TEXAS HIGHWAYS™

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

ADVENTURELAND

A GUIDE TO THE NATURAL TREASURES OF THE PANHANDLE CANYONLANDS

By Matt Joyce

OCTOBER 2021

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+

THE RETURN OF LIVE MUSIC

FLIGHT OF THE GRACKLES


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Photo by Renee Dominguez

EDITOR'S

NOTE

Matt Joyce at Lake Meredith on the Canadian River

The Adventurer

Senior Managing Editor Matt Joyce has been documenting his outdoor adventures in *Texas Highways* for nearly a decade. For this month's cover story, the sixth-generation Texan traveled to Caprock Canyon, Palo Duro Canyon, and the Canadian River to chart a roadmap for an epic canyon-to-canyon vacation.

What was a highlight of your Canyons trip that didn't make it into the story?

The best part of traveling for *Texas Highways* is learning about different pockets of the state from locals who are fascinated with their own home turf. Chris Podzemny of Amarillo is a good example. "Podz," as he's known, builds trail systems for hikers and bikers across the Panhandle. At Palo Duro, Podz took me on a hike on the Rock Garden Trail, which he helped build 10 years ago with the Palo Duro Corps of Engineers. Our hike went deep into the park to spectacular side canyons I'd never seen before. To top it off, we jumped into an old stock tank known as the Duck Pond. The pond is typically dry and only fills every few years during unusually wet seasons like this summer. It was a blazing hot afternoon, but the water was chilly due to the cool Panhandle nights. Only time I've been swimming in the canyon.

Your stories often feature intensive physical challenges. Which trips have been the most personally challenging?

River trips on the Neches, Devils, and Rio Grande were personally challenging as I started a newbie and had to learn how to paddle. On the Rio Grande Lower Canyons trip, I fell out of my canoe, soaking my one set of clothes on a 40-degree November day. Cold! When I did the "5 Peaks in a Week" road trip in West Texas, I had to swallow my fear of heights when hiking to the top of Emory Peak in Big Bend National Park and Mount Livermore in the Davis Mountains. Both of those summits require some scrambling, complete with whipping winds and sheer drops.

What outdoor adventures are still on your to-do list?

I'd love to hike the roughly 100-mile Lone Star Hiking Trail in the Sam Houston National Forest.

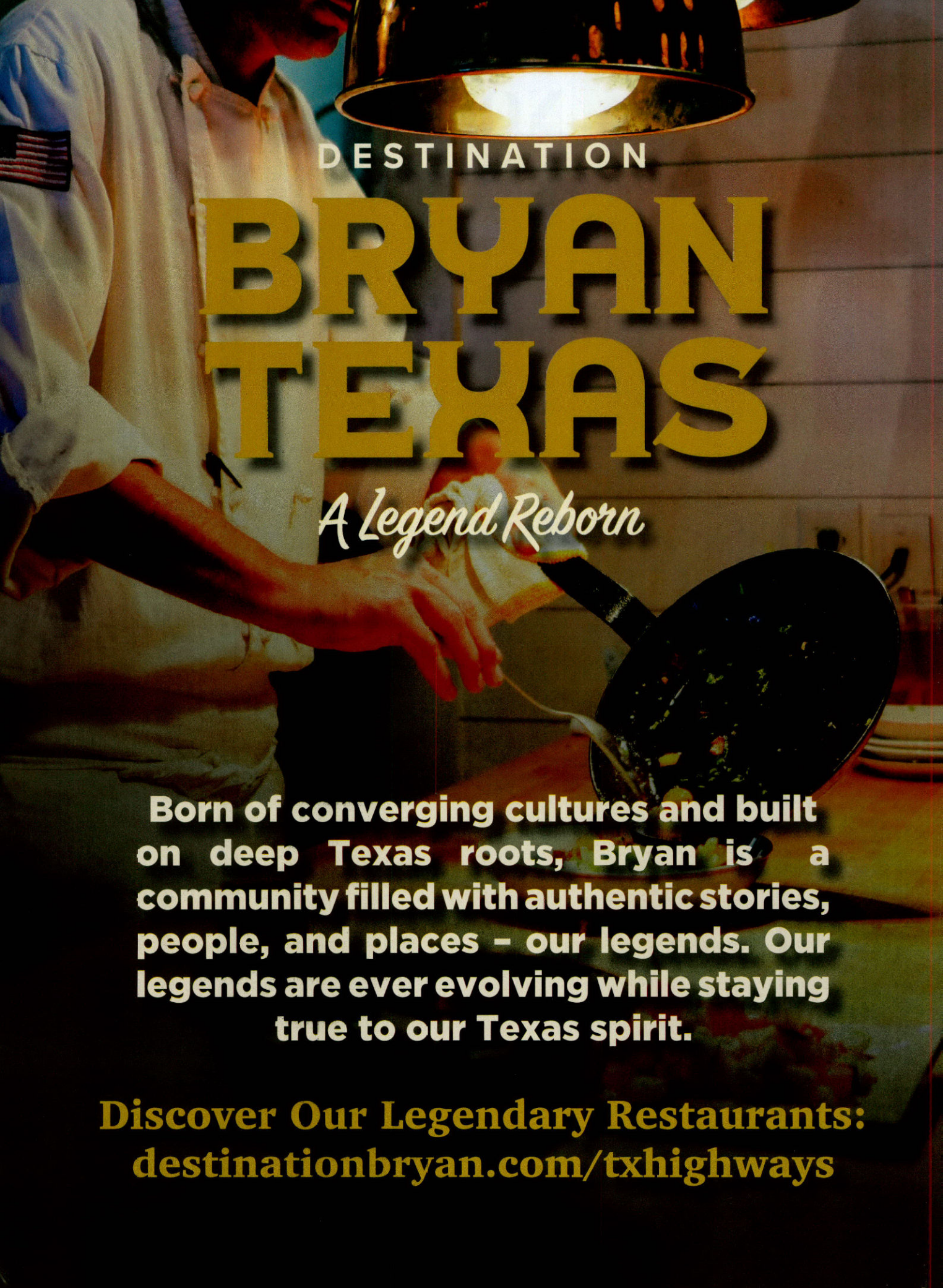
Your family spends a lot of time traveling the state in a pop-up camper. What are some of your favorite spots?

We've been on about 85 camping trips since we got a pop-up camper in 2012, according to my spreadsheet. Some of our favorite sites include South Llano River State Park, Maverick Ranch RV Park in Lajitas, and Daingerfield State Park. Swimming is always a key component. As for the future, we've never camped at Palo Duro. After my experience this summer, I'm itching to return with my family and the camper.

Emily R Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Photo: Kenny Braun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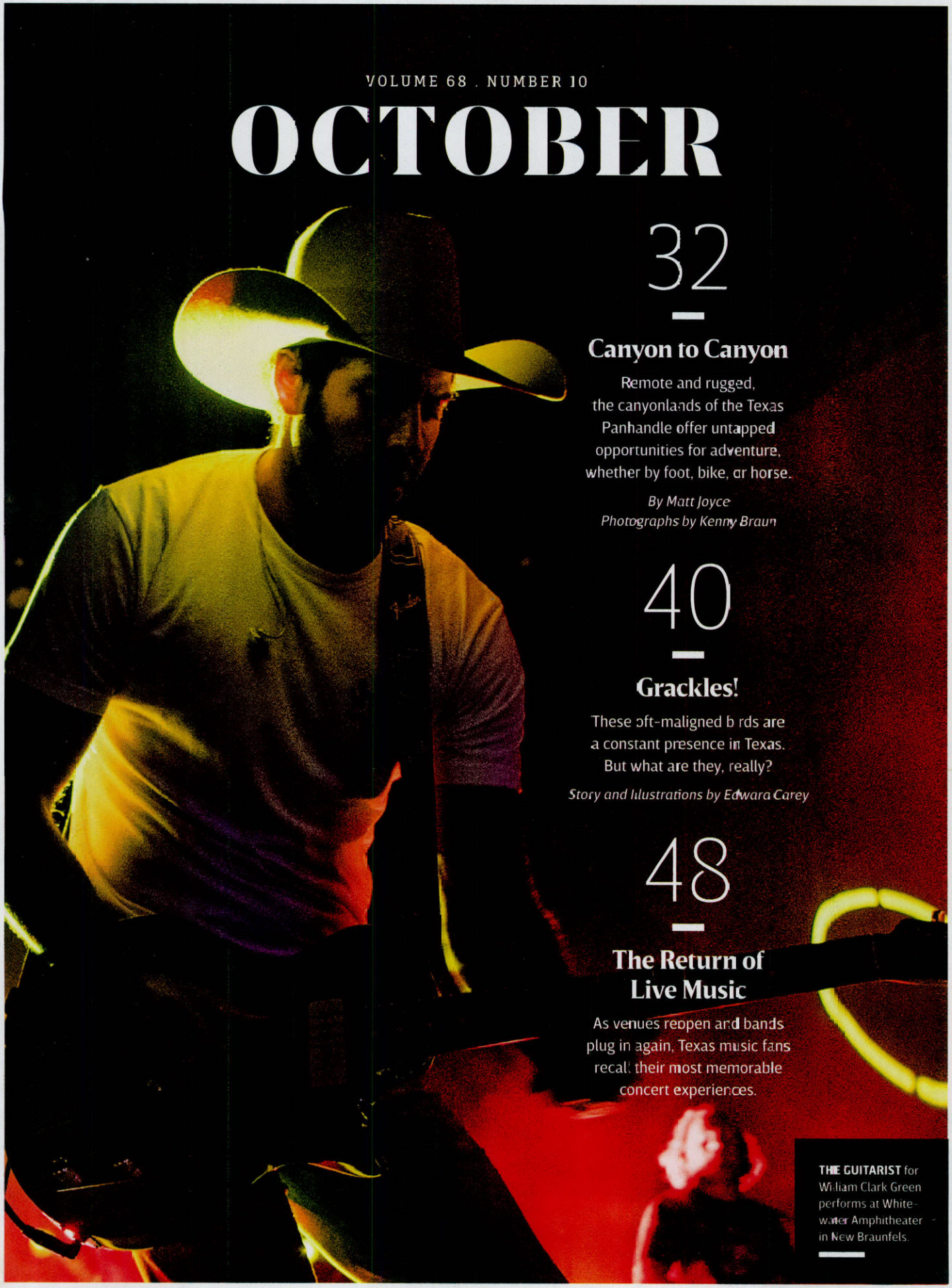


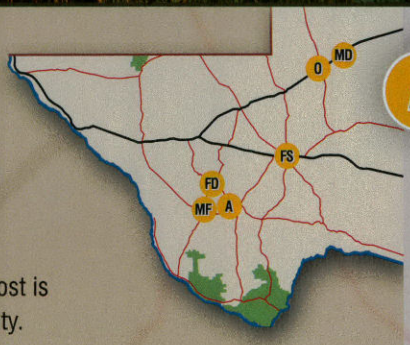
THE GUITARIST for William Clark Green performs at Whitewater Amphitheater in New Braunfels.

Photo: Tiffany Hofeldt

WEST TEXAS ROAD TRIP

As you explore, you'll find an amazing range of relaxation and adventure, natural beauty and urban culture, fine art, fine dining, small-town charm and big-city amenities...

but what you will remember most is the warm, West Texas hospitality.



A ALPINE

Natural beauty, unique nightlife and shopping, and a grand array of hotels and guest lodging make Alpine the perfect staging grounds for your West Texas adventure.

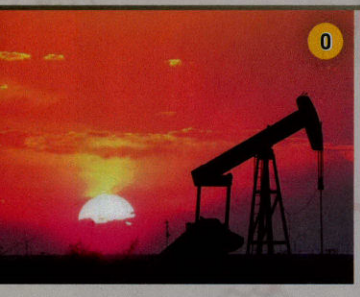
visitalpinetx.com

Historic & Mural Walking Tours: Explore Alpine's small and eminently walkable downtown with these guides to its historic and artistic highlights.

Nov 19-20 - ARTWALK
Alpine's biggest arts festival spans two days in November to showcase a variety of art exhibitions in many local businesses, all against a backdrop of festivities and live music.

MIDLAND–Midland is a great place to eat, play, shop & stay as you explore West Texas! Midland International Air & Space Port is the closest commercial airport to Big Bend National Park. ***visitmidland.com***

Sep 25-Nov 20 - Fiddlesticks Farms Cornfield Maze & Pumpkin Patch
Oct 10 - The Mavericks @ Wagner Nöel Center



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Oct 19-21 - Permian Basin International Oil Show
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FORT DAVIS–Experience the mile-high climate in the Texas mountains! Award-winning State and National Parks offer excellent nature activities and star gazing under the "Darkest Skies in North America"! ***fortdavis.com***

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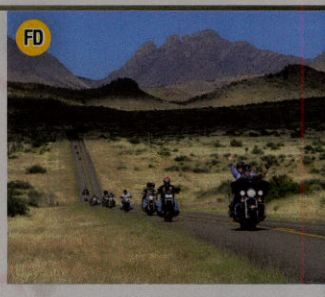

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Oct 2 - Fall Fest
Oct 13-16 - Big Bend Open Road Race 2.0

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Oct 8-10 - Made in Marfa & Chinati Weekend
Nov 5 - Ballroom Marfa presents MXTX with Graham Reynolds

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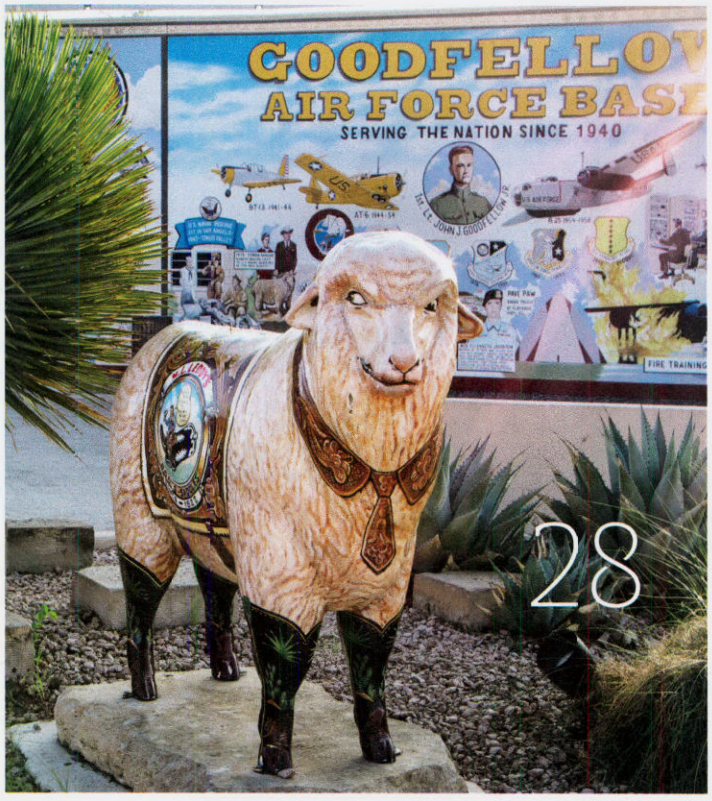

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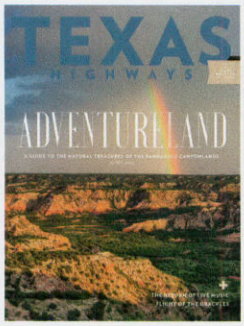

ON THE COVER
View of Palo Duro Canyon from El Coronado house at Doves Rest Cabins
Photo by Kenny Braun

Photos: Tom McCarthy Jr. (top); Jessica Attie (bottom)

Behind the Story

There's no British equivalent to Texas' infamous grackle, at least according to Edward Carey, who wrote and illustrated "Grackles!" (Page 40). Before moving to the Lone Star State from the U.K. 11 years ago, the Austin-based novelist had been aware of Texas hallmarks like cowboys and cacti, but "nobody told me about grackles," he says. Nearly immediately after arriving, the grackles commanded Carey's attention, and he began drawing and painting the creatures. "They are such a joy to draw because their faces are so dramatic," says Carey, who has become quite a fan of the bird. "They are like small demons that are a part of our daily existence. They are the birds we deserve." During the pandemic lockdown, Carey began a series of daily drawings, and grackles made frequent appearances. A book of these quarantine illustrations, titled *B: A Year in Plagues and Pencils*, will be published by Gallic Books this November.

Featured Contributors

Krystal Quiles
The visual artist and illustrator based in Brooklyn, New York, uses texture and color to connect with viewers, as she does in her illustration of Fort Worth filmmaker Chyna Robinson for "No Ordinary Filmmaker" (Page 75). "I was inspired by the words of Robinson, by her sense of community and empathy," Quiles says. "I can relate to how your environment impacts your work and how people-watching can stimulate that creativity." Quiles has worked with The Smithsonian Institution, TED, and *The Nation*, collaborating on illustrations that encourage social awareness.

Robert Wilonsky
Wilonsky has been doing research for "Good Neighbors" (Page 12) his entire life. The essay, set in South Dallas, recalls his family's deep roots in the neighborhood: His grandfather moved to the area near Fair Park almost a century ago. "While I was working on this essay, I asked a local preservationist who should serve as my 'expert' about the old neighborhood," the Dallas-based writer says. "He suggested the woman who now lives in my dad's childhood home, who knows my dad as the guy who sometimes shows up just to say hi." A former city columnist at the *Dallas Morning News*, Wilonsky has covered Dallas for over 30 years.

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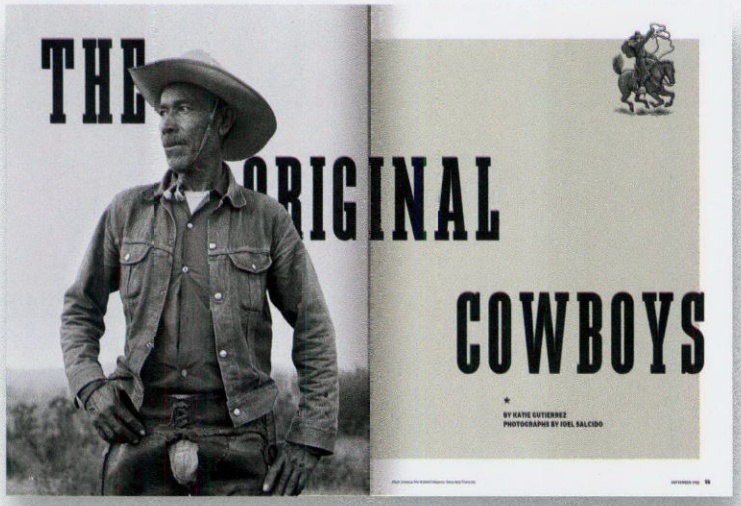


Loved "The Original Cowboys" and the wonderful story of Samuel Buentello. His is an amazing life story and worthy of reading.
Richard Johnson, DeSoto

Lipscomb Sweet Home
My grandparents lived there for a time, and my grandfather was the justice of the peace ["This Happy Place," August]. I remember all the turkeys! They'd come around every evening and sometimes get on the roof of the house.
Rhyan Sikorski, Dallas

Wine List
McPherson's viognier is a favorite ["High Plains Vintner," August]. Also a fan of the sangiovese. We enjoyed a bottle with homemade pizza just the other night.
David Wilcoxen, Austin

Driving Across the Pond
You should try lorry (truck) driving in the U.K. ["Keep on Truckin'," August]. No two minutes are the same on our roads.
David Cutforth, Stamford, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom

Cover Cowgirl

I couldn't believe my eyes when I pulled the latest issue from my mailbox. The gorgeous, Avedon-esque photograph of Maddie Ferguson astride Bonnie by photographer Dave Shafer reminded me of what I love about black-and-white photography. And reading the articles inside brought to mind my early enthrallment with the cowgirl way of life.

