, in 1883, Watson bought the acreage from Presnall's estate for \$6,000. The Watsons encased the entire original structure within a large, two-story frame addition, one of several changes they made to the home as their farming and ranching operation

prospered. The encasement likely helped preserve the original sandstone house, which is in good condition for its age. Today, the Land Heritage Institute is in the midst of restoring the entire farmhouse, a work-in-progress dependent on funding.

Oppelt recalls visiting her great aunt, Cora Watson, who lived in the house from the early 1900s to her death in 1971. "The farm house has a wonderful little stairway leading to the attic, and sometimes Aunt Cora would let me climb it and then play in the attic where trunks full of treasures made for an afternoon of fun," Oppelt says.

Cora was the second generation of Watsons to live in the house before the family sold the property in 1974. The land stayed in agricultural use until 1990, when the San Antonio Water System bought it for the development of a reservoir. The Applewhite Reservoir project fell apart in 1994, however, leaving the homestead vulnerable to the elements until the Land Heritage Institute—a consortium of conservation and civic groups—rescued the site in 2009 after raising money from a variety of sources to purchase the property and

begin restoration.

"We were inspired to devote substantial time and treasure to this project because of our love of the land, the wildlife, and the Medina River, which has inspired us our whole lives and which continues to inspire us," Oppelt says.

Along with the farmhouse, structures on the homestead include a large barn the Watson families used for raising quarter horses, mules, and paint horses. Another barn, originally part of the Pérez-Walsh Ranch north of the Medina River, served as a pigeon house with an elongated loft with cutouts for the birds to nest. The homesteaders ate pigeons regularly in soups, stews, and other dishes, reserving their valuable livestock for sale at market.

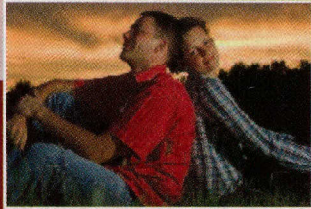
"The property is where people from many cultures found the natural resources to live and prosper."



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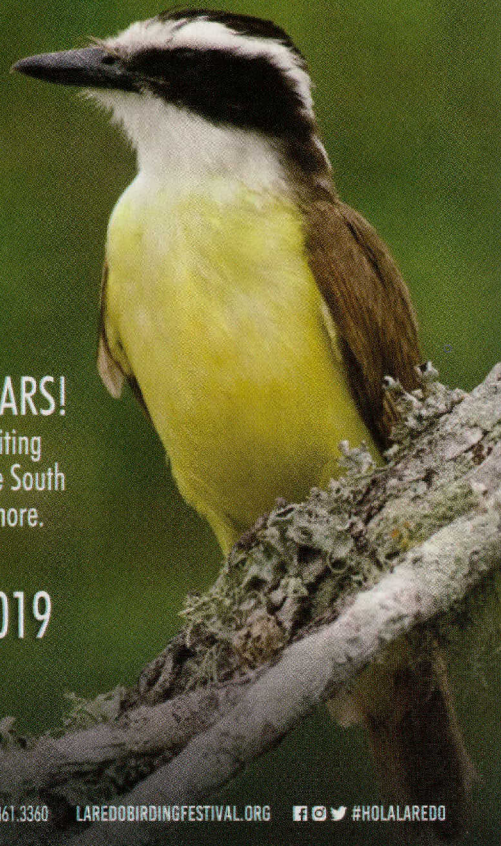
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"I recall Mrs. Walsh telling me how happy she was once she never had to bake or eat another pigeon pie again," Oppelt says.

Historically, a spring that fed a small stock pond provided fresh water in front of the old house. But the drought of the 1950s ended the spring's flow and dried up the pond. According to Watson family lore, the pond's mud saved the life of the elder Watson's 5-year-old son, Ralph. The boy, bitten on the toe by a rattlesnake, stood in the cool mud in order to slow the effects of the venom while waiting for medical attention to arrive.

For its part, the Land Heritage Institute aims to preserve the site's history while providing educational opportunities, such as for student filmmakers and sustainable land-use techniques. Oppelt says the institute has partnered with schools for student projects such as eradicating invasive species, restoring the farm's 125-year-old chuckwagon, and researching and designing historical costumes for interpreters.

The institute also promotes recreation as a gateway to understanding the natural world. Located above an important South Texas riparian corridor, the homestead and its lands offer tantalizing opportunities for birding and wildlife watching, including sightings of the Eastern bluebird, broad-tailed hawk, and painted bunting.

Though little-known among the state's hundreds of heritage sites, the Presnall-Watson Homestead offers a remarkably intact perspective spanning the breadth of Texas history. "Visitors who appreciate history, nature, ranching, and outdoor recreation would all be interested in the Land Heritage Institute and the Presnall-Watson Homestead," Oppelt says. **L**

PRESNALL-WATSON HOMESTEAD

is open to the public on the second Saturday of each month, or by appointment for groups. Entry costs \$3 per person, \$10 per family; equestrian fees are \$10 per horse and rider. 1349 Neal Road, San Antonio. 210-689-1734; landheritageinstitute.org