Cynthia Efferson, Fort Worth

Yee-haw

As a longtime reader of your magazine, I find it to be one of the best in all categories. Your September 2021 issue, however, achieved new heights! The whole issue is an amazing salute to the original and current cowboys and cowgirls who helped then and now to make Texas unique.

Terry Arnold, San Antonio

Family History

My grandfather was a vaquero ["The Original Cowboys," September]. I'm his only grandchild left that can record his story. If I don't, my cousins, children, nieces, and nephews will never really know Guiermo Gomez, my Grandad Joe. My great-grandfather brought horses from Spain to a rancho in Chihuahua, Mexico, and never left. He stayed on that ranch his entire life. My grandfather worked on that ranch until his father died, and then as a young teenager came to Texas and joined an older brother who was working on Waggoner Ranch. Grandad was a mestizo vaquero whose life experience until he was nearly 30 was horses and horsemanship. That's why as a young teenager he and his older brother were responsible for a remuda. His stories of them taking the remuda across the Red River at Doan's Crossing north of Vernon and getting Waggoner cattle onto Quanah Parker's "Big Pasture" need to be preserved. My grandparents worked hard, achieved their citizenships, raised their five children, and lived wonderful, productive lives.

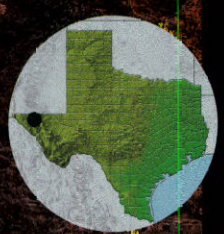
Rusty Knox, Lampasas

Say That Again?

Just read some wonderful articles in the August issue on small towns. The comment from Alma Alvarado on the proper pronunciation of "Leakey" made me laugh ["My Hometown"]. Honestly, we should have a dictionary and pronunciation guide on how to say our Texas towns and counties for all the newcomers coming to our great state. It would be a shame to lose those. Can you say "Bexar"?

Charlene Andre, San Antonio

We want to hear from you! Send photos, feedback, and recommendations to letters@texashighways.com; P.O. Box 11009, Austin, TX, 78714-1009. Follow @TexasHighways on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest.



Golden Promise

Bigtooth maple trees make Guadalupe Mountains National Park one of Texas' best places to see colorful fall foliage. "I had planned to be in the Guadalupe Mountains on an unrelated assignment and was lucky that it coincided with the change in colors," says photographer Kenny Braun, who took this shot last October while hiking Devil's Hall Trail. Luck certainly helps when it comes to catching peak leaf display, but summer conditions this year portend a colorful fall. Elizabeth Jackson, Guadalupe Mountains' chief of interpretation, says the season's soaking rains should enhance brilliant colors. An October cold snap of three to five days and mild winds would also help, she adds. Guadalupe Mountains' fall foliage typically lasts from mid-to-late October through November. The park updates a Fall Color Report on its website and social media channels. "Trying to predict natural events is difficult," Jackson says. "We anticipate a good color season, but it could be very, very good."

Photo: Kenny Braun

Crockett

Pipp Gillette celebrates the musical legacy of the Piney Woods

By Heather Brand

PIPP GILLETTE runs the Camp Street Café & Store in a historic building where Lightnin' Hopkins once played.

Photo: Tom McCarthy Jr.

Nestled in the Piney Woods of East Texas, Crockett was established shortly after the Texas Revolution and named for famed frontiersman Davy Crockett. With an economy based on lumber, agriculture, oil, and the railroad, Crockett grew into a busy crossroads, and by the early 1900s, it was a common stop for Black performers on the Chitlin' Circuit. Crockett's stages also attracted local musicians, including the legendary bluesman Lightnin' Hopkins, from nearby Centerville, who was a common sight in town. Only one of those old venues still exists—now known as the Camp Street Café & Store. Pipp Gillette, who moved to the area in 1983, restored the historic building in 1998 with his brother, Guy, who has since passed away. Gillette hosts regional and national acts at Camp Street and also takes the stage himself, playing traditional cowboy music. Gillette's family has deep roots in the area, and today he lives on the same ranch in nearby Lovelady where his grandparents once raised cotton and cattle and where he spent summers as a boy.

Notable Namesake

"Houston County was the first incorporated county in the Republic of Texas in 1837, and the oldest road in Texas runs through it—El Camino Real de los Tejas. David Crockett took that road from Nacogdoches and camped here. A fellow here named Elijah Gossett from Tennessee heard there was someone camping out by this spring and went to investigate. He found out it was his friend Davy Crockett from Tennessee. The next day, Crockett headed on to San Antonio, and we know what happened there. After the revolution, the Gossett family gave the community the land and named it Crockett."

Cotton and Cattle

"From the earliest days, folks were coming from places like Alabama and Georgia, and some were slaveholders. They brought their slaves with them, and it became huge cotton country. Crockett used to have four or five cotton gins. Timber and cattle have always been a big part of the local economy too. When I was a kid, there was still cotton around, but it was being phased out. Crockett has many big, historic homes that come from the heyday of the cotton period."

Camp Street

"The African American population is still here, and that's one of the reasons Black music and the blues thrived like it did. Camp Street [now South Third Street] was in the African American business district in the days of segregation. My grandfather owned the buildings on this street as rental properties. The Camp Street Café & Store building used to be the Starlight barber shop, café, taxi stand, and pool hall. Lightnin' Hopkins would stroll up and down this street playing for tips. Since 1998, many touring musicians have played at the Camp Street Café & Store. It's got good sound and acoustics. I always give credit to Lightnin' Hopkins for the ambiance. It's a place where he played, and there aren't many of those left."

Monumental Figures

"We put up a statue of Lightnin' Hopkins across the street from the Camp Street Café & Store in 2002 on the 20th anniversary of his death. The whole community really got behind it. Another building on Camp Street also has a mural of some of the musicians who played here. We put up a second statue of local cowboy Myrtis Dightman on the east side of town. Myrtis unveiled it himself in 2011. He competed in bull riding in the National Finals Rodeo seven times [beginning in 1964] and was considered the Jackie Robinson of rodeo."

Shop Local

"We have a number of cafés on the square: the Moosehead Café, Keshia's Café, and Betty Boop's Sandwich & Soup. Another place that's quite remarkable is Stories of Texas. It's a gallery with a lot of Western art, pottery, and antiques. I carve [bird] decoys, and it has my decoys in there right now. Almost everything is made in Texas."

Davy Crockett's Fiddle

"Davy Crockett was the first fiddler to come through town, and Crockett has hosted the annual World Champion Fiddlers Festival since 1937 [on the fourth Saturday of September]. Some amazing fiddlers have come here from all over the country."

TOWN TRIVIA

POPULATION:
6,447

NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:
2

YEAR FOUNDED:
1837

NEAREST CITY:
Houston, 119 miles south

MARQUEE EVENTS:
Christmas in Crockett on the Square, Nov. 20; Davy Crockett Festival, April; Myrtis Dightman Rodeo, September.

MAP IT:
Camp Street Café & Store, 215 S. Third St.


ESSO
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MOTOR OIL
AMALIE
AUTOMOTIVE Service
PETROLS - OILS
WE HAVE
SPOT OIL

Good Neighbors

In South Dallas, a father and son reconnect with the forgotten soul of the city

By Robert Wilonsky

My father and I pulled into The Market at Bonton Farms in South Dallas to grab lunch before our trip to the old neighborhood a few miles away. This was at the beginning of the year, after a long stretch in quarantine. In the "before times"—before the pandemic, before Dad's health declined—this was something we did regularly.

We would drive down to Bexar Street, to where it dead-ends into the Great Trinity Forest and a Trinity River levee—one of Dallas' most beautiful natural treasures. There at The Market, we would have a bite for breakfast. Then we would head home, toward North Dallas, by retracing my father's childhood steps along memory lanes called Park Row, South Boulevard, and the former Forest Avenue long ago renamed for Martin Luther King Jr.

For more than a year, we had spent precious few hours together in the same space, though my parents live only 5 miles from my house. But for our sanity, we had decided to mask up, gas up, and head to Dad's South Dallas motherland, which some current residents call The Brotherland.

"*Whoawhoawhoa*," my 77-year-old father, Herschel Wilonsky, moaned through his mask as we approached our destination. The farm and market reside atop the former Turner Courts housing project, which was once so violent even cops stayed away as soon as the sun threatened to set. Parked out front was a shiny, restored dark blue 1929 two-door Model A Ford with running boards and wheels painted daybreak yellow. It looked almost identical to the four-door Model A Dad rebuilt when he was a teenager and kept under a car cover until Mom convinced him to sell it last year.

Dad grabbed his wooden cane, which was once his father's, and hustled for a closer peek. Bonton employee Clifton Reese is a native of this neighborhood and a family friend. He was standing outside, saying goodbye to some customers, when he saw Dad ambling toward the vintage ride. Clifton wanted to go in for a hug but settled for the requisite elbow bump. Dad asked who owned the Ford. Clifton told him it belonged to a man who was dining on the patio.

"Can't miss him," Clifton said. "He's the one smoking the cigar."

We placed our lunch order then headed out back, where a man who introduced himself as Cedric Sanders was puffing away at a table he shared with another man and two women. Dad asked Cedric about the car, and the two of them small-talked for a few minutes. My father told Cedric if he ever needed parts for the Model A, he had plenty stashed in his garage. Dad told him they were remnants of the inventory from the auto parts store he and his father once owned on nearby Second Avenue down the street from Fair Park.

"Wait a second," said Cedric, his eyes and grin widening. "You're S&W Auto Parts!"

Illustration: Jane Webster

My father grinned beneath his mask and said, yes, he was one of the Ws in S&W Auto Parts, which he reluctantly shuttered in 2009 before heading into an unexpected retirement. Cedric just about passed out at this realization. He explained he had been a customer of my father's years ago. I hear this often whenever I walk around South Dallas, likely because my father spent more than half a century on Second Avenue.

I love that these men remember my father, a bald, bearded white Jew with a voice like Big Tex who inherited a business he never planned on running and stayed there until it was time to go. It moves me because of how much their affection and fond memories move him. He spent most of his life standing behind a rotting, stained chipboard counter for 10 hours every day. In the mid-1950s, my grandfather Harry Wilonsky, like all the other South Dallas Jews of that era, moved his wife and son to the cheap, wide-open, white-open spaces of North Dallas. At the same time, he moved the parts store from Elm Street in Deep Ellum near downtown, its home since 1932, to nearby Second Avenue. So, he never really left South Dallas. And it never left him.

When my grandfather moved the store in 1955, Second Avenue was still thriving, a lively boulevard filled with nightclubs, groceries, and restaurants. Paw-Paw, as I called him, knew every shopkeeper on the street, among them Jack Repp, a Holocaust survivor who owned a dry-goods store across from the parts store. Before he died last year, Jack told me he liked to visit with my grandfather because they could speak to each other in Yiddish. That was a sound not often heard in Fair Park back then.

I spent high school summers working at the parts store in the early and mid-'80s, selling U-joints and carburetors and brake pads to "shade tree" mechanics for whom the store doubled as a neighborhood hangout. Once, a longtime customer walked in with a pistol aimed at my dad and his father. I forget why now. But Dad escorted him out, his arm over the man's slumped shoulders. The customer came back a few days later, as if nothing had happened.

I used to think it would have made for a good workplace sitcom, like *Barney Miller*, as tense as it was tickling. Dad employed a long-haired bass player named Olin, who spent nights gigging at a joint called Mother Blues on Lemmon Avenue; a 6-foot-11 scoundrel called Slim, who stole from Dad on occasion and was eventually shot to death in his car; and a good old boy named Kirk, who Dad affectionately called Putz.

Despite weekends and long summers behind the counter, I learned next to

nothing about the parts business or, for that matter, how cars work. But I liked working alongside Dad and spending time with my grandfather. Paw-Paw would take me on deliveries in his El Camino, which smelled of 43-year-old ashtray, or to lunch at the Old Mill Inn at Fair Park, or on long drives around the neighborhood he loved and refused to leave even as it came undone. He was a generous man who gave little bottles of bourbon to regulars at Christmas. His customers were his friends, his people, his *mishpucha*.

By the time I worked there, and my younger brother after me, S&W smelled of cigarettes and grease and sweat. And it stood along a stretch of avenue whose slow, steep decline meant blocks of liquor stores, no-tell motels, biker-club headquarters, and cracked empty lots. Much like it is today.

In the '50s, when the community shifted from Jewish to Black residents, city and state officials split the neighborhood in half by running an expressway called South Central straight through it, just past the Forest movie theater. Now, the neighborhood on the west side of the freeway is mostly blank real estate with for-sale signs teasing investors and developers with their blueprints for shoebox condos. There's a lot of that in South Dallas these days.

I've read and heard enough about the old neighborhood to become nostalgic for the Second Avenue I never saw, the South Dallas I never knew. Where middle-class Black and white residents worked and lived and drank and ate. Where Jimmy's Food Store, an Italian grocery that's now an East Dallas landmark, first operated as Morningside Super Market. Where *Buck Rogers* serials played at the Dal-Sec movie house, which the city bulldozed in the '60s, along with half the neighborhood, to make room for a Fair Park parking lot.

When my son, a freshman at the University of Texas at Austin, was younger, we spent almost every Saturday in this part of town. We'd get lost on side streets, searching for remnants of what used to be. We hunted for ghost signs on old buildings advertising long-gone shops, walked around the historic Bama Pie

building that stands empty, and rooted around for bricks that said "BUILDERS," the name of my grandfather's old brickyard, once located where the Mesquite Rodeo now stands.

My father, who occasionally forgets what happened five minutes ago but remembers every detail of 10,000 yesterdays ago, is nostalgic for the lost city he knew better than most. This is the city my grandfather and his brothers escaped to, lived in, and helped build. The Wilonskys had dry-goods stores and wrecking yards and parts shops in Deep Ellum, even a pawn shop called Dallas in downtown. I've heard the stories, seen the faded photos, even had a few drinks in Uncle Eli's old clothing store in Deep Ellum, now the Anvil Pub. The auto parts store on Second Avenue is still there, too, painted over and bricked up, now a church for homeless people.

Harry Wilonsky, a short man born in 1904 in Šakiai, Lithuania, was the last of four brothers to come to Dallas. He came to this country when he was just 18, speaking no English, and though he was in Texas most of his life, he never shed his Eastern European accent. He died at 83 in March 1988 mumbling about the deep snows of home.

He and my father also spent more waking hours on Second Avenue than they ever did in the place called Preston Hollow, the North Dallas neighborhood they moved to in the '50s. Maybe that's why people like Cedric Sanders still remember the store and my father. Because Dad never left. Because he never wanted to.

After lunch at Bonton, Cedric took Dad outside to look under the hood. Dad used his cane to point out what had been replaced and what was original. He told Cedric if he ever needed the original spark plugs and not those modern-day fill-ins, just give him a ring. Dad handed him a S&W Auto Parts business card. The old Second Avenue phone number now goes to Dad's cell phone.

My father beamed as we drove the 3 miles from Bonton to his old house, a bungalow on Park Row. It was as though he'd just been reunited with long-lost family members. For the first time in a year, I grabbed his hand and gave it a squeeze.

For the first 11 years of his life, from March 1944 until the summer of '55, Herschel Wilonsky lived at 2521 Park Row, between Atlanta and Edgewood streets, about a mile from the front gates to Fair Park, home of the State Fair of Texas. To this day, my father can stand in front of his boyhood house and tell you who lived where. "That was the Ablons' house," he

I've read and heard enough about the old neighborhood to become nostalgic for the Second Avenue I never saw, the South Dallas I never knew.

said that afternoon. He nodded toward bungalows along the block. "And that was the Jacobs', and that was the Levines', and that was the Chesnicks'."

This is a historic neighborhood; it says so on the plaque planted along South Boulevard in 1981, telling the story of Jewish merchants who came to South Dallas but eventually moved north and were replaced by "prominent Black leaders of the Dallas area [including] educators, lawyers, merchants, clergymen, doctors, and business executives." Every June, beginning in 2012, I ferried the *Dallas Morning News*' summer interns on a daylong city tour, and this marker was always our first stop.

I'd gone to work for Dallas' only daily after 20 years at the *Dallas Observer* and, before that, two at the *Dallas Times Herald*. In the spring of 2016, I was promoted to city columnist. It was a dream gig for a native son who collects every old book and bottle and knickknack and scrap of yellowed paper with the word "Dallas" on it.

During my tenure, I probably wrote more about South Dallas than any other part of town. Its past and present have been so poorly misrepresented that it's too often portrayed as a place without much future. I used to worry that the interns, a mix of high school and college students mostly from out of town, would hear bad things about South Dallas during their brief stays here, that the ignorant and scared who refused to step foot down here unless it's State Fair time would send them home with the wrong idea.