EVENTS



Let It Snow

Pearland's Winterfest forecasts a fun-filled day of playing in the powder

Texans don't let a lack of snow get in the way of winter fun. This annual outdoor festival blows in more than 200,000 pounds of powder, with snow tubing hills and play areas in the H-E-B Winter Zone. Family-friendly activities include an exotic petting zoo, virtual reality games, winter-themed inflatables, rock climbing, craft vendors, and local food. Celebrating its 23rd year, it's one of the city's largest events, welcoming up to 10,000 attendees each year. Admission is \$10 for children ages 3 to 16, \$5 for ages 17 and older, and free to children 2 and younger. Save \$2 on presale tickets until Jan. 24 with a canned good donation for the Pearland Neighborhood Center. —*Hannah Phillips*

WINTERFEST
Jan. 26
Recreation Center &
Natatorium, 4141 Bailey Road,
Pearland
281-412-8900;
pearlandtx.gov/winterfest

Photo: Kevin Stillman

Arts & Culture

CENTRAL TEXAS

Austin
Get in the Game Exhibit
Through Jan. 13

This exhibit examines the intersection of social justice and sports in the United States by celebrating athletes who have broken barriers and spoken out for equality, both on and off the playing field. *LBJ Presidential Library, 2313 Red River St. 512-721-0200; lbjlibrary.org*

Austin
Middleditch & Schwartz
Jan. 13

Together, Thomas Middleditch and Ben Schwartz perform an improvised comedy show in which they create characters and storylines based on audience suggestions. Every show is different. Middleditch stars as the lead of HBO series *Silicon Valley*, while Schwartz is an Emmy-winning writer, comedian, and actor best known for his role on *Parks and Recreation*. *Paramount Theatre, 713 Congress Ave. 512-472-5470; austintheatre.org*

Groesbeck
Right Turn Only Exhibit
Jan. 24-27

See wood turning and visual art by nationally renowned Limestone County artist Janice Levi. *Springfield Hall, 199 Park Road 35. 254-255-4693; masseyfoundationtx.com*

Waco
Very Eric Carle: A Very Hungry, Quiet, Lonely, Clumsy, Busy Exhibit
Jan. 26-May 12

Step into the pages of Eric Carle's colorful picture books. The exhibit features play-and-learn activities inspired by five of Carle's classic books: *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Very Quiet Cricket*, *The Very Lonely Firefly*, *The Very Clumsy Click Beetle*, and *The Very Busy Spider*. *Mayborn Museum Complex at Baylor University, 1300 S. University Parks Drive. 254-710-1110; Baylor.edu/mayborn*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Dallas
Jacob Hashimoto: Clouds and Chaos

Through April 7
Exploring a universally compelling phenomenon of nature, the Crow Museum presents this solo exhibition. The central work, *Nuvole*, is a large-scale, site-specific installation that is the first major exhibition to debut in the newly renovated museum. *Crow Museum of Asian Art, 2010 Flora St. 214-979-6430; crowmuseum.org*

Denton
Life Stories Told Through Quilts
Through Feb. 15

This exhibit features the work of Barbara McCraw, a retired professor, pathologist, and master quilter whose pieces have been exhibited across North America and Europe. She has created quilts celebrating figures like Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the Obamas. Her pieces are in numerous collections including the Smithsonian, the Denton Courthouse-on-the-Square Museum, and the University of Michigan. *Gough Gallery, Patterson-Appleton Arts Center, 400 E. Hickory St. 940-382-2787; dentonarts.com*

Denton
Denton Black Film Festival
Jan. 23-27

This film festival is a weekend-long festival celebrating the diverse stories and culture of the black community through film, music, and art. The festival offers programming for the family inspired by the African American experience. DBFF seeks to offer the works of local, national, and international filmmakers that often are not seen by a broad audience and may not be recognized through major theatrical release. *Campus Theatre, 214 W. Hickory St. 469-573-0799; dentonbfff.com*

Fort Worth
Laurie Simmons: Big Camera/Little Camera

Through Jan. 27
Simmons' career-long exploration of archetypal gender roles,

DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT? If you think your event might be of interest to *Texas Highways* readers, submit your information at texashighways.com/submit-event

especially women in domestic settings, is the primary subject of this exhibition and is a topic as poignant today as it was in the late 1970s, when she began to develop her style by using props and dolls as stand-ins for people and places. Often photographing the dolls situated in tiny, austere settings, Simmons uses fictional scenes to make observations about real life. *Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth*, 3200 Darnell St. 817-738-9215; themodern.org

**Grand Prairie
Lunar New Year**

Jan. 25-27, Feb. 1-3
Free entertainment and activities include dance performances, fire crackers, live music, multicultural performances, vendors, and contests for kids. *Asia Times Square*, 2625 W. Pioneer Parkway. 469-865-2918; asiatimesquare.com

EAST TEXAS

**Lufkin
Something Rotten!**

Jan. 22
Set in 1595, this play tells the story of Nick and Nigel Bottom, two brothers desperate to write a hit play. When a local soothsayer foretells that the future of theater involves singing, dancing, and acting at the same time, Nick and Nigel set out to write the world's very first musical. Nominated for 10 Tony Awards, this show continues its tour in Tyler, Jan. 24; Orange, Jan. 25; and Galveston, Jan. 26. *Temple Theater*, 3500 S. First St. 936-633-5454; angelinaarts.org

**Tyler
Lagniappe: The Art of Letitia Huckaby**

Through March 17
This solo exhibition spotlights the family narratives and African American history themes prevalent in the work of acclaimed photographer and multimedia artist Letitia Huckaby. *Tyler Museum of Art*, 1300 S. Mahon Ave. 903-595-1001; tylermuseum.org

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

**Surfside Beach
Surfside Beach Food and Art Festival**

Jan. 26
Enjoy a chili cookoff, artisans, craft beer tastings, live music, kids carnival games, kite-flying, and more. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 *Bluewater Highway*. 832-434-4529; surfside.tx.gov

**Tomball
Narrated Glass Blowing Demonstration**

Jan. 5
Houston's only open-access studio offers free, narrated glass-blowing demos on the first Saturday of every month except August. *Three Dimensional Visions—Glass Blowing Houston*, 17442 FM 2920. 281-734-0366; threedimensionalvisions.com

History & Heritage

CENTRAL TEXAS

**Austin
Martin Luther King March and Festival**

Jan. 21
Join the march from the MLK statue at the University of Texas campus to historic Huston-Tillotson University to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy in Austin and the world. *Huston-Tillotson University*, 900 Chicon St. 512-657-3064; mlkcelebration.com

**Bastrop
Bastrop County MLK Walk and Program**

Jan. 21
Each year in January, there is a walk followed by a program with guest speakers in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. The cities of Bastrop, Elgin, and Smithville take turns hosting the event. elgintx.com

**Kerrville
Renaissance Festival**

Jan. 25-27, Feb. 2-3
The festival features the Last Chance Forever Birds of Prey Show, The Great Rhondini Escape Artist, food, crafts, games, and more. *River Star Arts and Events Park*, 4000 *Riverside Drive*. 214-632-5766; kerrvillerefest.com

**New Braunfels
War Stories: New Braunfels in World War I**

Through Jan. 31
Presented as part of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of America's role in WWI, New Braunfels' uniquely German character compelled its citizens to respond with fervor once America was at war with Germany. On view in the exhibit are artifacts from the Sophienburg's rich collections—posters, photographs, uniforms, and other historical objects to showcase events, individuals, and ideology from 1914 to 1919—as well as touch on the lasting impact of The Great

War on America and on this German community. *Sophienburg Museum & Archives*, 401 W. Coll St. 830-629-1572; sophienburg.com

**San Antonio
City of San Antonio Martin Luther King Jr. March**

Jan. 21
The City of San Antonio's Martin Luther King Jr. Commission celebrates the 51st anniversary of the first March for Justice organized by the late Rev. Dr. Raymond "R.A." Callies Sr., a San Antonio teacher and pastor. Today it's one of the largest MLK marches in the nation. *MLK Academy*, 3501 MLK Drive. 210-207-7084; sanantonio.gov/mlk

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

**Lubbock
Work, Fight, Give: American Relief Posters of WWII**

Through Jan. 13
This traveling exhibition offers a wide-ranging collection of original relief posters and memorabilia that provides an exciting new window on understanding a watershed event to our nation's history. *Silent Wings Museum*, 6202 I-27 North. 806-775-3049; silentwingsmuseum.com

**Plano
Dallas Area Train Show**

Jan. 19-20
The largest model train show in the North Dallas area welcomes novices and seasoned engineers alike. The show offers operating layouts, dealer displays, how-to clinics, and video displays. *Plano Event Center*, 2000 E. Spring Creek Parkway. dfwtrainshows.com

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

**Goliad
El Soldado de Mexico**

Jan. 26-27
In the winter of 1836, Santa Anna's army crossed the Rio Bravo with

the mission of putting down the revolution that was brewing in Texas. Contrary to popular myth, the Army of the Republic of Mexico was made up of professional soldiers, many of whom were seasoned veterans by 1836. Join Primer Battalion as they make camp at Presidio La Bahia and instruct their members in drills just as Santa Anna's officers would have done. Visit with the unit as they go about their daily routines and see what life was like in the sometimes brutal conditions experienced in the winter and spring of 1835-36. *Presidio La Bahia*, 217 Loop 71. 361-645-3752; presidiolabahia.org

**Houston
MLK Youth Parade—Midtown Houston**

Jan. 19
The 13th annual parade kicks off the holiday weekend. *Midtown Houston*, 1200 Holman St. 713-953-1633; mlkgrandeparade.org

**Houston
MLK Grande Parade—Midtown Houston**

Jan. 21
The 25th annual parade—one of the largest single-day multicultural events in the U.S.—is held in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The parade route begins on San Jacinto and Elgin streets at 10 a.m. and features more than 300 culturally diverse performing groups from across the nation. This year's parade theme is "It Takes A Village." *Midtown Houston*, 1200 Holman St. 713-953-1633; mlkgrandeparade.org

**Houston
The Original MLK Day Parade and Holiday Celebration**

Jan. 18-21
The Black Heritage Society honors the legacy of Dr. King with its 41st annual commemorative parade and a variety of community activities. *Downtown Houston*. 713-236-1700; blackheritagesociety.org



San Antonio's Martin Luther King Jr. March

Music

CENTRAL TEXAS

Fredericksburg

Luckenbach Blues Festival

Jan. 19
This 12th annual celebration features local, regional, and Texas blues artists. *Luckenbach Texas Dance Hall, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. 830-997-3224; luckenbachtexas.com*

Gruene

Hair of the Dog Day

Jan. 1
Enjoy free live shows all day on New Year's Day. *Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. gruenemarketdays.com*

Kerrville

Symphony of the Hills in Concert

Jan. 5
This annual pops concert features music from the 1950s, a golden age for music in America, including Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and selections from *Guys and Dolls*. *Cailloux Theater, 910 Main St. 830-792-7469; symphonyofthehills.org*