Maybe it's not the heart of the city—shiny and glitzy, big and brand new—but

continued on Page 74

TEXAS HIGHWAYS

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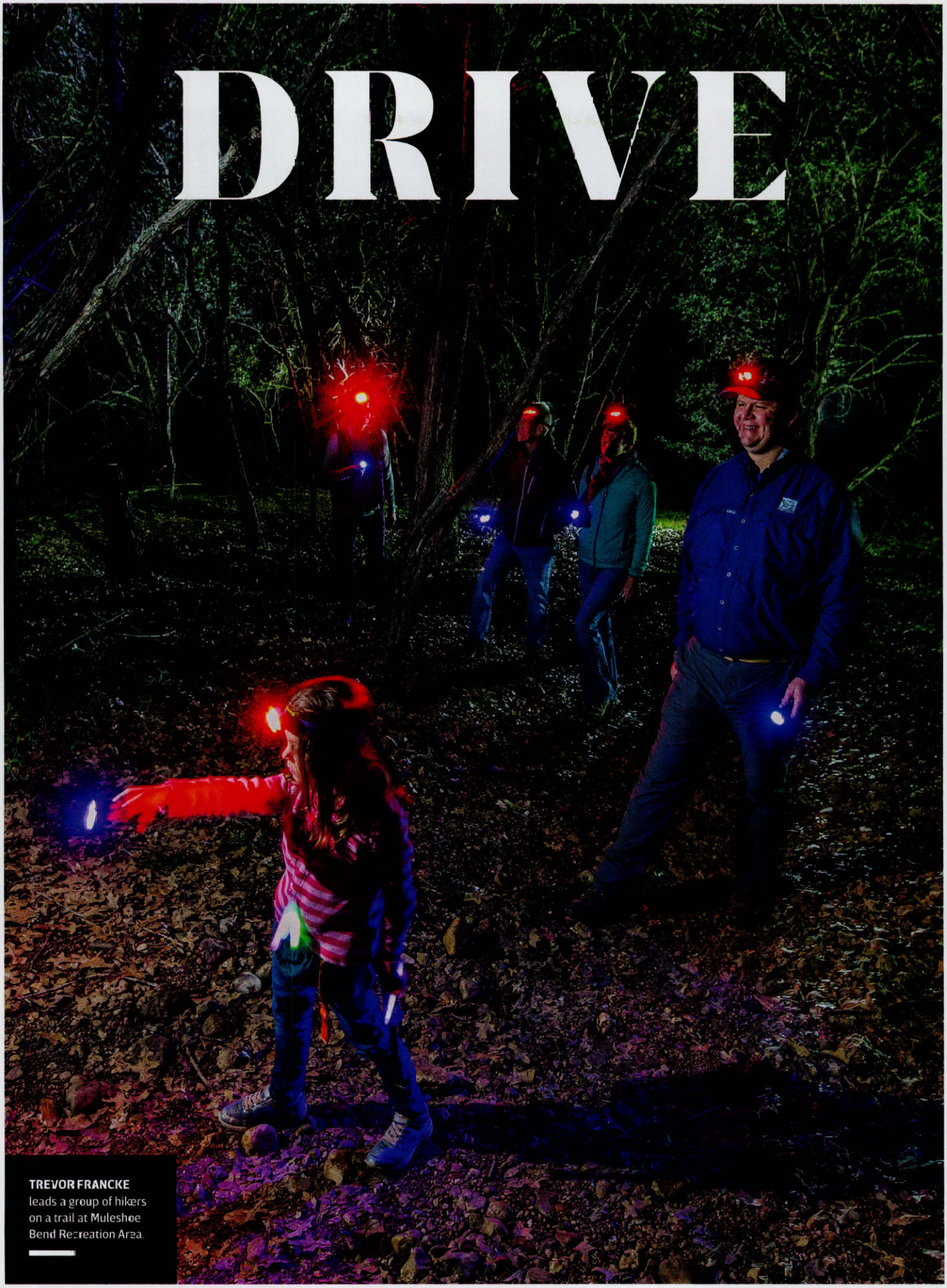


TREVOR FRANCKE leads a group of hikers on a trail at Muleshoe Bend Recreation Area.

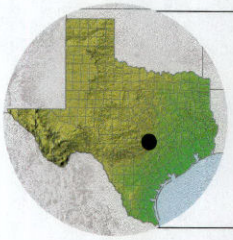
Photo: Erich Schlegel

A BARK SCORPION glows in the leaf litter alongside the trail during a Muleshoe by Night hike.

What Lurks in the Dark?

Encounter creepy-crawlies and a new perspective on nighttime hikes at Muleshoe Bend

By Pam LeBlanc



MULESHOE BEND
2820 CR 414, Spicewood.
512-473-3366; lcra.org/parks/muleshoe-bend
Two-hour hikes cost $20 per person, $25 per couple, or $50 per family.

I'm following Trevor Francke down a twisty trail at Muleshoe Bend Recreation Area an hour after dusk, sweeping a black light along the ground in front of me with every step. A glowing green scorpion pops into focus, and then another. Soon I discover spiders lurk everywhere, too. Add to that a cacophony of whippoorwills and some coyotes yipping in the distance, and it quickly becomes apparent the night shift has reported for duty on this cloudy, still evening in late May.

"I've seen a scorpion every time I've done this trek—sometimes 50 of them," says Francke, who is leading us through the 654-acre park that skirts the shores of Lake Travis northwest of Austin.

The Lower Colorado River Authority launched its series of after-dark hikes here last fall and now offers about one a month year-round. A program coordinator leads each excursion, sharing a little information about the local flora and fauna and encouraging participants to relax under the cloak of darkness. Most of us have been conditioned since childhood to fear things that go bump in the night, but this eye-opening walk reminds me we're never alone out here in the woods—and, for me, that's comforting.

My husband and I were looking for a new way to explore the outdoors. I'm familiar with most of the daytime inhabitants of Central Texas parks, but I wanted a better sense of what prowls the brush at night. So, we booked one of the park's 42 campsites. En route, we picked up brisket and sausage from Opie's Barbecue in nearby Spicewood. Upon arrival, we parked our new adventure rig, a 2021 Ford Transit nicknamed Vincent VanGo, next to the mesquite trees in Site 13 and watched a pair of Canada geese flap overhead while we waited for the sun to sink in the sky. Ten minutes before 9 p.m., we grabbed our headlamps and struck out for the designated meeting spot at a trailhead along the park's main gravel road.

The threat of rain must have scared off some hikers because just one other

Photo: Erich Schlegel

HIGHLY SUSPECT Bowfishing, a Bertram-based outfitter, leads a nighttime expedition on Lake Buchanan.

couple showed up for the nocturnal walk, down from the regular nearly dozen people. Francke, the parks program coordinator for LCRA's Western Parks District, gives each of us a handheld black-light flashlight and an infrared thermal imaging monocular to help us spot creatures while we walk. First, though, he reminds us to stay alert and watch for stinging critters. "They're not going to jump out of the grass and get you," he assures us. In addition to scorpions, centipedes and rattlesnakes also call this park home.

Fireflies blink on and off like a string of holiday lights hung in the scrub as Francke finishes his briefing. He pulls out his phone and fires up the Audubon Bird Guide app. He wants us to hear the sound of an Eastern screech owl. "Quite often, I'll get one to talk to me," he says. We don't have any luck with a real screech owl, or with the deeper, more resonant call of a great horned owl, which he plays next. "Nobody's talking to me tonight."

We flick off our headlamps, switch on our black lights, and head down the trail. It's fairly flat, but it takes my eyes a few minutes to adjust to the darkness, so I move slowly. It doesn't take long before we realize we're surrounded. Less than 25 yards down the trail, Jon Zmikly, one of the hikers and a senior lecturer in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Texas State University, sweeps his black light over the ground, illuminating a 2-inch arthropod as bright as a green anole: a bark scorpion, or *Centruroides sculpturatus*.

Scorpions are groovy. Females give live birth to litters of about 30 scorplings that climb onto their mother's back soon after birth, where they stay until they molt. They live, on average, three to five years, according to Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. Treat them with respect because stings are painful and cause swelling that can last for several days. Within a few minutes we've spotted a dozen more scorpions, some of them no bigger than a quarter, others as big as a fat thumb. "The sense of awe people get when they see their first scorpion—especially when it's a little kid who finds one—it's just great," Francke says.

For two hours we prowl the woods, looking into shadows and listening to the low buzz of crickets and the occasional twig cracking underfoot. We point our infrared sensors into the murk,

Make a Night of It

Recreate in the dark at these parks and lakes across the state.

To get a glimpse of moonlight streaming through cypress trees—casting light on the alligators, beavers, minks, and owls that live on Caddo Lake—book a night tour with **Caddo Outback Tours** in Karnack. caddolaketours.com

Overnight guests at the **Canyon of the Eagles** on Lake Buchanan can attend programs led by a qualified astronomer every Wednesday through Sunday, weather permitting. canyonoftheeagles.com

Two LCRA parks, **Lake Bastrop South Shore Park** and **Jessica Hollis Park** on Lake Austin, offer full-moon paddle tours. lcra.org/parks

Bowfishing is legal for taking non-game fish in Texas public waters, and it's a popular nighttime activity in the **Highland Lakes** region and at **Martin Dies Jr. State Park** in East Texas. highlandlakes.com; tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/martin-dies-jr

Other state parks offer an array of nighttime activities, including stargazing programs at **Enchanted Rock State Natural Area**, **Lake Whitney State Park**, and **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park**. tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks

Photo: Erich Schlegel

hoping to spot an armadillo, raccoon, fox, or nesting deer, but they're staying hidden tonight. We amuse ourselves by pointing the devices at each other to see how it highlights warm objects. "Let's walk as quietly as we can," Francke says. "Think about why we're here. The important part about being in nature is just finding yourself."

We pause in front of a labyrinth of carefully placed stones. One by one we tiptoe through it, admiring the little mound of treasures carefully arranged at its center—a fishing lure that glows in the black light and someone's bandana. We stand a few minutes, focusing on the breeze that's whispering against our skin, the rustling of leaves overhead, and the feeling of solid ground beneath our feet. "Remember to breathe," Francke says quietly.

We make our way back to the trailhead then continue across the main road. There, next to a grove of oaks and ashe juniper, we flip the white lights of our headlamps back on. "Sway the light back and forth and look for green dots," Francke says.

We scan the ground 10 feet away, and a constellation of green dots jumps into view, nature's glitter clinging to tall grasses and low-hanging tree branches wherever we look. "It's all kinds of spiders," Francke says. "They're everywhere." Part of me wishes I didn't know just how many spiders are training their eyes on us on this humid night, but I remind myself they are beneficial predators that keep other insects in check.

Zmikly likes hiking at night because it forces him to use senses he doesn't always use, instead of relying solely on vision. Tonight, he noticed the smell of cedar trees and paid attention to chirping and croaking that normally fades into the background. "I just think the night provides a different view of life," he says. "Totally different creatures come out that we don't often see, and the adventure of getting to see what's around the next curve is accentuated."

Margo Richards, LCRA's vice president of community resources, says the hikes have been popular, especially as more people head outdoors for socially distant recreation. At Muleshoe Bend alone, visitation numbers are 60% higher than they were before the pandemic began. If positive feedback about the night hikes keeps rolling in, they could be scheduled at other LCRA-operated parks.

"The fun doesn't end when the sun goes down," Richards says. "It's just a way to let people see a park in a different light than they typically would."

Or, perhaps, a different dark.

Forged in Fire

Sergio Menchaca turns old steel tools and wood scraps into "blades with a past"

By Laurel Miller

Ask Sergio Menchaca when he became interested in knives and he'll joke, "According to my dad, the moment I was born. But in reality, he gave me my first knife when I was 5. For some reason, I've always been drawn to them." Menchaca has grown up to be the gifted, mostly self-taught knifemaker behind Texas Sage Forge, an online operation offering high-quality custom blades.

Menchaca's upbringing in Junction was typical of a Hill Country kid. He spent his time fishing, hunting, and butchering wild game for the dinner table. Knife in hand, he began to equate preparing food and cooking to familial love. Nowadays, he pairs antique steel scraps such as sawmill blades, plow discs, and hay rakes for blades with vintage wood, antlers, bone, cactus, and reclaimed native hardwood for handles to create "blades with a past." His full-tang knives—the metal used to form the blade runs the full length of the handle—start at $150. His specialties are custom kitchen knives and 14-inch barbecue slicers for his predominantly chef and pitmaster client base, which includes Mark Scott, co-owner and pitmaster of Convenience West barbecue in Marfa.

Menchaca, who is also the principal of Bowie High School in Bowie, made his first knife in 2015 as "a fun way to de-stress." Shortly thereafter, his friend and master bladesmith Chris Arguello invited him to learn how to forge. "It was magical," Menchaca recalls. "It's not just working with fire; it's about taking something that's considered trash and transforming it into something valuable with decades of use."

Menchaca is also inspired by turning family treasures into tools that become heirlooms. He's made a blade from a 150-year-old wrench that belonged to a customer's great-grandfather and turned an 18th-century oak wagon wheel into a handle. Customers can also have colorful epoxy resin molded into the handles. Even using old steel, Menchaca hammers his blades to a superb edge. "I forge thinner blades than most: ⅛-inch to 1/16-inch, versus ¼-inch," he says. "Most chefs prefer that because it yields a super light knife that cuts effortlessly."

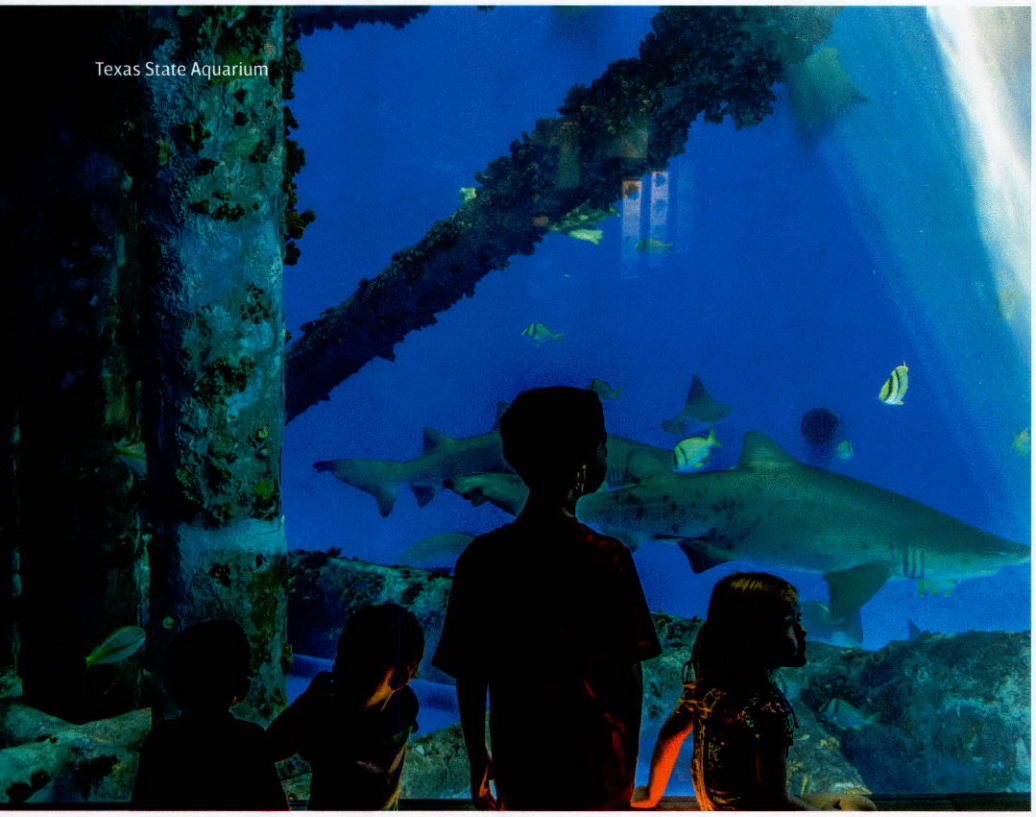
Recently, Menchaca has been crafting Japanese-style blades designed for various uses—*suntoku, honesuki, nakiri*—but he'll make everything from oyster shuckers to bowies. "Crafting knives still gives me a connection to my family." *For more information, visit texas-sage-forge.business.site.*

Photo: Vaughn Luciano

Fin-tastic

Gulf Coast sharks preserve the delicate balance of marine life

By Melissa Gaskill



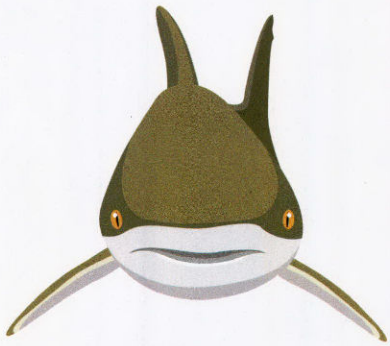
Texas State Aquarium

Chances are, if you've visited the Texas coast, you have been near sharks. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department scientists catch sharks along the coast as a way to estimate how many live in our waters and where. From 2010 to 2019, they caught around 1,600, including blacktip, spinner, bonnethead, and bull sharks.

That indicates a fairly healthy shark population, which is good news. Without these top-of-the-food-chain predators, says Greg Stunz, a researcher at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, animals on which they prey become over-abundant and upset the balance in marine environments. Without sharks to eat some of the big fish on coral reefs, those fish eat up the little fish that consume algae, allowing the green stuff to take over the reef.

Globally, sharks are disappearing, primarily because of commercial overfishing. A 2021 study published in the scientific journal *Nature* reported that since 1970 the number of ocean sharks and their close relatives, rays, declined by 71%. Three-quarters of shark species currently face risk of extinction, including several found in Texas waters, such as hammerhead and whale sharks.

Sharks simply are not designed to survive intense fishing. "They are slow to mature, don't have many young, and don't reproduce as rapidly as smaller fish," Stunz says. "We have to be extremely cautious in the way we harvest them."



That Bites

Sharks pose little danger to humans. "We just aren't on the menu, and shark bites are very rare," Stunz says, adding that the last fatality by shark in Texas was over 50 years ago. "Most of the time, they really don't want to interact with us." Statistics back him up. Your likelihood of being killed by a shark is 1 in 3.7 million; of being hit by an asteroid, 1 in 700,000. Here are some easy ways to lower those odds even more.

Stay away from people fishing or schools of fish in the water.

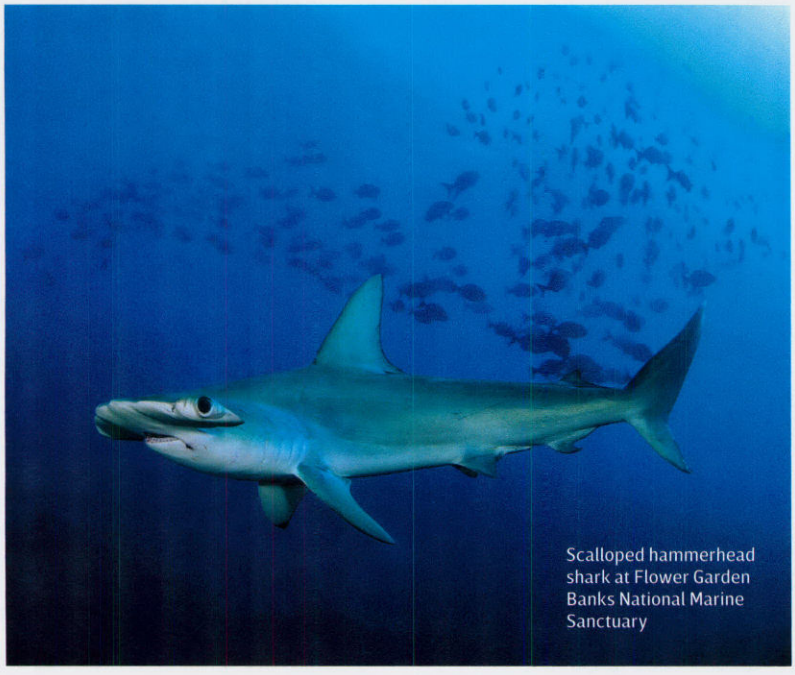
Avoid being in the water at dawn and dusk, when sharks are most active.

When fishing, don't put your string of fish in the water.