Round Top

Texas Guitar Quartet in Concert

Jan. 12
Composed of Isaac Bustos, Jay Kacherski, Alejandro Montiel, and Joseph Palmer, TQG has developed an exciting repertoire by commissioning new works and creating their own arrangements and compositions. *Festival Concert Hall, 248 Jaster Road. 979-249-3129; festivalhill.org*

EAST TEXAS

Lufkin

The Drifters in Concert

Jan. 29
These Rock & Roll Hall of Famers celebrate 50 years of classics, from "There Goes My Baby," to "Under the Boardwalk." Tap your feet along as the new voices of The Drifters take you on a trip back in time. *The Pines Theater, 113 S. First St. 936-633-0349; thepines.visitlufkin.com*

Nature & Outdoors

CENTRAL TEXAS

Wimberley

Polar Bear Plunge and Fun Run

Jan. 1
Brave the cold with a fun run through Blue Hole Regional Park followed by a plunge into Blue

Hole. *Blue Hole Regional Park, 100 Blue Hole Lane. 512-660-9111; cityofwimberley.com*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Glen Rose

Rhino Encounter Program

Jan. 5
Discover the world of the wondrous rhinoceros during a one-hour interactive learning session followed by a guided tour of Fossil Rim. This event, which has a limit of 12 people, is open to guests ages 7 and older. *Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, 2299 CR 2008. 254-897-2960; fossilrim.org*

McKinney

Dinosaurs Live!

Through Feb. 18
Encounter the 46-foot T-Rex and nine new life-size animatronic dinosaurs along the nature trails. This year's exhibit also features an outdoor fossil dig. Note: The Heard is unable to animate the dinosaurs when temperatures drop below 35 degrees. *Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary, 1 Nature Place. 972-562-5566; heardmuseum.org/dinosaurlive*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

South Padre Island

Polar Bear Dip

Jan. 1
Take a plunge into the Gulf at this annual beach party featuring live music and costume contests. *Clayton's Beach Bar and Grill, 6900 Padre Blvd. 956-761-5900; claytonsbeachbar.com/polar-bear-dip*

South Padre Island

SPI Kite Fest

Jan. 31-Feb. 2
Enjoy indoor kite performances at the convention center followed by kite-flying at the flats. *South Padre Island Convention Centre and The North Flats, 7355 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; spikitefest.com*

Shopping & Antiquing

CENTRAL TEXAS

Fredericksburg

Hill Country Gem and Mineral Show

Jan. 19-20
The Fredericksburg Rockhounds

bring artifacts, exhibits, demonstrations, jewelry, minerals, fossils, and more to this 50th annual event. *Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, 432 Lady Bird Drive. fredericksburgrockhounds.org*

Fredericksburg

Hill Country Indian Artifact Show

Jan. 26
This event features Native American artifacts including arrowheads, pottery, beads, and books. *Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, 432 Lady Bird Drive. 830-626-5561; hillcountryindianartifacts.com*

Kerrville

Winter Market

Jan. 26-27
Vendors from all over the state and beyond present their art, clothing, accessories, gourmet food, and more. *Inn of the Hills Hotel and Conference Center, 1001 SH 27. 830-895-5000; texasmarketguide.com*

Round Top

Winter Antique Show

Jan. 25-26
This annual show draws people from across the country to scour the vintage finds of more than 100

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THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Route 66

Trippin' the Mother Road

BY CHET GARNER



Lucky for Texans, the most famous road in America cuts through the Texas Panhandle. It's Route 66, the "Mother Road of America," moving cross-country travelers from Chicago to Los Angeles with numerous stops in the Lone Star State. Taking this route from the Oklahoma border to the New Mexico border is more than a great road trip—it's a trip through American history.

1 U-Drop Inn
Every traveler should "drop in" to this Route 66 landmark in Shamrock. Once a gas station and diner, today it's a visitor center, gift shop, and great place to grab a cup of coffee and stretch your legs. Its art-deco architecture is so iconic that it was immortalized in the Pixar movie *Cars*. Roam through and imagine the good ol' days when travelers such as Elvis used to drop in for a fill up. 1242 N. Main St., Shamrock. 806-256-2501; shamrockedc.org

2 Devil's Rope Museum
Through its history, Route 66 was marked by strange roadside attractions dedicated to the weird and wonderful. This museum in McLean carries on that tradition by telling the story of barbed wire (aka "devil's rope"). There's also a collection of antiques from other stops like the Reptile Ranch in Alanreed and the original giant cow that topped the Big Texan Steak Ranch in Amarillo. Open March 1–Nov. 1. 100 Kingsley St., McLean. 806-779-2225; barbwiremuseum.com

3 Giant Cross of Groom
You can see this attraction coming from miles away—a huge cross made of 2.5 million pounds of steel. Located at a rest stop, the 19-stories-tall cross also has a life-size bronze sculpture of the last supper, an empty tomb, and a replica of the Shroud of Turin below it. It's a fascinating place to stop for a potty break or to ponder life's greater mysteries. Off I-40/Route 66, Exit 112, Groom. 806-248-9006; crossministries.net

4 Route 66 Historic District
While many of the old buildings in downtown Amarillo have been lost to time and development, this district feels frozen in time. Spend the afternoon exploring small shops and restaurants, like The NAT, an antiques shop in a building that has been everything from an indoor pool to a ballroom where Duke Ellington once performed. Don't miss the juicy burgers at the Golden Light Café and Cantina, where the booths and photo-covered walls tell the story of why this place has been a favorite since 1946. 3511 W. Sixth Ave., Amarillo. amarillo66.com