40 feet
Length of a whale shark, the largest fish in the sea

6
Number of common shark species in the Gulf of Mexico

6,500
Number of sharks tagged by Texas anglers since 2014



Scalloped hammerhead shark at Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Where to Safely See Sharks

Texas State Aquarium, Corpus Christi
A permanent *Saving Sharks* exhibit features a life-size great white shark replica, jaws of a prehistoric Megalodon, full-size diving cage, and a map tracking tagged sharks in real time. The touch pool features small sharks; reef sharks circle a shipwreck in the H-E-B Caribbean Sea exhibit; and sand tiger sharks swim in the *Islands of Steel* exhibit. *texasstateaquarium.org*

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, Gulf of Mexico
On these reefs 80-125 miles off the Texas coast, scuba divers can get close to a variety of sharks, including reef, bull, silky, sandbar and nurse sharks. Scalloped hammerheads gather here in large groups from January to early April, and whale sharks pass through July to September. *flowergarden.noaa.gov*

Shark-a-thon, Padre Island National Seashore
The largest land-based shark-catching tournament in the world is held Oct. 8-10 this year. Hang out on the beach for a chance to watch sharks of all types and sizes get caught, tagged, and released. *sharkathon.com*

Saving Sharks

Greg Stunz is the director of the Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, which leads a shark-tagging program in the Gulf of Mexico. Center researchers use satellite tags, most of them applied by recreational anglers, to track sharks in real time. An online mapping tool from the nonprofit OCEARCH lets anyone follow along. *meetoursharks.org.*

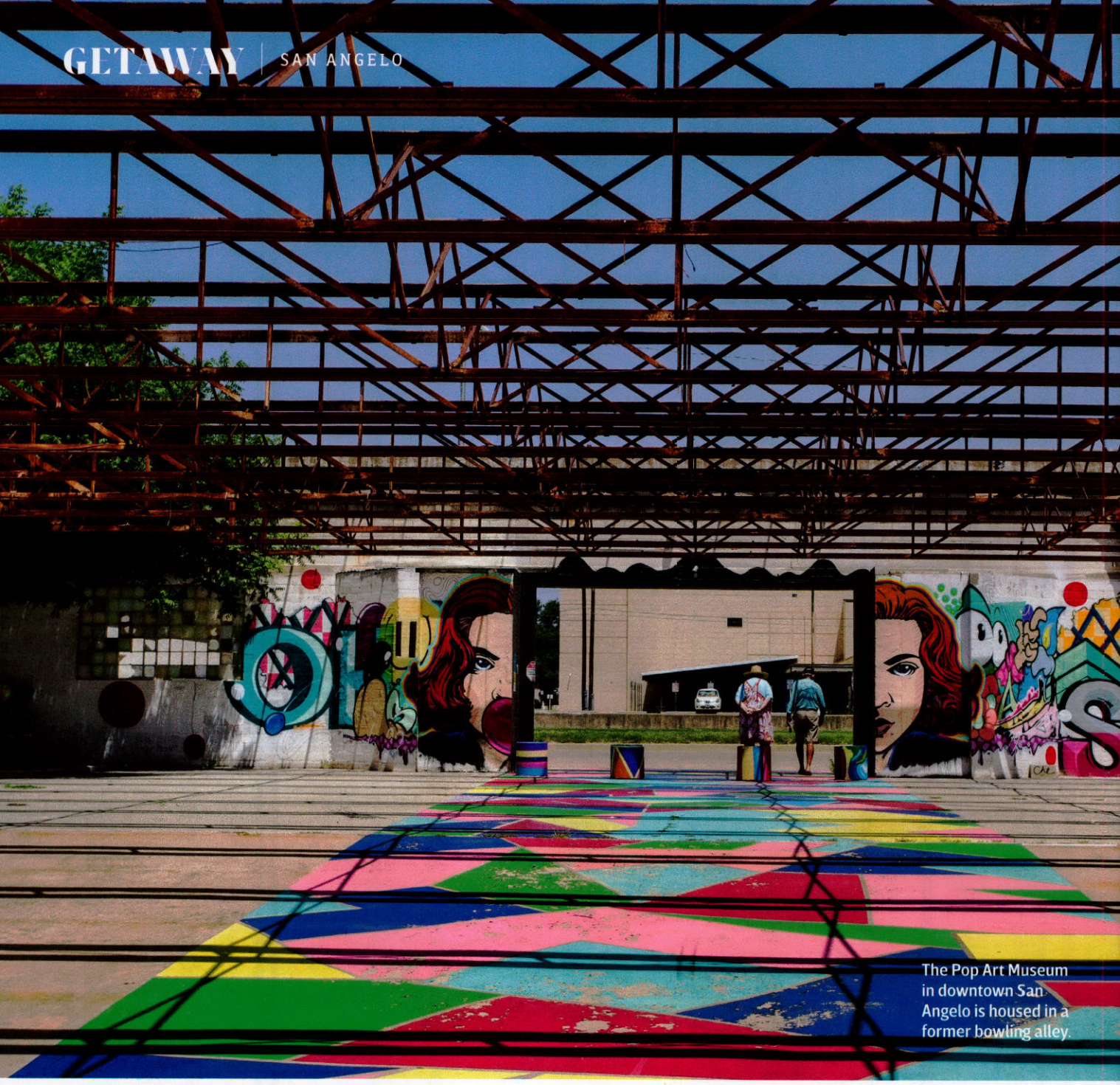
Q: How did you start studying sharks?
A: As a researcher, after a lot of discussions on the declines in shark populations, I wondered how populations on the Texas coast were doing. We didn't have a lot of information, so we designed research to answer that question. It evolved into a tagging program tracking the movement patterns of species such as tiger, scalloped hammerhead, and shortfin mako sharks.

Q: You also study how catch-and-release affects sharks. Why?
A: More and more people are enjoying recreational fishing. That's a good thing, but it puts more pressure on our resources. To protect those resources, more anglers practice catch-and-release. We wondered, are the fish surviving the process? So, we developed a citizen science program working with anglers. On average, about 90% of fish survive.

Q: How do sharks differ from the public's negative perception of them?
A: Sharks are not quite the scary creatures they've been portrayed as. Sharks are a little shy and more cautious than you might expect.

Q: What is your favorite Texas shark species?
A: The mako. It's the fastest fish in the ocean, a very powerful and charismatic species. Individuals tagged off the Texas coast spend summers off New England or in the central Caribbean and come back to almost the exact location where they were tagged.

Photos: Will van Overbeek (left); Jesse Cancelmo (right)



The Pop Art Museum in downtown San Angelo is housed in a former bowling alley.

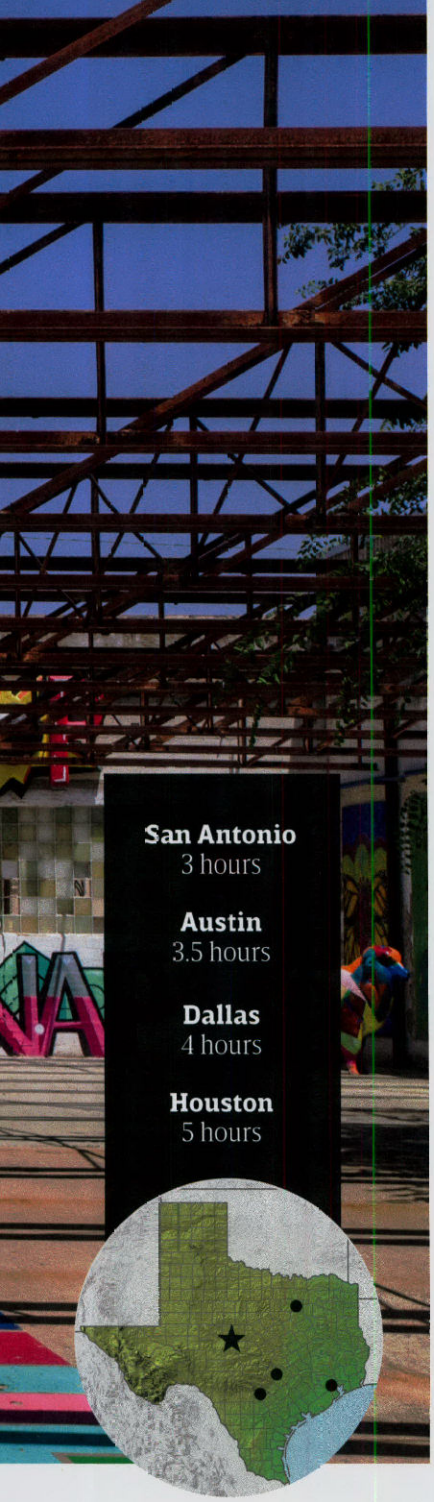
Paint the Town

This former Wild West outpost brushes against its artistic side

By Kimya Kavehkar

The frontier era of San Angelo was infamous for its gambling halls, whiskey-filled saloons, and thriving bordellos. The San Angelo of today, however, is a kinder, gentler town with plenty of family-friendly diversions. Its brand has transitioned from the wildest of West Texas to a haven for creatives. There are two free 24-hour art galleries downtown, a weeklong fall painting festival, artist studios and workshops at the Chicken Farm Art Center, and the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts. With the Concho River as a backdrop, San Angelo is the perfect canvas on which to create your ideal weekend retreat.

Photo: Tom McCarthy Jr.



San Antonio
3 hours

Austin
3.5 hours

Dallas
4 hours

Houston
5 hours

STAY

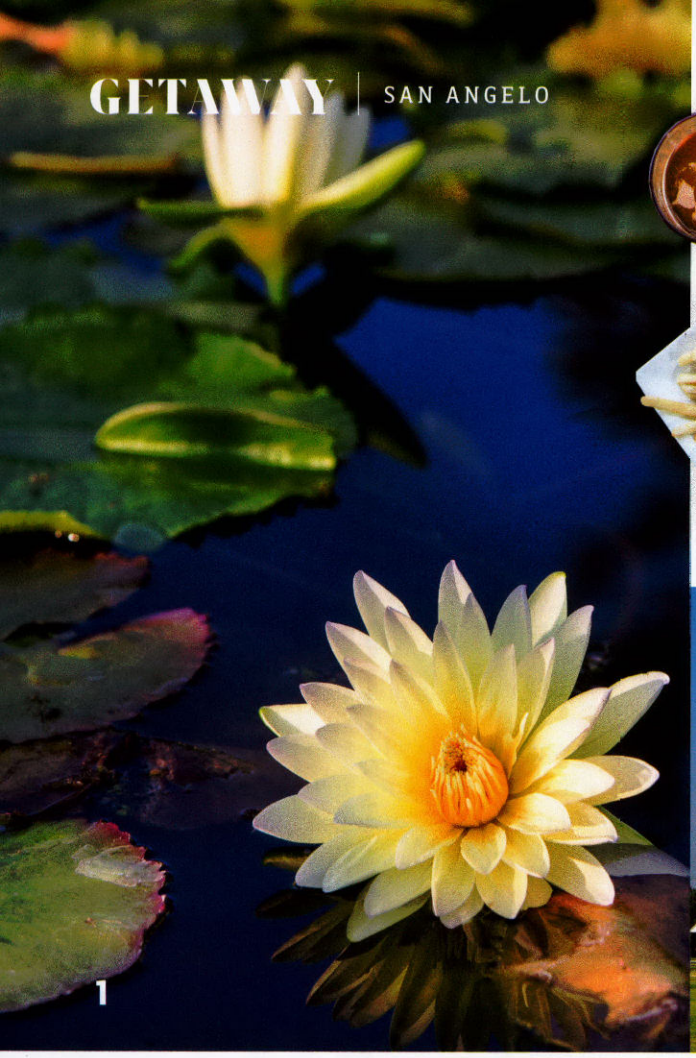
EAT

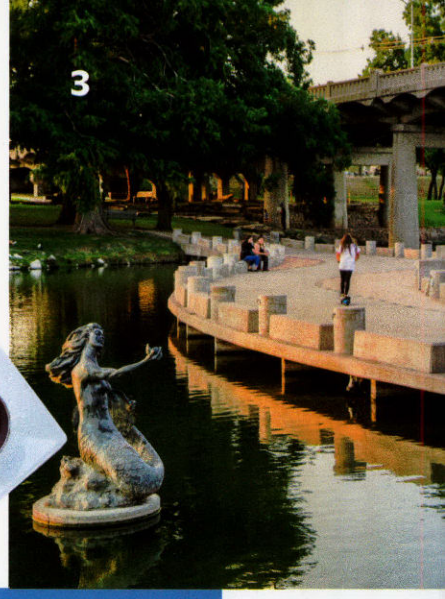
SEE

LEARN

SHOP

DRINK





1 / INTERNATIONAL WATERLILY COLLECTION From April to October, water lilies of various types bloom at Civic League Park, which serves as the home of the Texas Dawn variety, designated as the Official Water Lily of the State of Texas in 2011.

2 / ZERO ONE ALE HOUSE Kick back with a cold one brewed in-house at this casual downtown restaurant. Pair the ridiculously cheesy cheddar blanket burger with a pint of the popular Intermission Amber bearing notes of caramel and tropical fruit.

3 / RIVER WALK A stroll here shows off San Angelo's greatest natural treasure, the Concho River. You can rent a paddle boat, play a game of putt-putt golf, and take in views of the city. A mermaid statue rising from the river honors the freshwater pearls found in the Concho.

4 / FORT CONCHO The U.S. Army built Fort Concho in 1867—three years before the establishment of San Angelo—to protect frontier settlements in the area and beyond. Today, visitors can walk through barracks, the hospital, and officers' quarters.

5 / THE LATEST SCOOP This family-owned downtown ice cream parlor serves sweet treats including frappés, hot chocolate, and smoothies. Try a scoop of sea-salt-butter-pecan or blueberry-lavender ice cream in a homemade waffle cone.

6 / SILO HOUSE Located in the artistic complex known as the Chicken Farm Art Center, this restaurant has on-site lodging and a menu that includes standout dishes like fried guacamole wontons and grass-fed beef tenderloin with citrus-jalapeño butter.

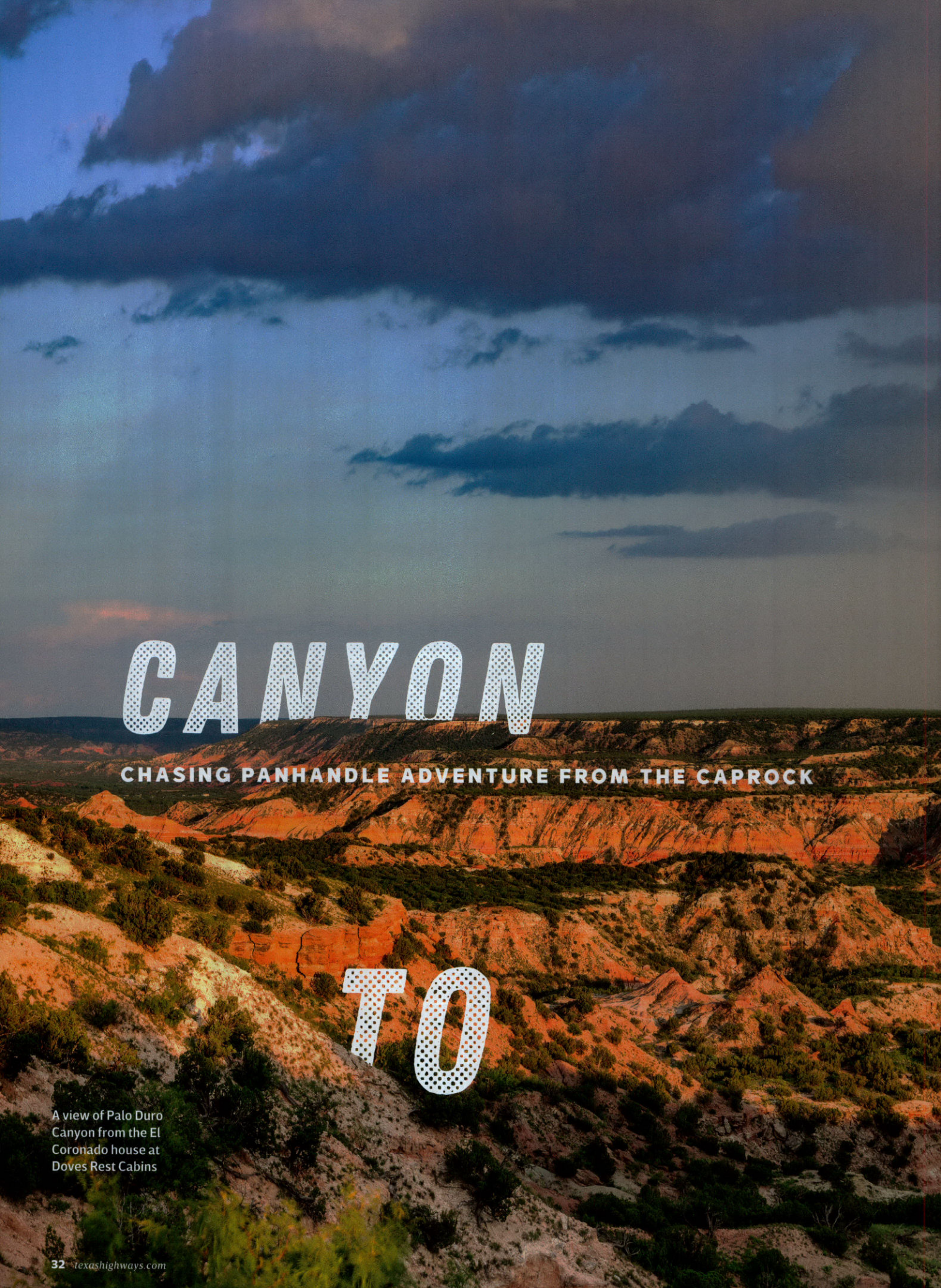
7 / POP ART MUSEUM This open-air downtown museum features colorful paintings and statues that serve as an homage to the pop art movement. Walk through the former bowling alley—free and open 24 hours a day—to view the work by local artists.

8 / SAN ANGELO STATE PARK Nothing can prepare you for the majestic sight of roaming bison. Visitors can view the beasts—as well as Longhorns from the state's official herd—up close. The park also offers campsites with electricity, water, grills, and picnic tables.

Photos: Tom McCarthy Jr.

En Plein Air

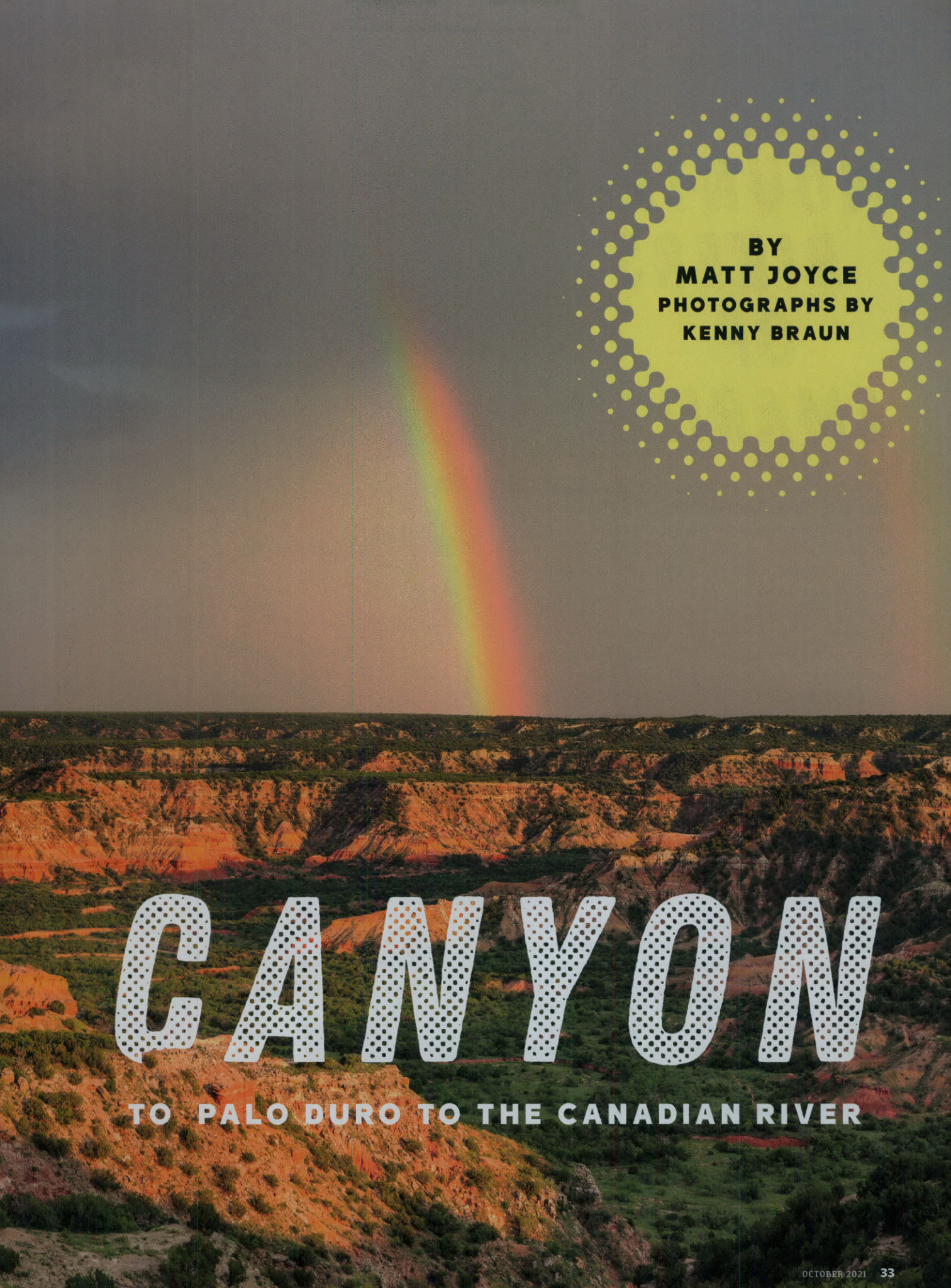
While **EnPleinAirTEXAS** is celebrating its eighth year in San Angelo, the tradition that inspired the festival has been in Texas for a century. Texas Artists Camp, a group founded in the area in 1921, once hosted some of the largest en plein air gatherings in the Southwest. The term is French for "in the open air," and refers to a movement started by Impressionists who would paint outdoors. The San Angelo celebration, which runs **Oct. 23–30**, invites artists to put brush to board in nature and visitors to watch. The weeklong series of events culminates in an exhibit and sale at Fort Concho. ***enpleinairtexas.com***



CANYON TO

CHASING PANHANDLE ADVENTURE FROM THE CAPROCK

A view of Palo Duro Canyon from the El Coronado house at Doves Rest Cabins



CANYON

TO PALO DURO TO THE CANADIAN RIVER

BY
MATT JOYCE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
KENNY BRAUN

THE MOUNTAIN BIKERS OF AMARILLO

have it better than most. On Thursday evenings, beginners and experts alike gather in Palo Duro Canyon State Park to ride some of Texas' most thrilling trails. They glide through the canyon bottom, swooping under shady cottonwood trees on the banks of the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River. They rattle across sunbaked rocky draws lined by orange pinnacles. Those wanting to test their legs and lungs climb the park road 600 feet to the canyon rim.

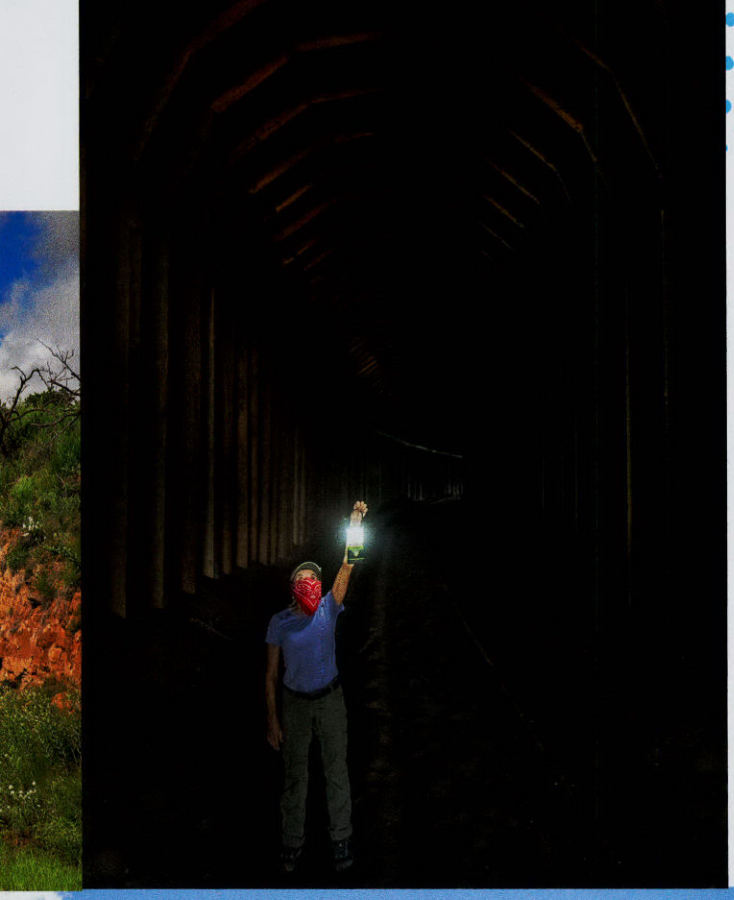
When it starts getting dark, the riders gather near the park entrance at a pavilion on the grounds of a complex of vacation cabins owned by the Shepherd brothers, local cyclists. The fridge is stocked with beer from Amarillo's Ponderosa Brewing. Bratwurst sizzle on the grill. Stories are told and retold with fresh embellishment.

"One of the main things I love about riding in the canyon is every ride is different whether you're riding in the summer when it's humid and like a jungle or in the wintertime when it's dry and crisp," says Richard Douglass, a rider from Amarillo. "I've met so many great people through this. The mountain biking community brings people from all walks of life together."

The Texas Panhandle sometimes gets a bad rap. Drivers speeding through on Interstate 40 or US 87 might dismiss the region as a horizontal expanse of dusty cotton fields, lonesome grain silos, and stinky feedlots. But this is an uninformed perspective, as one look at a topographic map reveals. The Panhandle Plains are certainly vast, but rivers and creeks slash the country like lightning bolts. These drainages pierce the mighty Caprock Escarpment, creating a jumbled shelf over the rolling plains to the east. Millennia of erosion by wind and water have forged a landscape of valleys, breaks, and canyons.

I set out this summer from "downstate"—the locals' term for the rest of Texas—to explore the Panhandle canyonlands from Caprock Canyons to Palo Duro Canyon to the Canadian River. I discovered not only a vibrant community of local outdoors-lovers, but also a wealth of adventures and

Illustration: Cindy Salans Rosenheim



distinctive landscapes, all anchored in the rugged history that characterizes the American frontier. Plus, I saw at least one Texas horned lizard on each day of my trip—always a good omen.

CAPROCK CANYONS

WE'RE DRIVING THROUGH THE PLAINS SOUTH OF Quitaque when Chris Podzemny, a local trail-builder and my guide for the day, swerves to a stop at a state historical marker. The plaque recounts the Republic of Texas' ill-fated Santa Fe Expedition that trudged north through here in 1841 during a failed attempt to claim New Mexico for Texas. Disoriented, hungry, and peppered by Kiowa attacks, the expedition made camp nearby at the juncture of Quitaque and Los Lingos creeks.

It's easy to imagine getting lost among the swells and valleys that approach the caprock, but today we have a clear destination—the Caprock Canyons Trailway, a 65-mile route that follows an old railroad bed between the towns

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Caprock Canyons Trailway; the Clarity Tunnel; the Clarity Tunnel entrance

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

DURANGO, COLORADO. MOAB, UTAH. Bentonville, Arkansas. In Chris Podzemny's vision, the Texas Panhandle will one day take its place among the pantheon of great mountain-biking destinations.

An avid cyclist, Podzemny has spent more than a decade building and advocating for hiking and biking trails in Palo Duro Canyon State Park and on other public lands in the Panhandle. He's a founding director of Six Pack Outdoors, an Amarillo nonprofit that organizes bike races across the region and uses the proceeds to build trails.

A dedicated volunteer, Podzemny's passion-fueled hobby turned into his full-time job last November when the Fairly Foundation—a philanthropic arm of the Fairly Group, an Amarillo risk-consulting firm—offered him a job as a full-time trail advocate and builder.

"A good trail system is the easiest, fastest, most efficient way for any community to improve their local quality of life," he says. "We've got lots of great canyons all over the Panhandle. It's my mission and job to identify those areas and make excellent trails."

Podzemny says he's helped build about 80 miles of trail over the past 10 years in conjunction with Six Pack Outdoors and the Palo Duro Corps of Engineers. He expects to add another 20 miles to that tally this year and for each of the next several years. The projects include new or improved trail systems at Johnson Park in Borger; Buffalo Hill in Canyon; Palo Duro Reservoir near Spearman; the Ninth Street Trails in Amarillo; and the Bureau of Land Management Cross Bar Ranch north of Amarillo.

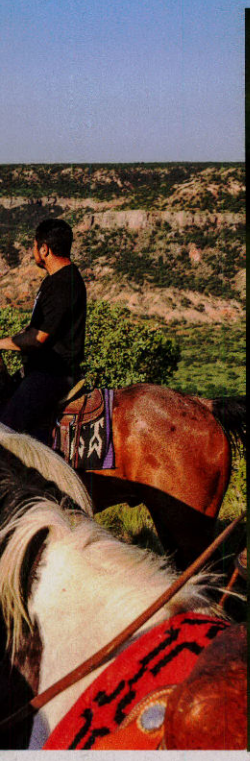
At the Rick Klein Sports Complex in Amarillo, 15 miles of new trails include a 4-mile stretch laid out in the shape of a tarantula.

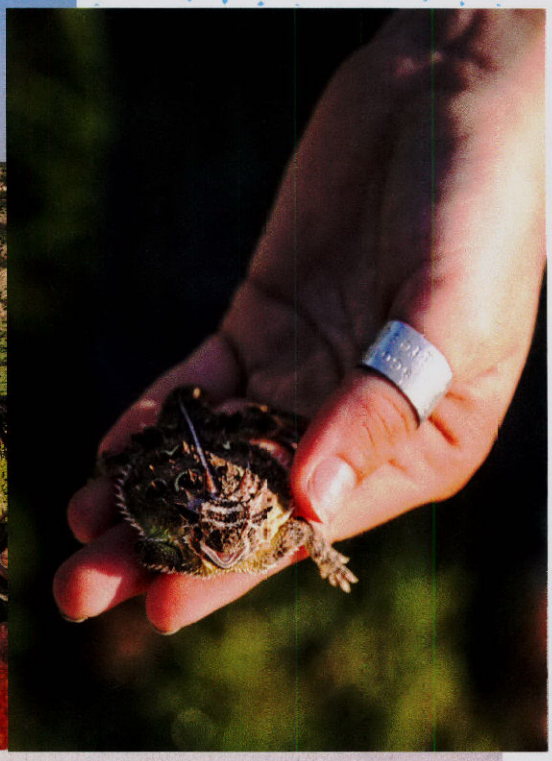
"We've got about a section of land out there, and we made it into a geoglyph, an earth drawing," Podzemny says. "I got to measuring it, and it turns out it's the largest anthropomorphic geoglyph in the Americas. The city is applying for recognition from the *Guinness World Records*."

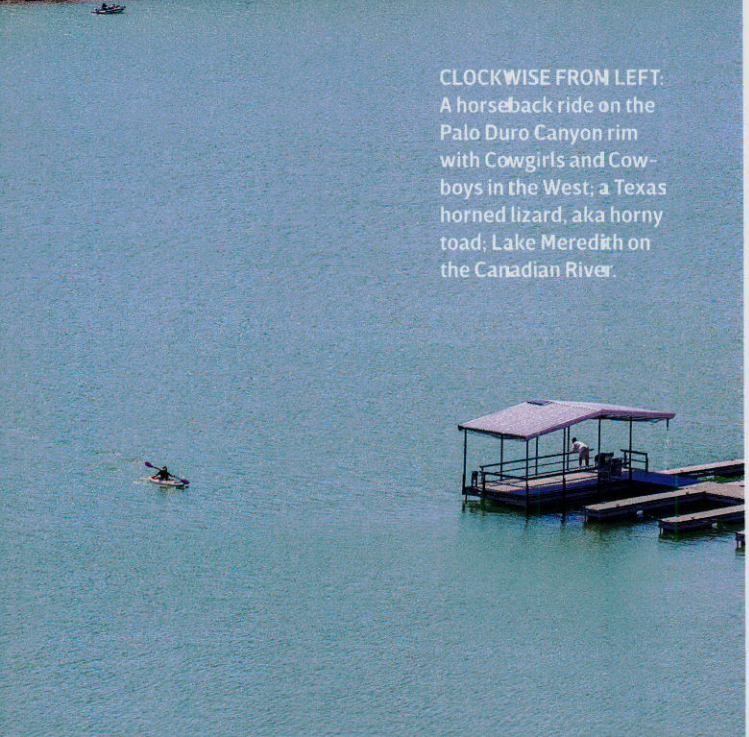
of Estelline and South Plains. The railroad opened in 1928, hauling commodities like cattle, cotton, and gravel across the Panhandle. The line closed in 1989, and by 1994, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department had converted it into a trail. While Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway is best known for its 300-head bison herd, prairie dog towns, and hiking trails that navigate 1,000 feet of elevation from the top of the Caprock Escarpment to the Little Red River, we've brought bikes for a moderate 21-mile, out-and-back route starting at Monk's Crossing.

Pedaling along a section of trail that's mostly flat and surfaced with crushed rock and packed dirt, I dodge a parade of grasshoppers, six-lined racerunner lizards, and a couple of horny toads—all fat and happy with the unusually wet summer. The star of this section of trail is the Clarity Tunnel, a 725-foot railroad shaft through a rocky hill. A colony of a half-million Mexican free-tailed bats has taken up summer residence in the tunnel. It's not necessarily for the squeamish, but riding a bike through the dark corridor—navigating a thin track through foot-deep guano with the chirping of bats overhead amid an intense odor of ammonia—makes for a memorable adventure.

The payoff is spectacular scenery. As the trail follows Quitaque Creek and climbs in elevation, numerous bridges cross the gravel stream, giving overhead views of clear waters trickling through red-rock ravines and sandy banks thick with cottonwoods and wild plums. Overhead, Mississippi kites soar against a backdrop of billowing cumulous clouds.







CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: A horseback ride on the Palo Duro Canyon rim with Cowgirls and Cowboys in the West; a Texas horned lizard, aka horny toad; Lake Meredith on the Canadian River.

"It's a pretty hardcore trail—not a Disney ride for sure," Donald Beard, the superintendent of Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway, tells me later in reference to the full 65-mile route. "You're on your own. Cell phone service may or may not work. But for a lot of people, it's a challenge they want to conquer."

PALO DURO CANYON

GIVEN THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF HORSES IN PANHANDLE history, horseback rides provide a fitting perspective of Palo Duro Canyon, the region's signature natural attraction. The Spanish introduced horses to Texas in the 16th century: Francisco Coronado first traversed the Panhandle, including the canyon, in 1541. Plains tribes including the Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche quickly seized on the animals' potential, evolving into master horsemen as warriors and hunters. The U.S. Cavalry subsequently fought the tribes on horseback and targeted the tribes' remudas, a ruthlessly effective tactic on full display at the Battle of Palo Duro in 1874, a decisive defeat for the Comanches. The battle helped clear the way for sprawling cattle ranches built by cowboys like Charles Goodnight, forever linked with horses in Texas legend.

"Palo Duro Canyon and the surrounding area was the last free home of the most powerful Indian tribe in American history—the Comanches," says Phyllis Golden, owner of Cowgirls and Cowboys in the West, which guides horseback rides on Los Cedros Ranch near Amarillo. "This was their winter home. When you get to the rim of the canyon, you'll see the protection from the wind and weather in the canyon. And there's water down there, which is very rare here."

On our ride, Golden's American quarter horses amble out across the open prairie, stepping around mesquite trees and prickly pear cactus. Spotting movement in the thick grass, a wrangler pounces from her horse and snatches a horny toad from the brush to show the riders. Soon, the land starts buckling into shallow draws before abruptly giving way to the massive chasm of Palo Duro Canyon. We stop for pictures against a backdrop of big sky sliced in half by the opposite canyon rim and its walls of banded orange, pink, and green.

Later, in a visit to Palo Duro Canyon State Park, I walk along the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River, which is flowing swiftly from summer rains. I try to picture how this narrow stream could carve a canyon 800 feet deep, 120 miles long, and 12 miles wide. On a hike up the canyon walls on the Rock Garden Trail, I reach a point on the Tub Springs Draw Spur—named for an old cowboy bathing spot—where a shallow slot canyon opens to a dry pouroff over a massive box canyon. I shimmy out on my stomach to crane my neck over the ledge for a head-spinning look at a shimmering pool far below.

"When you start to think of this place in terms of edges, it

CLOCKWISE: Park Ranger Kenny Points demonstrates an atlatl at Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument; sunset at the Shepherd Brothers Cabin Rentals; cycling at Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

covers so many different aspects," says Jeff Davis, Palo Duro assistant park superintendent. "We're in this liminal space where the flats of the High Plains turn into the Rolling Plains at the Caprock Escarpment. We are at a juncture between different migratory paths of birds. And this canyon was the site of the Battle of Palo Duro, which was the edges of two cultures really clashing with each other and the end of a way of life for one of those cultures."

CANADIAN RIVER VALLEY

A FASCINATING PHENOMENON UNFOLDS WHEN approaching the Canadian River from State Highway 136 at Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument. Just as the park road begins to descend into the valley, a massive view opens of the river channel splitting the valley before flowing into the blue water of Lake Meredith. The river water, hued a burnt orange from the surrounding rocks, meets the lake, creating a vibrant borderline of orange and blue that fades as the waters blend and give way to the lake's ultramarine depths.