5 MidPoint Cafe
The exact midpoint of this 2,278-mile stretch of pavement between Illinois and California just so happens to be in Texas. Straddling the center line is a '50s-themed diner serving some of the best pie in the country. They call it "ugly pie" because the homemade crust is never uniform or picture perfect. But oh, does it taste perfect. 305 W. Route 66, Adrian. 806-538-6379; facebook.com/midpointcafe

**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 *Route 66* episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.

vendors. Various locations. 979-249-4042; antiqueweekend.com or roundtoptexasantiques.com

EAST TEXAS

Conroe

Houston Money Show
Jan. 18–19
The 62nd annual event features more than 120 local, regional, and national dealers in coins, currency, medals, jewelry, and bullion. The public can buy, sell, swap, trade, and get free advice on coins and related material. Enjoy free kids activities on Saturday and hourly door prizes. Lone Star Convention and Expo Center, 9055 Airport Road. 832-610-5313; coinshows.com

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Aransas Pass

Texas Winter Market I
Jan. 12–13
This shopping event brings in vendors from across the state to show the best in clothing, gifts, jewelry, gourmet food, Texas handmade items, gifts for the guys, home and holiday décor, candles, accessories, and more. Aransas Pass Civic Center, 700 W. Wheeler Ave. 888-225-3427; texasmarketguide.com

Ranches & Rodeos

CENTRAL TEXAS

Austin

SaddleUP—Texas Ranching Tradition
Through April 30
Jump in the saddle and experience a virtual ride with real Texas ranchers. Through photographs and video, see cowboys and cowgirls ride, rope, and rodeo the same way their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents did before them. Texas Capitol Visitors Center, 112 E. 11th St. 512-305-8400; texasstatecapitol.com

Want more? View the Texas Highways Events Calendar at texashighways.com/events.

For a free printed copy of an even more detailed, quarterly schedule of events, go to texashighways.com/freepubs; write to Texas Highways Events Calendar, P.O. Box 149249, Austin, TX 78714-9249; or call 800-452-9292 from anywhere in the U.S. or Canada, between 8 a.m.–6 p.m. Central.

For Texas travel questions, call 800-452-9292 to reach a TxDOT Travel Information Center, where a professional travel counselor can provide routing assistance and send free brochures (including the official Texas State Travel Guide, the Texas Official Travel Map, and the quarterly *Texas Highways Events Calendar*).

To submit event information, visit texashighways.com/submitevent.

Listing deadlines: Spring (March, April, May): Dec. 1; Summer (June, July, Aug.): March 1; Fall (Sept., Oct., Nov.): June 1; Winter (Dec., Jan., Feb.): Sept. 1.

Bandera

Cowgirl Roundup

Jan. 6
Brush off your best horse and your best hat and hit the trail. Main Street. banderacowboycapital.com

San Antonio

San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo Barbecue Cookoff and Festival

Jan. 25–26
This championship event sanctioned by the International Barbecue Cookers Association features some of the world's best competitive barbecue teams, live music, family activities, a barbecue trade show, a kids' cookoff, shopping, and more. Proceeds benefit the rodeo's scholarship fund. The San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo on the Salado, 1723 Creekview Drive. 210-225-5851; sarodeo.com

Waco

Ram Texas Circuit Finals Rodeo

Jan. 3–5
Spectators enjoy seven rodeo events (bareback riding, bull riding, saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling, team roping, tie-down roping, and barrel racing) along with the fan favorite, mutton bustin'. Extraco Events Center, 4601 Bosque Blvd. 254-776-1660; extracoeventscenter.com

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Fort Worth

Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo

Jan. 18–Feb. 9
Established in 1896, this popular event attracts nearly 1 million people from around the world for the nation's oldest livestock show and daily performances of the world's original indoor rodeo. On Jan. 19, more than 100,000 spectators line the streets of downtown Cowtown to watch the rodeo's annual All-Western Parade on Main and Houston streets. Will Rogers Memorial Center, 3400 Burnett Tandy Drive. 817-877-2400; fwssr.com

follow-up visits to my team of doctors, my five-times-a-week radiation treatments, and my appointments at the “chemo lounge.” But in March, my third month of treatment, a few rays of sunlight appeared. I had completed my 35 doses of radiation. I began to feel a little less hammered by the chemo drug. I actually had some energy. I put the top down on my Karmann Ghia and took Dashiell on a ride—the first time I’d driven a car since New Year’s Day.

The second week after radiation, I went to see the whooping cranes with Lois and Dashiell, both of them fiercely alive and loving. I had realized the first goal on my list. I was in the presence of living miracles—creatures whose majesty and beauty were enhanced by my new perspective.

We had arrived in Rockport during the weekend of Oysterfest, a celebration of that protein-rich mollusk glorious in all of its forms: fried, baked, served on combo platters or in stews and gumbo, and raw on the half shell. Up until then I had subsisted primarily on milkshakes and smoothies, but I knew instinctively that I could eat oysters—and boy, I sure enjoyed doing so.

Each of the other goals I met was important in its own way. In May, month six, I bought a new Fender Precision Bass, which in my opinion, is the only bass guitar that matters. I played a short live set of songs by the Rolling Stones, still the world’s greatest rock ‘n’ roll band, at the Continental Club in Austin, and on guitar was my musical co-conspirator going back to The Skunks days, Jon Dee Graham. The gig was good medicine and reminded me of my old life.

In August 1998, the ninth month of my cancer adventure, Lois, Dashiell, and I ventured to the Grand Canyon for the first time. Nothing really prepares a person for that first glimpse of the abyss.

I HAVE COME TO APPRECIATE the value of metaphors and not just on the page. To me, birds are metaphors. The first birds were land creatures who had previously escaped predators by running

away. Over time, they developed wings and the ability to fly. In this sense, the notion of “taking flight” means something far more impressive than mere escape. We say, “Things are looking up,” when we mean things are good and positive; we also say, “Business is taking off.” And then there’s that great blue heron that whispered in my ear about learning how to fly. When you find a great metaphor, make the best of it.

The first year or two after surgery, my side effects started having less impact on my having a nice day. My checkups all came out clear, or as they say, “No sign of recurrence.” Five years out, I was still fine, and I started feeling confident that my next scan wouldn’t come back showing a big, dark spot in my lungs—the most telltale sign of recurrence.

I kept writing, and in the legal pads I used for notes and outlines, the margins of pages gradually filled with idle sketches of animals, human caricatures, and other graphic experimentation. I started using pocket-size Moleskine notebooks and eventually did more drawing in them than note-taking.

I wanted to paint birds, but I knew I’d have to get better before I tried it. I kept studying pictures in books and online, but by far the best research was watching them outdoors. Eventually, I produced a series of grackle paintings. Grackles are omnipresent in Austin and, once you get over the nuisance factor, they’re really quite entertaining. But my favorite birds—long-legged wading birds like herons and cranes, egrets, and spoonbills—would have to wait. I didn’t want to insult them.

Every year or two, I went back to Port Aransas or Rockport to see the whooping cranes. On the boat tours, we not only saw great numbers of whoopers up close, but dozens of my favorites—great blues, green herons, tricolor herons, little blue herons, and white morphs.

Last summer, Lois and I spent a few days in Port Aransas to get in some beach time and go birding. The whooping cranes wouldn’t be coming back until October, but my connections down there assured me that I could see lots of my

favorite feathered friends. I was also anxious to check out works by two local artists who specialize in wildlife and see how they might inform my own work.

Debbie Stevens, who moved to Corpus Christi when she was 12, had an exhibit in Rockport called *Taking Flight*, wherein she blurred the lines between her avian subjects and their backgrounds to create an impressionistic feel, as if the bird were ready to pop out of the frame and go flitting about the room. Unconventional settings are a way I have come to maneuver around my technical shortcomings.

Elsewhere, Kent Ullberg has an awesome, monument-size pair of bronze whooping cranes in the Rockport Center for the Arts sculpture garden. Ullberg was born in a fishing village in Sweden but has resided on South Padre Island since 1978. He is considered one of the world’s preeminent wildlife sculptors, known for his realistic portrayals of birds, mastodons, marlins, tarpons, sailfish, elephants, and bulls.

His work also includes many incredibly fine great blue herons. I felt a little reluctant to show him samples of my work, but when I did—a two-panel work measuring 36 inches by 48 inches of a pair of great blues facing each other—he seemed delighted. I took his reaction as a sincere compliment. That was motivation.

With a population of around 4,000, Port Aransas may be small, but it’s got a big heart when it comes to birds and birders. Eleven months after Hurricane Harvey, wrecked boardwalks of four birding preserves in various stages of rebuilding and demolition cluttered the landscape. Still, the preserves remained open, and we spotted hundreds of birds.

One morning, we took an expedition that started out at the edge of Charlie’s Pasture, a 1,217-acre preserve consisting of salt marshes and other habitat that coastal birds consider prime real estate. My guide, Ray Dillahunty, had a mug of hot coffee for me and a long list of species he’d already sighted.

Immediately after focusing my binoculars, I saw great blue herons, roseate spoonbills, and egrets of the reddish and

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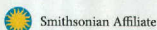
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white-morph variety. Dillahunty quickly pointed out the black-necked stilts and three species of herons. Then there were the white ibises—wading birds with football-shaped bodies, long red legs, and extended, downward-curving beaks.

We had seen 10 species and a total of 118 birds, and we had five more birding spots ahead of us—or five more reasons to love Port Aransas.

When I'm not writing or playing music, I'm painting nonstop. Though I do like trying to depict birds realistically, I tend to put them in unusual situations—like standing in a queue to catch a concert at the Continental Club in front of surrealistic skylines, or riding the Austin Motel sign as if it's a rocket to Mars. Is it because I lack confidence in my skill at creating natural settings, or because it's my little trick to get people to notice and pay attention?

After going to Port Aransas, I decided I was ready to paint the more challenging birds I hadn't previously attempted. In the next three months I finished a dozen new paintings. I've done several great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, yellow-crowned night herons, blue jays, cardinals, mockingbirds, and even more grackles. As I write this, I'm starting work on a painting of whooping cranes, and I'm also prepping for an exhibit at Yard Dog Art Gallery in Austin.

My health is good. This December marked 22 years since surgery day. If cancer ever comes knocking on my door again, so what? It can't be as bad as being ripped to pieces in the talons of the great horned owl who periodically sits in the elm tree behind our house.

I'm going back to Port Aransas soon. The Whooping Crane Festival is held every year on the last full weekend of February; in mid-April the cranes start flying back to Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada. Last year, the Aransas flock of whoopers increased to a whooping 505 birds. Counting those that reside in captivity or in other flocks established in recent years, the total population of whooping cranes is now around 850.