The scene is a precursor of the colorful Alibates flint rock I've come to see. President Lyndon B. Johnson created this national monument in the 1960s to protect the ancient quarries located above the river valley when the Canadian River was dammed to create Lake Meredith for water supply and recreation. Archeologists have discovered evidence of a succession of indigenous cultures living here as long as 13,000 years ago. The monument includes the remains of a village of the Antelope Creek people, who lived above

the valley from roughly A.D. 1150 to 1450 as well as more than 700 flint quarries. Dug from the dolomite caprock, the quarries are shallow depressions each about the diameter of a tetherball court.

Alibates flint—which was named in the early 1900s for a local cowboy named Allen Bates—occurs in about a 10-square-mile area, explains Park Ranger Kenny Points, during one of the daily hiking tours to see the quarries. Long ago, the natives figured out the flint could be shaped using stone hammers into hard, sharp blades for spear points, drills, scrapers, and arrowheads. Tools made from Alibates flint have been found as far afield as Mexico, Montana, and the Mississippi River. Conversely, archeologists have found far-flung artifacts here, including pipe stone from Minnesota, obsidian from New Mexico, and seashells from the Pacific Ocean.

"It's just really amazing for rock to travel from Minnesota to here before there's an automobile or even a horse to bring it here, and for this rock to travel all the way from here to the Great Lakes," Points says.

In October, when the weather is cooler and in recognition of Texas Archeology Month, park rangers lead Saturday tours of the Antelope Creek village site, which is located a mile from the quarries themselves. "It was about a mile walk to work for them," Points says. 'We think that happened because the flint was being traded so heavily that they didn't want to show anybody the exact location of the quarries."

The caution of the Antelope Creek people makes perfect sense. But after exploring the Panhandle's canyonlands and the scenic adventures around them, I see no reason to keep these Texas treasures a secret.

CANYON COMFORTS

You could save money by camping and cooking your own food on an excursion to the Panhandle canyonlands, but visiting the local towns adds color to your adventures.

TURKEY

TONY'S: breakfast, Tex-Mex, burgers, sandwiches, and ice cream. 806-423-1579

HOTEL TURKEY: historic hotel and restaurant celebrating the legacy of native son and Western swing pioneer Bob Wills with regular live music. RV hookups available. Rooms start at $80/night. 806-759-0272; hotelturkeytexas.com

QUITAQUE

THE COFFEE MILL & MERCANTILE: a Caprock Canyons pit stop with baked goods, sandwiches, ice cream, and desserts. 806-455-1029; facebook.com/quitaquecoffee

AMARILLO

COWGIRLS AND COWBOYS IN THE WEST: horseback rides and chuckwagon events on the rim of Palo Duro Canyon. 806-672-9256; cowgirlsandcowboysinthewest.com

CANYON

JOE TACO CANYON: Tex-Mex with spacious open-air seating and bar on the downtown square. 806-452-8226; joetaco.net

PALACE COFFEE: a cool urban spot serving stout coffee on the downtown square. 806-476-0111; palacecoffee.co

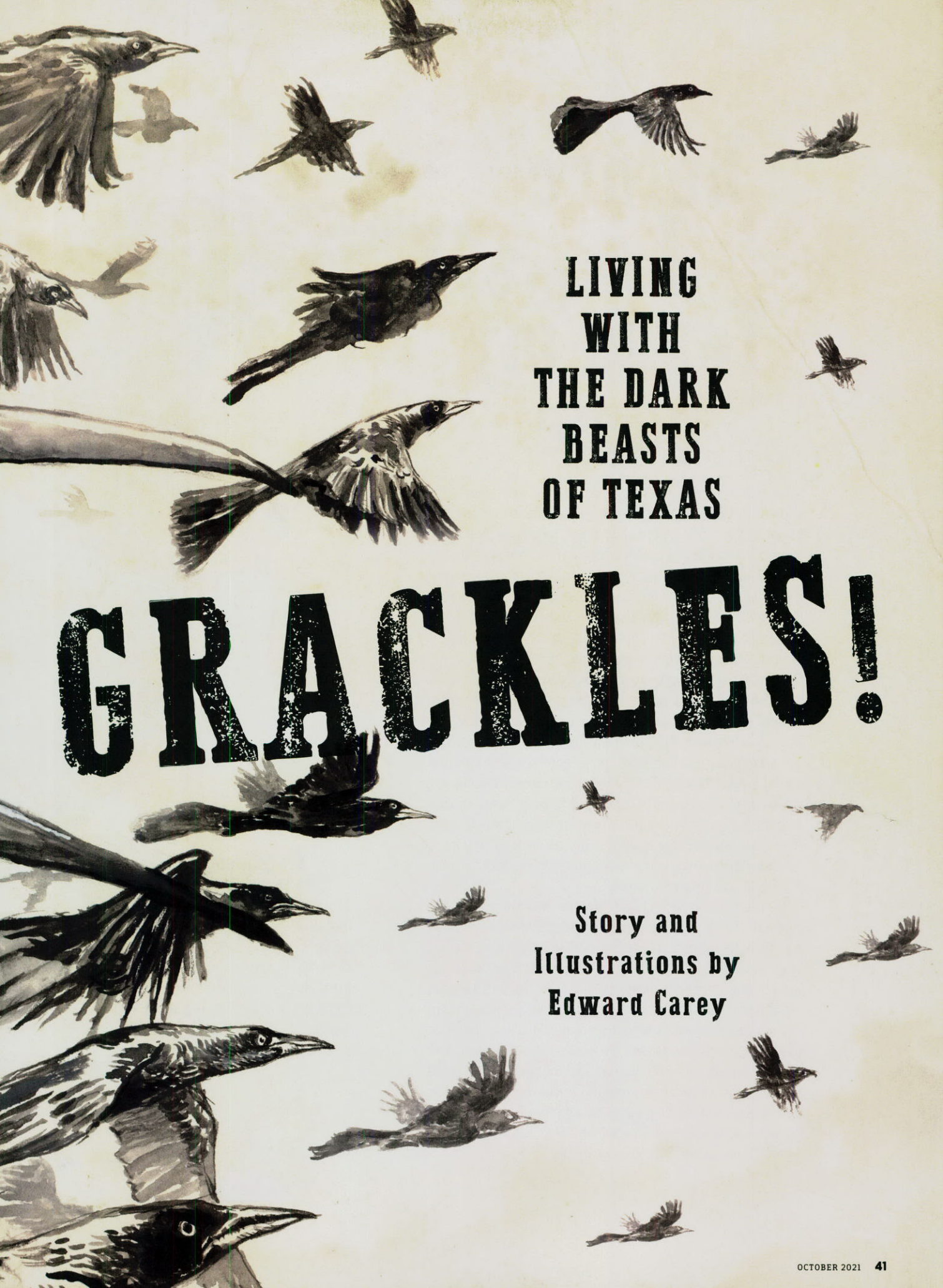
PALO DURO CANYON

SHEPHERD BROTHERS CABIN RENTALS: Located 1.5 miles from the Palo Duro Canyon State Park entrance, these cabins feature kitchenettes, prairie views, architectural flourishes, and a garden pavilion area. Cabin rates start at $75/night. facebook.com/shepherdbrotherscabinrentals

DOVES REST CABINS: luxury lodgings ranging from efficiency cabins to a four-bedroom house with some houses sitting on Palo Duro Canyon's rim. The property contains a 17-acre natural area and a bison jump where Comanche hunters once ran bison off the canyon precipice. Cabin rates start at $199/night. dovesrestcabins.com

FRITCH

SMOKE RINGS CRAFT BBQ: barbecue standards, smoked-meat sandwiches and burritos, and fried mac-and-cheese. 806-857-0004; facebook.com/geterdonebbq



LIVING WITH THE DARK BEASTS OF TEXAS

GRACKLES!

Story and Illustrations by Edward Carey

Before I made Texas my home,

I was entirely ignorant of grackles. I am from England, and I'd been looking forward to seeing new creatures in my new home—armadillos, for example, a few snakes, perhaps even a puma (from a distance). No one told me about grackles. No one talked about grackles. But here I was, and there they were, seemingly all about Austin, from parks to parking lots. Strange black broken umbrellas making their noise of disquiet. "What is that?" I asked a native, pointing to the shadowy thing. "A grackle," the shrugged response. Good heavens.

"Grackle" does not sound like a bird's name. Rather it is the description of a noise, something between a grate and a cackle. When I came to live here in 2010, I thought at first this was the local nickname, but I soon learned it's their actual name. The word grackle is derived from "graculus," a New Latinism meaning "jackdaw," which is a European crow. "Gracula" is a variation of graculus. In 1772, the word "gracule" was first used in English as a modern adaptation of the Latin. "Dracul" is the Romanian word for the devil. It is not taking it so very far to see these birds as descendants of Vlad Tepes, the Impaler, who inspired Bram Stoker's vampire.

There are three species of grackle. The common grackle, the boat-tailed grackle, and the great-tailed grackle. The common grackle is the one that migrates long distances. There are two forms of common grackle: the bronzed grackle and the purple grackle, both smaller than the other two species, with a shorter tail and smaller bill. The boat-tailed grackle is a marsh bird and in general keeps close to the water. Unlike the other two species, it prefers to stay near the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and has little interest in world domination unlike the great-tailed grackle, with a habitat covering more and more of America. It has not yet reached the East Coast but hopes to very soon. The great-tailed grackle, with its menacing yellow eyes, is the subject of this essay, our hero—or villain.

Gracklesong for use in the household

Monday's grackle is fleet of foot.
Tuesday's grackle is made of root.
Wednesday's grackle eats old people's fleas.
Thursday's grackle invites disease.
Friday's grackle rips open doves.
Saturday's grackle steals little loves.
Sunday's grackle is in the house.

Solomon Grackle, Solomon Grackle

Has the most terrifying cackle,
He screeches in the street
And stole the butcher's meat.
To shut up the singing lark
He screeches in the city park.
He hides in church places
To fright all the sad faces
Waiting for the mourners
He lurks in dark corners
And when out they weep
He gives a shrilling shriek.

The grackle is a rather discouraging, miserably vicious-looking bird. Many people loathe it, but I have an increasing fascination for it. A grackle is living proof of monsters, of goblins, of creatures that we otherwise claim as fiction. At times I do not think it can be a bird at all. Perhaps it is actually a thing, a thing made from the souls of dead glum people. It appears not to be made up of feathers and flesh but rather of old leather, bits of broken umbrellas, of torn kites, of old Victorian ladies' fans (or old Victorian ladies), of abandoned toupees where the rubber underneath the hair is very visible. Instead of a rib cage, perhaps its anatomy boasts a rusted and bent bicycle wheel, or perhaps a coat hanger. For lungs? Abandoned gloves (medical ones, most probably). Its long tail feathers might be a shoehorn or the minute hand from an old station clock. Surely a black tie from a funeral is among its wing feathers. Perhaps a handsaw, too, an exhaust pipe, a ripped flag, a hot dog, a shoe, a stethoscope, dollar bills, bin liners, plastic bottles. Sometimes, looking at the grackle, I wonder if its legs are made of barbed wire and its feet plastic cutlery.

Am I being unfair? It's just that grackles seem somehow constructed, artificial, made up. The noise they make, too, is not like any noise I've ever heard coming from any other bird. It doesn't sound like anything in any way natural. It sounds man-made, like the loud and unwelcome shrieks of rusty machinery. It sounds mechanical. It sounds like something failing.

The grackles hop and strut outside my home, looking grimly at everything, twisting their heads, letting forth their attitude. They have no majesty. They look like beggars, plague doctors, bitter humans sucked of all juice. There is nothing liquid about grackles; they are all cartilage. Sometimes you see a flash of blue or purple in their iridescent

This is the house that grack built

It is made of old skin and bones, hair and moans, dead flies, children's cries. It has twists of rusted wire and a baby's pacifier, it is made of dolls' clothing and secret loathing. That is the house that grack built.

What might be inside a grackle:


lost gloves
bent bicycle wheel
broken spectacles
sparkplug
quarters
rusted gears
mobile phones
coathanger
bicycle horn
syringe
umbrellas
handsaw
metal ruler
punctured soccer ball
fidget spinners
remote control
shoes
dollar bills
shoehorn
old radio
clock's minute hand
plastic bottles

Old Black Coat

Screech screecher, beak clatter, snap snapper, black maker, black giver, black matter, matter matter, natter natter, mutter mutter, screech! Ka-reek, Ka-reek, crack, crack, crack, crack. Old black coat.

tail feathers, and this seems to have come from some of the color glimpsed as you move an old daguerreotype in your hand. Perhaps they are the physical embodiment of lost portraits of the dead. They are what happens to photograph albums after they have been abandoned or lost or orphaned. Living with these creatures seems unwise and full of bad luck, but there is something almost mythical in watching morphed human souls or burnt abandoned objects taking a vaguely bird-shape form, hopping, screeching, perching on everything, accusing, lamenting, blaming, chattering, shrieking, laughing as you go about your personal business.

I can't help but think of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' famous comment that animals are "good to think with." Looking at grackles—unafraid, indifferent, suffering from verbal diarrhea, with never an unexpressed thought—it is tempting to think they are commenting on humanity. I suppose there are old nursery rhymes about grackles because the creature is so illustrative, so ripe for storytelling. They also seem like they would fit very neatly into children's cautionary tales. Surely some old, deceased-age grackle tales were told in the household by the light of a fire to infants who would not settle. Surely once upon a time in Texas, where these things dot the landscape in abundance, parents soothed their babies to sleep by singing old lullabies about grackles. But I have not found any, and so I have made some of my own, a handful of which I have dropped in here as possibilities.

Grackles are natives. They belong here. This is their home. But they are also extending their home throughout North America, making themselves at home everywhere. Their noise is the soundtrack to our lives in this part of the world. Grackles move around urban streets taking control, stealing from humans and from birds, dominating smaller birds, even eating a sparrow out of sheer fury. They congregate outside supermarkets and sing their long and raucous operas every evening.

I asked the novelist and Texas historian Stephen Harrigan about grackles. I wondered if he knew of an instance like, for example, that of geese saving Rome in 387 B.C. by alerting the populace with their honking to an army of Gauls come to invade. If not that, then maybe something along the lines of pigeons acting as messengers during World War I. Were grackles at the siege of the Alamo perchance, providing commentary? Harrigan can't help me there, but he does, characteristically, have an eloquent response to the creature: "What strikes me as special about grackles is that

Speak Truth

A long-legged wild dog is called a jackal
No one has ever seen a dead grackle.

Gracky, Gracky, Raw Throat

Whither do you yell and gloat,
Is it because you can tell
Which of us is bound for hell?

they're among the easiest birds to contemplate. You don't need binoculars to see them, they're not skittish around humans, and they're sort of always there. The more I look at them, the more I understand the link between birds and dinosaurs. In the way their bodies are conformed—and the way they strut around, alert and knowing—they seem to me like miniature velociraptors."

I agree with him, though they seem to me also modern somehow—and the bird we deserve. As humanity extends its mark upon nature, so the grackles increase.

Cliff Shackelford, statewide ornithologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, is a walking encyclopedia of birds. He was able to offer some specifics: "The increase in the great-tailed grackle is a direct result of urbanization just like with the explosion in rodents and roaches in our cities, all of which benefit from man's doings. Not everyone considers them a nuisance. I've heard from several birdwatchers who claim it's their favorite species because they're interesting to watch, especially when males display to females in springtime. Plus, folks are amazed at the variety of bizarre sounds made by the males."

Grackles seem always to be performing. Not just the males putting on the deafening displays of courtship as they fluff their feathers, but also stalking and watching and pushing others out of the way.

In Mexican folklore, the *zanate*, which is what the grackle is called in Spanish, was silent at creation. But then it stole seven songs from the sea turtle. The noise a grackle makes certainly feels like a strangulation: unharmonious, unlovely, purloined. It seems when the grackle stole the turtle's songs, it neglected to learn them very well—or in its performance, the songs, possibly cleverer than their stealer, betray the crime in performance. Is the grackle desperately trying to get the songs right but ever failing? Does it have a distant memory of a beautiful noise, and yet each time it attempts to reproduce it, it's cursed with its own creaking cacophony? Or, over time, has the grackle made the turtle's songs its own—a sound astonishingly lovely to other grackles? Regardless, no one makes music like the grackle.

Grackles tell it like it is. Endlessly quarreling, singing out of key, keeping close together, yet always seeming alone. Physiognomy would declare grackles villains—those pointy beaks!—and yet they are just themselves, stubbornly, wonderfully, darkly, noisily the grackle. They are superbly dramatic, dressed in mourning like Hamlet, and as they slope along there's something of Richard III in them. They are always theatrical, always soliloquizing. They are also evidence of survival, heroes of longevity, of a singular life.

Grackles add salt to our daily diets. Or is it a memento mori? Whatever it is, whatever they are saying, they are these shadows in our lives, our daily shadow, not going anywhere; they are going everywhere. Coming soon or here already, grackles scream on.

The Return of Live Music

Rediscover the joy of communal grooving as venues reopen and festivals resume across the state

Shane Smith and The Saints perform at Whitewater Amphitheater in New Braunfels.

Photo: Tiffany Hofeldt

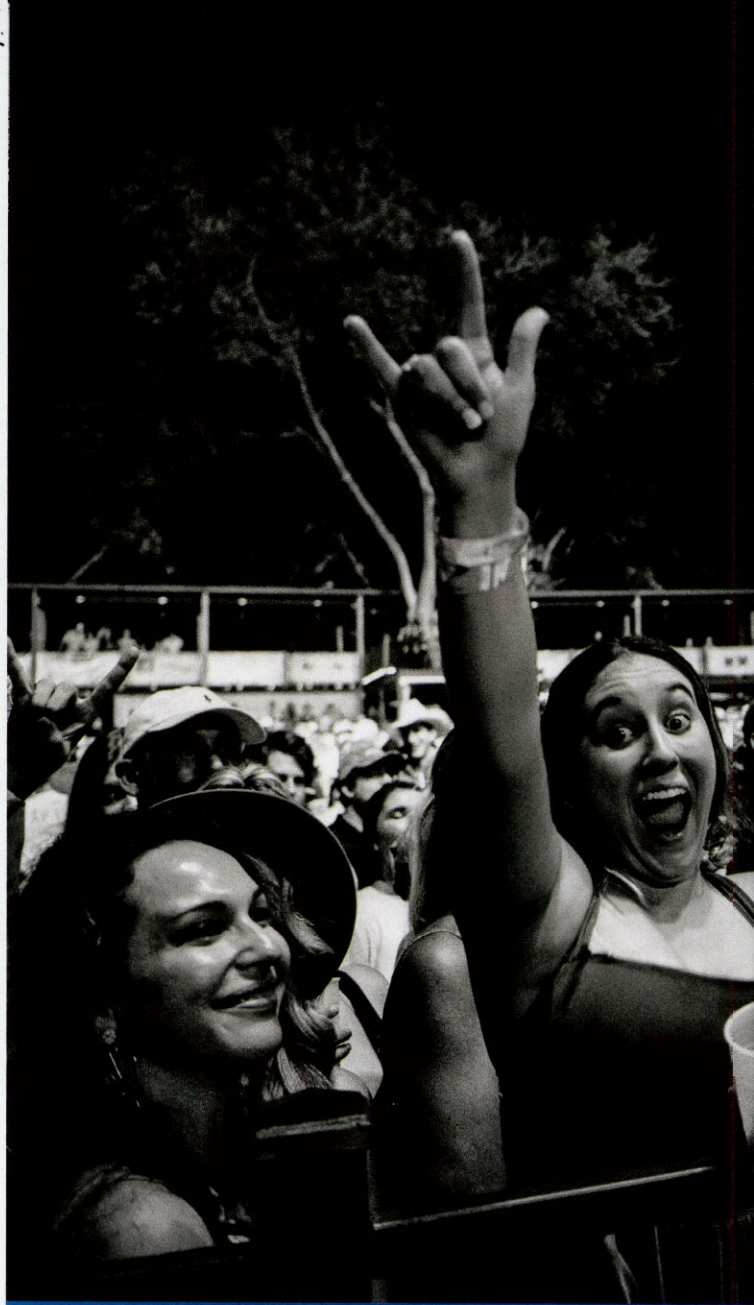
The Lineup for October's

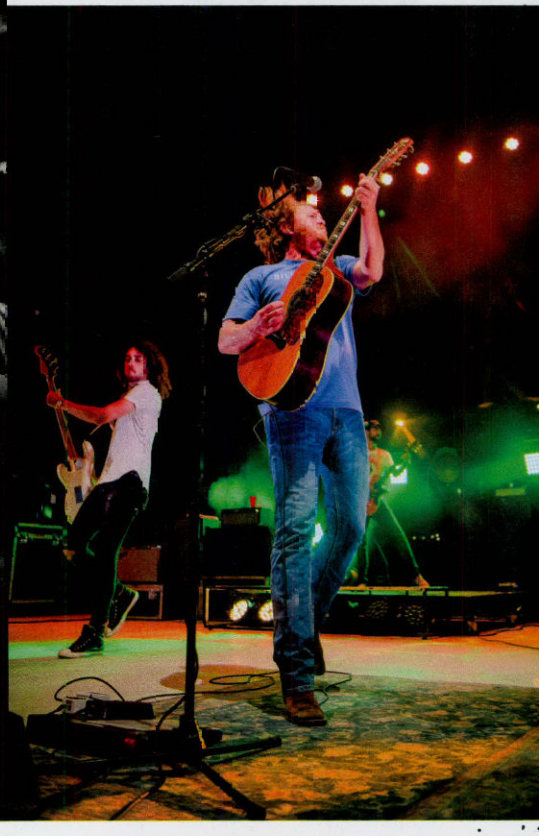
Austin City Limits Music Festival, headlined by George Strait, Billie Eilish, Duran Duran, and Megan Thee Stallion, is impressive—but ACL would've sold out both weekends in record time no matter who was booked.

That's how starved for live music we were in May, when all three-day wristbands to the 75,000-capacity event sold out in just under three hours. ACL Fest has been held at Zilker Park every autumn since 2002, except one. The resounding silence of 2020 made this year's festival the place to be more than ever before.

The return of live music to Texas stages has been as gradual and deliberate as a first encounter with Zilker Park's frigid Barton Springs Pool. Mask-required socially distanced shows, sometimes with audiences in cars, were the toe in the water. And while everyone's eager for the big, here-goes-nothing plunge and shriek, the delta variant has required venues, artists, and promoters to continue to approach with caution. In August, ACL Fest promoter C3 Presents announced attendees would be required to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test before entering the fest.

Sure, we've had music streaming on demand every minute of the day, but what we've missed is the sense of camaraderie among concertgoers. Here, four Texas music fans share which venues they can't wait to get back to.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The crowd readies at Whitewater Amphitheater; William Clark Green headlines the New Braunfels venue; Grupo Intenso at Payne Arena in Hidalgo.

RAILROAD BLUES, ALPINE

Railroad Blues in Alpine bills itself as the "World Famous Beer and Wine Tourist Trap." But it's with the tongue-in-cheek confidence of a live music venue that knows it's the real deal. For nearly three decades, the Blues has been a musical oasis—one of the few places to hear live original music between El Paso and San Antonio. The venue is also famous for its homemade sangria, which ferments for a month for an extra kick. But what really distinguishes this club, located between a dry creek and railroad tracks, is the people.

A mix of native Alpinians, Sul Ross State University students, and Big Bend tourists, the Blues crowd knows what they're in for at the West Texas town with a tradition of escape. So they react accordingly by getting lost in the music.

The best entertainment is sometimes on the patio. This is where the regulars gather around a fire pit and tell crazy stories or good-naturedly rib the famous hipster-artist outpost 26 miles away. When someone wears a Hawaiian shirt and parachute pants with a Stetson in Marfa, it's ironic. In Alpine, it's Saturday night.

Though the Blues is known for live music (more often country than blues), the craziest night of the week is the one without a band: Wednesday's Karaoke Night. When a regular named Vincent sings the glam-rock classic "The Ballroom Blitz," the place gets rowdy and barstools occasionally topple. But Becca, another regular, always brings down the house with Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets." Host/DJ Brady Wilkins keeps the good times flowing, even if many of the singers couldn't carry a tune if it had handles.

Railroad Blues is also a place for professional musicians. On a tour of 2,000-capacity amphitheaters in 2019, multi-genre singer-songwriter Ryan Bingham made a detour an hour off Interstate 10 to acknowledge the 264-capacity club's role in his early career.

"When our band was starting out in Austin [circa 2006], we were always broke, and times were hard," Bingham told the Alpine audience. "But Railroad Blues was a special place to play. It's so good to be back."

Austin-based musician Carolyn Wonderland fondly recalls her debut at the venue 20 years ago. "That audience gives you a chance," she says. There was

Photos: Tiffany Hofeld

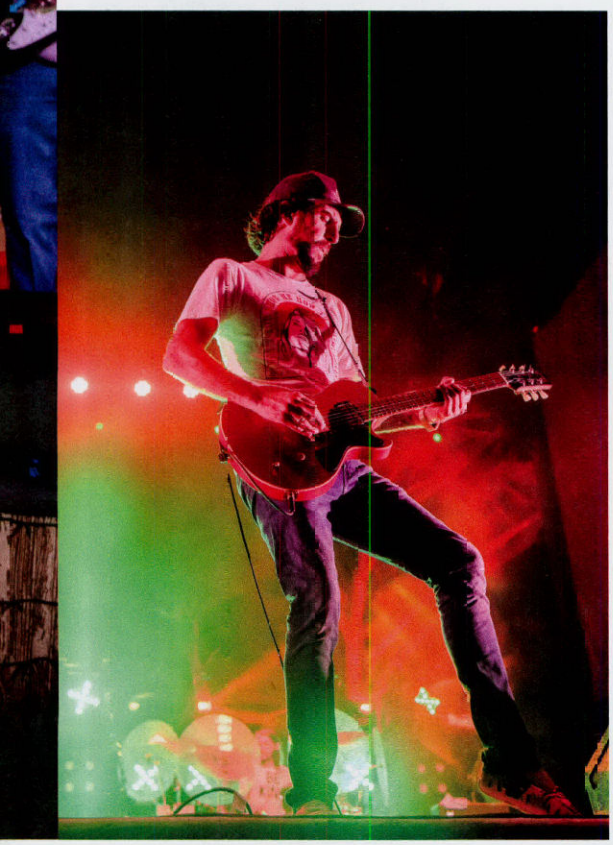
a guy who kept yelling out requests, until a woman shut him down. "Just play what you want to play, baby!" she shouted to Wonderland, with the crowd roaring in approval. "We had 'em dancing around the fire pit," Wonderland says.

Some of the other big acts who've played at Blues include Jerry Jeff Walker, Kinky Friedman, Alejandro Escovedo, Pat Green, Wade Bowen, Dirty River Boys, and Eli Young Band. El Paso club owner Tim Wilson saw those names and made the 220-mile trek to Alpine to see what was so special. Greeted by an antique fire truck at the entrance, emblazoned with "Puttin' Out Old Flames," Wilson says he quickly realized "there's just nowhere else like it." When Railroad Blues came up for sale in 2013, Wilson bought it.

This year, Wilson invested nearly $250,000 to add a brewery to the club. "When Big Bend Brewery shut down a couple years ago, it really left a void in downtown Alpine," Blues manager Chris "Chrispy" Puckett says. The Blues brews "all the hits" Puckett says, alluding to pilsners, porters, and IPAs, plus hard ciders and seltzers. "We'll be

Photos: Christ Chavez (top left); Tiffany Hofeldt (top right); Tom McCarthy Jr. (bottom)

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Geno Delafose & French Rockin' Boogie at Railroad Blues in Alpine; guitarist Josh Serrato at Whitewater Amphitheater; classic cars in front of Devil's Backbone Tavern & Dancehall in Fischer.



dabbling in everything."

Reinvention is a key post-pandemic activity, but it's good to see that the club's self-deprecating humor remains intact. "Our beer is going to be really great," Wilson says. After a pause, he followed up with: "Or it may suck." *—Michael Corcoran*

Upcoming Shows: Cece Sensor (Oct. 9), Jonathan Foster (Oct. 19) **Current COVID Policy:** Masks are encouraged. 504 W. Holland Ave. 432-837-3103; railroadblues.com

WHITEWATER AMPHITHEATER, NEW BRAUNFELS

On a balmy night in April 2016, Neil Young had already driven the raucous crowd at the Whitewater Amphitheater in New Braunfels wild with a blistering set of some of his greatest hits. The band rocked, and Young was in fine form with his quivering voice and battered black Gibson Les Paul electric guitar.

And then Willie Nelson stepped onto the stage, carrying his trusted guitar, Trigger.

"Let me get my harmonica here, Willie," Young muttered, before they launched into "Are There Any More Real Cowboys?"

It was a music lover's dream.

Such concerts are commonplace out on Farm-to-Market Road 306, west of Gruene and a stone's throw from Canyon Lake.

Musicians perform on a stage flanked by majestic cypress trees, with the Guadalupe River rushing by within earshot. Even parking the car before a show is an aural adventure, with the sounds of bullfrogs, birds, crickets, and inner-tubers competing for attention with the gurgle of the river and the crunch of gravel underfoot.

Most fans crowd in shoulder to shoulder in front of the stage at the 5,500-capacity venue. Others take in the show in comfort at reserved bleacher-style seating or VIP skyboxes.

Americana music is the amphitheater's strong suit, and the rustic Texas landscape provides the perfect setting for the hip-swiveling moves of Dwight Yoakam or the famed mumbles of Bob Dylan while singing "Like a Rolling Stone" and "Simple Twist of Fate." Only the outdoor stages at Luckenbach or John T. Floore Country Store in Helotes come close to the don't-fence-me-in vibe.

"Playing Whitewater Amphitheater is a magical experience like none other offered in Texas," says Randy Rogers, who has played the stage several times with his band and is also an investor in the venue. "Nothing beats being right on the river next to those beautiful trees with such a great crowd of people who appreciate sharing the Hill Country experience with the artist onstage."

I had seen Neil Young perform solo before, but I had longed to see the Godfather of Grunge prowling the stage as he did decades ago with Buffalo Springfield, Crazy Horse, and the supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

On that April night, I got my wish. The rock giant plugged in with Promise of the Real, the band featuring Willie Nelson's kids. I wasn't quite prepared for the passionate full-band rendition of "Out on the Weekend" or a cover of Merle Haggard's "Okie From Muskogee" or better yet, the electrifying distorted jam on "Down by the River."

I drove from San Antonio for the show, and most of the thousands of others in attendance also traveled from outside Comal County. That's typical of shows at Whitewater, which opened in 2007. Concertgoers often float the river in the afternoon before catching a show at night. A $70 million expansion, expected to be completed by summer 2022, will add even more diversions to enjoy, including zip lines, a roller coaster, and a restaurant.

"We are a true destination venue," owner and developer William Korioth says. "They're coming to the Hill Country for a show, and they're going to want to stay." *—Hector Saldaña*

Upcoming Shows: Willie Nelson & Family with special guest Pat Green (Oct. 8 & 9), Chris Young (Oct. 22), A Day To Remember (Oct. 24) **Current COVID Policy:** Vaccination or negative tests recommended. 11860 FM 306. 830-964-3800; whitewaterrocks.com

PAYNE ARENA, HIDALGO

In the 10-mile stretch between McAllen and the U.S.-Mexico border, you wouldn't expect to find a 7,000-seat venue. Payne Arena, a $20 million multipurpose complex, boasts a diverse group of American, Mexican, and

international acts every weekend.

The best thing about Payne Arena is that "it's not too big, not too small," which makes "every seat in the house a great seat," says general manager Eric Treviño, who has been with the venue since 2006. After all these years, he says the "happiness of the fans still gives him chills."

Due to the pandemic, the excitement was put on hold as Payne Arena closed from the first weekend of March through December 2020. Now that live shows are back up and running, upcoming concerts bring back memories of performances past.

In spring 2006, I saw Ramón Ayala y Sus Bravos del Norte bring their brand of Norteño, an accordion-based genre from the border of Texas and Mexico, to what was then known as Dodge Arena. I've made my home in Austin since 1998, but I spent several months that year helping my father recuperate after a surgery. When he'd recovered enough to do things on his own and I was about to return to Austin, I treated us to concert tickets. We were both avid fans. I'd idolized the group for so long, I worried I would cry or scream when they reached the stage.

The band, together since 1971, played almost every song I could have wished for, from "Tragos Amargos" to "Las Casas de Madera" to the song whose accordion still makes my heart trill, "Un Rinconcito en el Cielo." Dancing had broken out right in front of the stage and down the aisles. Polkas, cumbias, boleros, huapangos—it took everything I had to stay at my father's side and not scope out potential dance partners. In any previous time, I would have thrown my body into the tumult until the very last song.

The current calendar of events has me wishing I could escape to the Rio Grande Valley for a few months. As an aging Austinite, I'm too old now to enjoy the typical festival scene: standing for hours in dirt and mud, trudging to faraway port-a-potties, and batting away hungry swarms of mosquitos that aren't affected by the billowing clouds of cigarette smoke. I much prefer places like Payne, where I can still see the major acts I adore while seated and with fresh air conditioning blowing my way. *—ire'ne lara silva*

Upcoming Shows: Morat (Oct. 15), Maluma (Oct. 16).
Current COVID Policy: Masks are highly recommended but not required.
2600 N. 10th St. 956-843-6688; hidalgoarena.com

DEVIL'S BACKBONE TAVERN, FISCHER

The last time I'd been to the Devil's Backbone Tavern & Dancehall, 15 miles west of San Marcos, was Feb. 25, 2020. It was Mardi Gras, and my wife and I were judging the Fat Tuesday Gumbo Cookoff. Most of the gumbo entries were top-shelf, and we ended up making friends with the winner.

The best, most authentic part of the night was listening to Jesse Lege, an accordionist and Cajun Hall of Fame inductee from southwest Louisiana, play with his band, Bosco Stomp.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The bar at Devil's Backbone Tavern & Dancehall; rockabilly band The Georges at the Fischer venue; Grupo Intenso at Payne Arena.

Lege kept the dance floor packed as he played a steady stream of Cajun two-steps and waltzes.

A month later, COVID-19 forced the Devil's Backbone Tavern to shut its doors.

Robyn and John Ludwick and their business partner, Abbey Road, had purchased the historic 1937 venue in the summer of 2018 and reopened the dance hall that October. This revitalized version of the tavern was reminiscent of Soap Creek Saloon, a storied club on the outskirts of Austin back in the 1970s. Soap Creek presented great music throughout the week in a roadhouse that felt like it was in the middle of nowhere, instead of a quarter-mile from the then-young suburb of West Lake Hills.

Though the new proprietors of Devil's Backbone Tavern instituted a no-smoking policy, the venue was otherwise the same as it ever was since it first opened, down to the dollar bills pinned to the ceiling and the shuffleboard and washer pitching out back—until the pandemic arrived.

"We closed three times—March 21, 2020, and again in June and November 2020," Robyn says. GoFundMe pages were created to fundraise for the bartenders. The Ludwicks and Road helped the staff of 10 apply for

government assistance, and they took out a Small Business Administration loan.

After obtaining a food license, the bar portion of the tavern reopened in early 2021, spurred by what Robyn describes as the need to provide a place for the regulars. "I was highly concerned about the locals, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s. They needed a place to get together."

Live music was slower to return. There is no outdoor stage, and the venue has an older clientele, as well as older performers—such as Earl Poole Ball, Miss Lavelle White, Toni Price and Linda Gail Lewis—concerned about playing indoors.

DBT's first full-capacity show since March 2020 took place on April 25, 2021, with rockabilly band The Georges welcoming the crowds back.

I returned for a Sunday afternoon show and dance in June. The featured entertainment was Lege and another version of Bosco Stomp. Dancers were busy moving, and listeners focused on the music.

The dance hall is air-conditioned now, making gigs possible during summer months. The jukebox in the bar has been restocked with a curated gear: Doug Sahm singles replace Brooks & Dunn. The live music is still not completely back to normal. For example, Tuesday Barrelhouse Piano night, featuring keyboardists, moved from the bar into the less-confined quarters of the dance hall.