Things are looking up—for both of us. 🐱



The Empress of Gulf Coast Soul

Named a National Heritage Fellow, Barbara Lynn plays on

By Wes Ferguson

Barbara Lynn was a left-handed young girl in Beaumont when she started sounding out notes and chords on a guitar made for right-handed musicians.

She's always done things her own way. The pioneering sound that grew out of those childhood guitar rhythms—fiery and percussive, complemented by her soulful singing voice and a poet's command of songwriting—took Lynn around the world, from Beaumont to the Apollo Theater in Harlem, and to the top of the charts in 1962.

Lynn was just 20 years old when she wrote and recorded “You’ll Lose a Good Thing,” which became the No. 1 R&B single in America. The song, a heartsick warning from a suspicious lover, crossed over to No. 8 on the pop charts and inspired covers by hit-makers Aretha Franklin and Freddy Fender. Lynn recorded nine more near-hits, including “We’ve Got a Good Thing Goin’,” covered by the Rolling Stones

“I told him if he lost me, he’d lose a good thing, and then I went home and wrote it.”

in 1965, but her career slowed when she married, had children, and moved to California. Now 76 years old and back in Beaumont, Lynn has found renewed national acclaim more than half a century after her career began as “the Empress of Gulf Coast Soul.”

In September, the National Endowment for the Arts recognized Lynn as a 2018 NEA National Heritage Fellow, the United States’ highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. The southpaw’s high-energy style was on full display recently when she performed during the Eastside Kings Festival in Austin. Lynn seemed to be having as much fun as ever as she hit those unique percussive rhythms on her shiny, gold-hued guitar. She says she plans to keep touring and performing, and she will possibly record another album soon.

Q: You started taking piano lessons as a child. Why’d you quit?

A: I thought it was very common to see a young lady play a piano, so I said I’d like to play an odd instrument, so I picked the ukulele—and after seeing Elvis on TV, I knew guitar is what I wanted to play.

Q: How did you learn?

A: I taught myself to play. It came easy. I’d hear something on the radio. In fact, the doctor told my mom I was just musically inclined. I could hear something and play it. And I did. I created my own style.

Q: How do you describe that style?

A: I formed my own style by me being left-handed. I play with a thumb pick. A lot of musicians, mostly male, they just use their finger picks, but I have to use a thumb pick. When I was coming up, I noticed the finger pick kept slipping out of my fingers, so I just used my thumb pick. It stays on. It makes me feel like I’m playing the drums. I’ve got a beat.

Q: Besides Elvis Presley, who else inspired your music?

A: Gatemouth Brown, BB King—there’s a lot of them. But I was really inspired mostly by the blues.

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Q: When did you start performing in public?

A: I had already formed my own band at Blanchette Elementary School, a girls group called Bobbie Lynn and Her Idols. We went from place to place and started playing and everything, and pretty soon I got into high school, and then I started writing music and writing poems. That's basically how I got started.

Q: How were you discovered?

A: I was discovered by a country-and-western singer by the name of Joe Barry, and Joe Barry went and told Huey Meaux, who ended up being my manager, and from there we took it on. He started recording me.

Q: What inspired "You'll Lose a Good Thing?"

A: Oh, that was a really true story about a young man I was going with in the band named Sylvester. I told him if he lost me, he'd lose a good thing, and then I went home and wrote it.

Q: Following your success in the '60s, why did you stop recording music in the '70s?

A: After I got married and had my kids, I sort of slowed down a little, you know. That's how that happened. But I never left the music scene. A lot of people thought I did, but I never did. I was just slowing down a minute.

Q: How much time do you still spend traveling and performing?

A: I haven't been traveling too much, but I do try to go as much as possible whenever they call me. They're calling me right now to go back to Canada, back to Spain, and then they want me to go to Australia, but that's a bit too far. I can't stay on a plane that long anymore.

Q: What's your favorite venue in Texas?

A: Well, I love Antone's [in Austin]. I love the blues, I love the environment, the people there. They make me feel so warm. In fact, Austin itself, the whole city of Austin, makes me feel so warm.

The Museum of the Gulf Coast

For a grounding in the traditions of Gulf Coast music, check out Port Arthur's Museum of the Gulf Coast. Barbara Lynn is among the honorees in the museum's Music Hall of Fame, along with luminaries like Janis Joplin and Lynn's early manager, Huey Meaux. 409-982-7000; museumofthegulfcoast.org

Q: Has your music changed much as you've aged?

A: A little. Some of the songs I do now are a little different, but that's because I create my own sound. I noticed the people like it, so I will continue to keep doing it.

Q: When you look back at your career, what are you most proud of?

A: Well, the person I loved the most died: my mother. My mother traveled with me, and she kept me from using drugs. Still today I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't do none of that. She traveled with me in the early '60s, and when I played the Apollo and all those big places, she was right there with me. I miss my mom so much, but I know that she came with me a lot of places, and everybody loved her.

Q: Wasn't she your escort early on, too, when you were a teenager playing in Southeast Texas clubs?

A: Especially in the clubs. I was young, too. She did a lot of protecting. Beaumont was an incredibly small city then. Of course nowadays it has really grown up. But my mom was very protective of me, and a lot of musicians ended up knowing that. They knew just how far to go with Barbara because her mom was right there, man.

Q: How long will you keep performing?

A: I guess as long as I can—as long as God keeps these people calling me and keeps me going. 🐾

Texas Highways (ISSN 0040-4349) is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, 150 E. Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704; phone 512-486-5858, fax 512-486-5879. The official travel magazine of Texas encourages travel within the state and tells the Texas story to readers around the world.

Periodicals Postage paid at Austin, Texas, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Texas Highways* Circulation, P.O. Box 8559, Big Sandy, Texas 75755-8559.

VINTAGE




A Lively Legacy

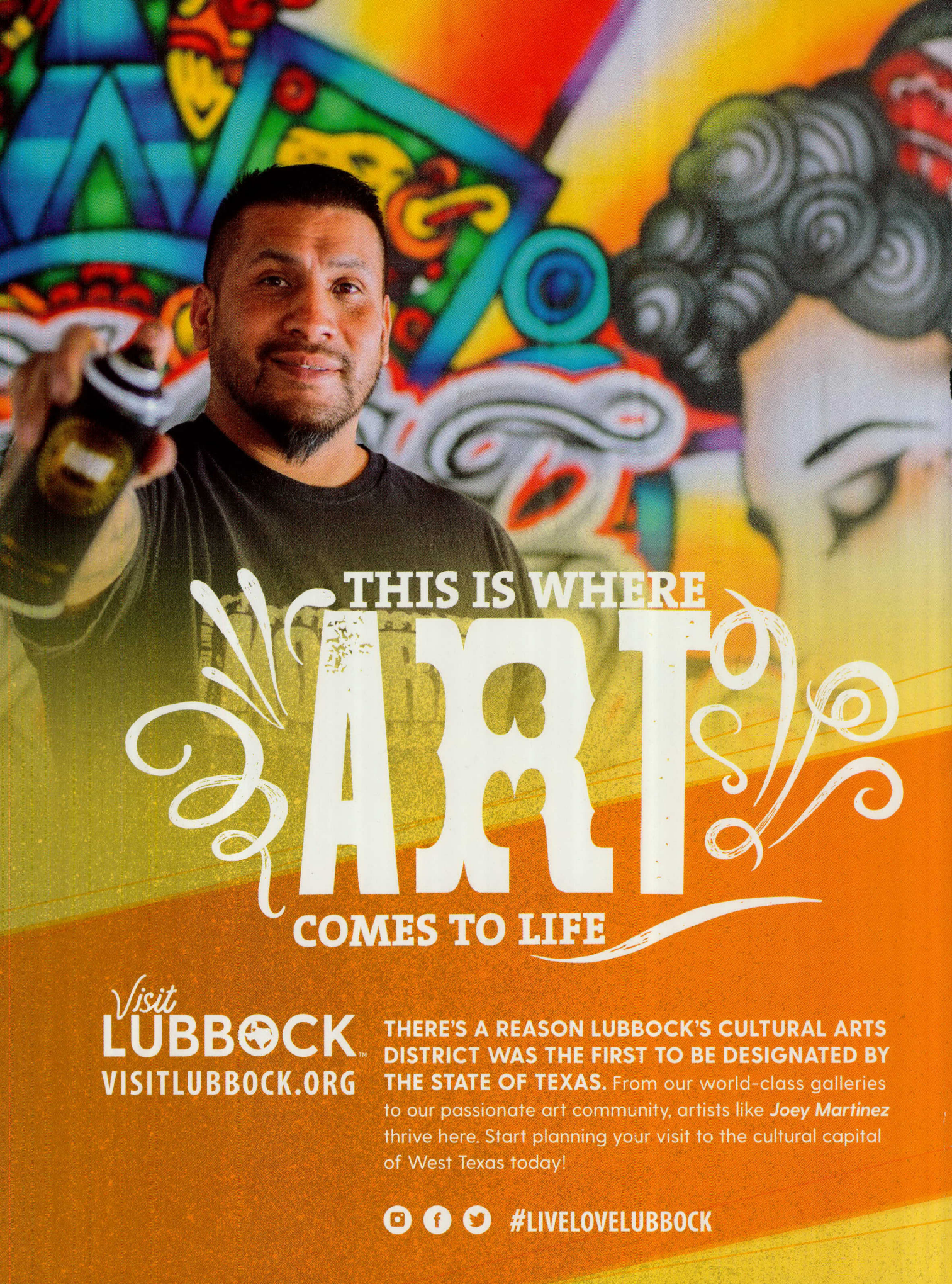
Frank Lively, 1928-2018

We lost a true Texas treasure on Nov. 18 with the passing of travel industry titan and *Texas Highways* founder Frank Lively at age 90. In May 1974, Frank repurposed an internal highway department publication into a travel magazine—in his words, a “showpiece for Texas.” Within a year, the Texas Legislature had named the 33-page monthly “The Official Travel Magazine of Texas,” declaring that “every effort be made to enlarge its growing family of readers.”

“We learned that our readers like articles about history scenery, travel, and wildflowers,” Frank often said. “We placed a lot of emphasis on top-notch photographs, and we always put the reader first.”

Frank’s love of Texas and *Texas Highways* readers did not end with his 1990 retirement. Always frank and lively, his legendary letters to the editorial staff on yellow legal paper continued for decades and reminded us to stay true to our roots. Frank’s wisdom, wit, and energy remain unmatched, but his devotion to the Lone Star State will live on in these pages.—*Jill Lawless, editor emeritus* 

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