"We're slowly building back our live music calendar," Robyn says. "The most important thing for us is the hang. The regulars at the bar are the heart of the operation. We celebrate their birthdays. When someone has medical issues, we do a benefit. The Backbone opened during the hardest times this country has ever seen. It was a place to gather then, and it's a place to gather now. I never had a doubt we'd be OK." —*Joe Nick Patoski*

Upcoming Shows: Whitey Johnson featuring Gary Nicholson (Oct. 22), Jeff Plankenhorn & Michael O'Connor (Nov. 12), Warren Hood Band (Nov. 28). **Current COVID Policy:** Neither masks nor vaccination proof are required. 4041 FM 32. 830-964-2544; devilsbackbonetavern.com

Photos: Tom McCarthy Jr. (top left and right); Tiffany Hofeldt (bottom left)

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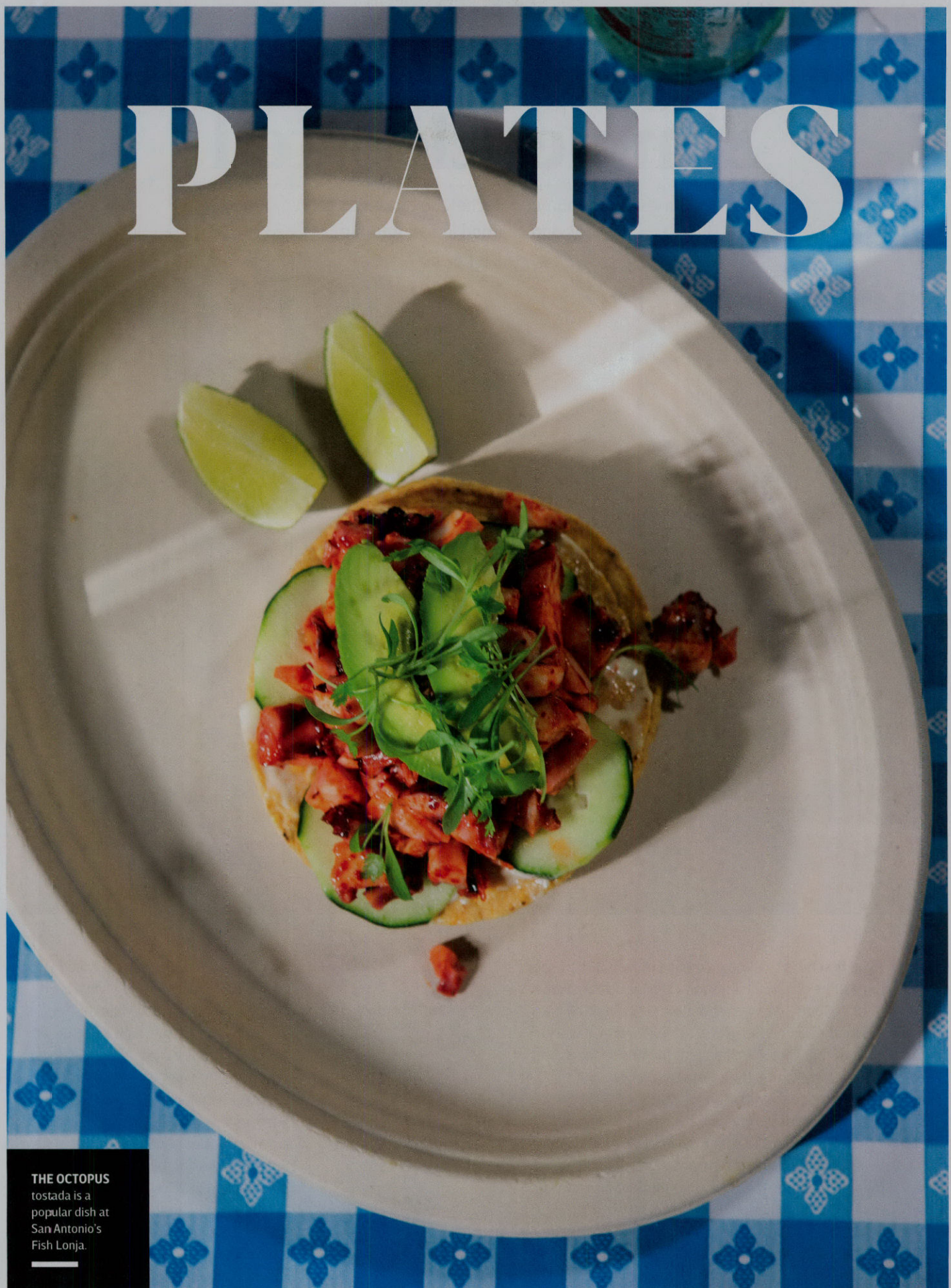
PLATES



THE OCTOPUS tostada is a popular dish at San Antonio's Fish Lonja.

Photo: Jessica Attie

Simple, Elevated

James Beard–nominated chef Alex Paredes serves carnitas and seafood in San Antonio

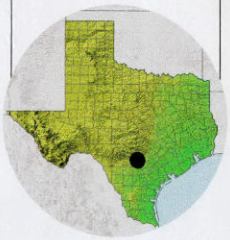
By Cynthia J. Drake

The first time I visited Carnitas Lonja in 2019, I sped past the old service station exterior on San Antonio's South Side. I checked my GPS, doubled back, and parked on the gravel drive. A warm, savory aroma greeted me when I walked into the tiny space. It felt like entering a family member's house for a special meal that had been cooking on the stove all day long.

Owner Alex Paredes greeted me from behind a steel counter. I knew I needed to order whatever I was smelling. "We have carnitas," he said, placing a small cup of chopped pork into my hand and smiling. I can't think of a better—or more Texan—greeting than that.

In 2020, Paredes earned a James Beard Award nomination in the "Best Chef: Texas" category. That same year, Carnitas Lonja survived COVID-19's brutal blow, and Paredes even managed to open a new sister restaurant called Fish Lonja on the same property. (*Lonja* is an affectionate word for "love handles" in Spanish.) Paredes achieved it all by never wavering from his vision. "What we do is very simple," he says. "Our spice rack is one spice. Everything else is just freshness."

CARNITAS LONJA AND FISH LONJA
1107 Roosevelt Ave., San Antonio.
carnitaslonja.com



Paredes was born in Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico. He spent a few years of his childhood in Boston before moving back to Mexico, and in 2004 he landed in San Antonio at age 19. In the region of Mexico where he grew up, he ate vegetable dishes like *rajas con queso* (creamy peppers with corn and cheese), *calabacitas* (sautéed

"Paredes could have done this totally different, but he leads with the food, lets the food do all the talking."

squash), beans, and rice for a late afternoon meal. "The house, after school, it always smelled like food: the smell of chili and onion, fresh tomatoes," he says.

In his years in Boston, from ages 4 to 9, dishes like Philly cheesesteak and pizza romanced his palate. In his teen years in Mexico, Paredes tried to create his own brick oven, placing bricks inside the family oven to make pizza, much to the bewilderment of relatives. In later years, after moving to Texas, his love for cooking led to jobs in the restaurant industry, most notably as sous chef at the now-shuttered brasserie Lüke on the River Walk.

While he was sous chef, Paredes and his cousin and fellow chef Sergio Ortega created some local buzz with a series of pop-up dining experiences called Gallo/Toro Cocina in 2016 and 2017. These were often fancy, multicourse affairs that fueled Paredes' dreams of opening a fine-dining restaurant with traditional Mexican cuisine. He began hunting for the perfect brick-and-mortar location.

In the meantime, Paredes decided to take a pilgrimage to Mexico. He traveled throughout the country, north to south by bus, with the idea that he'd sample regional cuisines and reimagine the recipes for his customers in the U.S. But something changed along the way for the then-31-year-old. He went to Mexico thinking he could inject his own point of view, but the country had its own lessons in store.

"I was going to make it 'refined'—learn how to make fish tacos or *aguachile*—and make it a fine-dining experience," Paredes says. But he learned there was no way to improve upon the beauty of the food he experienced there.

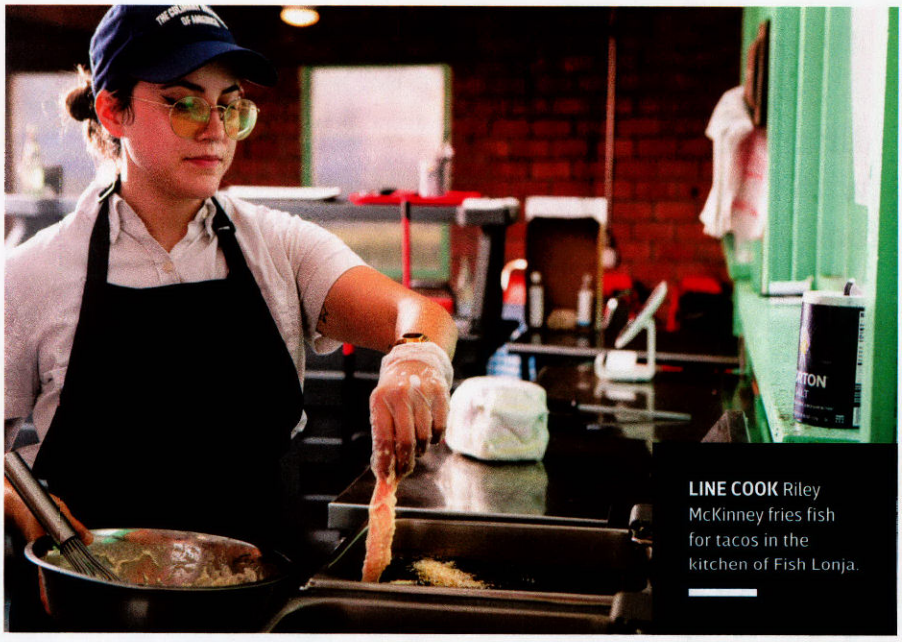
Back in San Antonio, a real estate agent showed him a junkyard property on Roosevelt Avenue that had been vacant for nearly a decade. It was a far cry from his upscale dreams, and his mother and wife tried to dissuade him from the location. But it sparked a memory of the places he'd visited in Mexico, where nothing is fancy or overworked. He was sold.

Paredes opened Carnitas Lonja in that location in April 2017, serving his Michoacán-style carnitas prepared with lard, water, and salt. Paredes sears chunks of "butt, picnic, and buche, which is the stomach of the pig," and then puts it into big pots to boil. His team of three cooks prepares the salsas and guacamole daily, cooking the corn tortillas over a *comal* brought 1,000 miles from Michoacán.

Customers order by the pound or half-pound, and some purchase even more meat on weekends for family gatherings. At the shaded picnic tables outside, a server brings a tray with charred homemade corn tortillas topped with carnitas and cups of pico de gallo, pickled onion,

FROM LEFT: Chef Alex Paredes in front of Carnitas Lonja; carnitas served alongside beans, pico de gallo, and tortillas.

Photos: Jessica Attie



LINE COOK Riley McKinney fries fish for tacos in the kitchen of Fish Lonja.

verde and roja salsas, and lime wedges.

"I think we were all hungry to see what he was going to do," says Jess Elizarraras, a former food writer and the executive producer of *San Antonio Express-News*' website, mysa.com. "He had great mentorship, he has a great palate, and then he goes and opens this tiny little shack that just has the best carnitas, the best tortillas, the best salsas. It wasn't this sit-down, stuffy kind of place. It was just good solid food."

Of the James Beard nomination, Elizarraras says Paredes' "insane amount of care" for his food helped to put San Antonio on the national dining map, alongside famed food cities like New York City and San Francisco. "I think it gave San Antonio a little bit of a lift, like we can be part of that circle, too," she says.

It's easy to see why this hole-in-the-wall restaurant has received national acclaim, and more importantly, why it's beloved by the community.

Roland Perez lives about a half-mile from Carnitas Lonja on the South Side, where he grew up and returned to live four years ago. He frequently dines there, where his conversation might be interrupted by the blast of a train whistling past on the nearby tracks. That's just part of the appeal, he says.

"What we have enjoyed most is the unpretentious nature of Carnitas Lonja—the plainish sign at the street, the welcoming employees, the picnic tables for seating," Perez says. "[Paredes] could have done this totally different, but he leads with the food, lets the food do all the talking."

With Fish Lonja, Paredes showcases the coastal flavors of Veracruz, Sinaloa, and Baja California, with shrimp and fish served ceviche-style. The octopus tostada starts with octopus that is chopped and drenched with lime juice and chili seasoning. The dense, crunchy tostada provides a canvas for a thick squeeze of mayonnaise with layers of sliced cucumber, avocado, octopus, and fresh cilantro.

"That's why I do these types of restaurants, because I really want people to understand the flavors of Mexico," Paredes says. The biggest compliment he gets is when people say the food reminds them of special places they've lived or visited. During his fine-dining days of Gallo/Toro Cocina, there was no cultural touch point. "It was a pretty dish, it was a delicious dish, but it brought no memories," he says. "And with the food that we make now, people say, 'This reminds me of a place I used to go to back in the day. The corn tortilla, the salsa, it brought me to that place.'"

DISTILLERY manager Will Glass and his dog, Hondo, traverse a Mason County spring.

Water Into Whiskey

Austin-based Nine Banded Whiskey infuses Hill Country spring water into its blends

By Pam LeBlanc

Will Glass scrambles down an embankment at Bar None Ranch in rural Mason County. There, he feeds a hose connected to a 250-gallon container toward a narrow stream. With one hand, he plunges the end of the hose into a rock-lined crevice where a spring bubbles up. With the other, he tosses a stick to his springy black lab, Hondo, who's come along for the excursion.

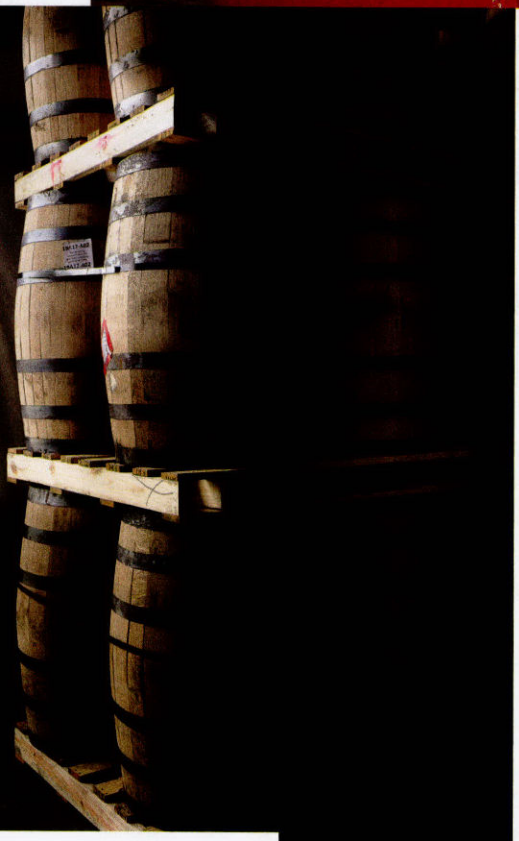
It takes about 20 minutes to fill the container. When he's done, Glass sprawls on his belly, dips his cupped hands into the stream, and takes a few gulps of limestone-filtered water before loading his pup and equipment back into the truck for the drive home.

Glass repeats this ritual once a month in order to gather water to make whiskey for Austin-based brand Nine Banded Whiskey. It's the clear spring water that makes the bourbon uniquely Texan. "It's fresh, right out of the ground," says Glass, distillery manager for the company.

One 250-gallon container of water will make about 6,000 bottles of bourbon, which is aged in American charred white oak barrels inside a warehouse on the outskirts of Austin. A chemical analysis shows levels of calcium in the spring water are seven times higher than city of Austin tap water, and magnesium levels are more than three times as high. That minerality raises the pH level and gives the bourbon a smoother, softer taste. "It's real minerals as opposed to [tap water that's been] sitting in an aluminum tank," says Sean Foley, co-founder of Nine Banded Whiskey.

Foley, who was a member of three national-champion swim teams at the University of Texas, first met Chris Ogden, a former forward on the Longhorn basketball team, when they were both freshmen. They became friends and later came up with the idea for

Photos: Jessica Attie (left); Melanie Grizzel (right)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Single-barrel samples; the wheated bourbon; American charred white oak barrels.

"Bourbon is the most intimate of all spirits. Bourbon is along for the ride for a lot of important moments in people's lives, certainly here in Texas."

Nine Banded together. Neither had experience making spirits, but both saw an untapped niche for an affordable premium whiskey with strong Texas roots. They teamed up with film producer and philanthropist Whitney Kroenke Silverstein to create Nine Banded in 2014.

"We're trying to keep the spirit of [Austin] going through whiskey," says Foley, who once managed Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps.

Foley says he and Ogden bring an athlete's mentality to their business. That's why they hired Glass, another former UT swimmer. "You want to finish what you start," Foley says. "You quit, you're gone. And team—team is huge."

Tim Osburn, part owner of Bar None Ranch and co-founder of Goodnight Loving Vodka, offered up the private Hill Country spring. The owners settled on a name inspired by the official small mammal of Texas, the armadillo, which has nine bands across its shell. In 2016, they produced their first blended whiskey.

Foley sips a small glass of his amber-colored bourbon with hints of vanilla, oak, caramel, and spice in his office one warm spring afternoon. Vintage concert posters by acclaimed Austin artist Jim Franklin, a friend of the Nine Banded founders, hang on the wall. "Bourbon is the most intimate of all the spirits," Foley says. "Bourbon is along for the ride for a lot of important moments in people's lives, certainly here in Texas."

Although most of the world's supply of bourbon comes from Kentucky, it doesn't have to be produced there to qualify as bourbon. It must be distilled from at least 51% corn mash, then aged at least two years in American charred white oak barrels.

From a national perspective, Texas whiskey is still in its infancy. Garrison

Photos: Melanie Grizzel

Brothers in Hye, west of Austin, landed its permit in 2006, making it the first legal whiskey distillery in the state. Nine Banded, like some new whiskey makers, buys already distilled liquor from out of state. Once that alcohol gets to Texas, Nine Banded blends it—mixing different barrels of bourbon together and stirring in the spring water to cut the proof—and ages it some more. The summer heat here speeds up the process, causing the barrels to expand and absorb some of the liquid they hold, according to the distillery's master blender, Amir Arad. "Whiskey is soaking up everything from wood, just absorbing all this age. What you're really drinking is all that flavor from the barrel. You're drinking the essence of oak," Arad says.

Nine Banded is setting itself apart in another way, too. In addition to blending straight bourbon, it's focusing on wheated bourbon, a fast-growing subcategory made partly with wheat mash that tastes somewhat like whole wheat bread sweetened with honey. It's particularly popular in Texas.

Not only does the limestone-filtered spring water impart a distinctive taste to the company's whiskeys, it also brings a sense of attachment to the legacy of the land.

"When I drink a glass of our bourbon, it brings me back to going out there with our crew," Glass says. "It connects you to all those Texans who explored the Hill Country."

Nine Banded Whiskey is available in liquor stores around Texas, including Spec's, Total Wine & More, Twin Liquors, and Goody Goody Liquor. ninebandedwhiskey.com.

Best Fruit Forward

Farmhouse Vineyards in Brownfield focuses on the almighty grape

By June Naylor

In the wine business, little happens overnight. Just as wine is sipped and not chugged, vines take years to mature; a grape crop grows over a two- or three-season period; and, of course, many wines need to age for prime enjoyment. But at Farmhouse Vineyards in Brownfield, things happen at a speed rarely seen in Texas.

FARMHOUSE VINEYARDS AT WHITEHOUSE PARKER
702 Old Lamesa Road, Brownfield. 806-752-7377.
TIPSY TRAILER
402 E. Main St., Johnson City. 830-282-4249.
farmhouse vineyard.com

The vineyard, just south of Lubbock, has exploded in just over a decade. Production more than quadrupled, rising from 20 acres to 120 acres, and the vineyard now sells to 20 prestigious wineries in the state. Farmhouse releases nearly 2,000 cases of its own wine annually, up from 100 cases when the vineyard started. When it comes to wine operations, particularly in the Texas High Plains, that's just about as quick as a lightning bolt.

"When we had eight days of constant rain in August 2017, we worked indoors and completely converted our farmhouse into our tasting room," co-owner Katy Jane Seaton says.

This work ethic is necessary in the Texas High Plains: The region grows more than 80% of the state's wine grapes.

Aside from the drive to get things done, Katy Jane and her business partners—husband Nicholas Seaton and in-laws Traci and Anthony Furgeson—have deep agricultural roots.

Nicholas and Traci, who are siblings, grew up in the area, where they learned to farm and raise and show livestock. Traci married her high school sweetheart, Anthony, in 2007. That same year they joined Nicholas in learning about grape farming from their uncle Cliff Bingham, who owns Bingham Family Vineyards nearby.

By 2010, the three planted their own grapes under the name ANT JV (Anthony, Nicholas, and Traci Joint Venture) to sell to assorted Texas wineries. Soon, their grape crops were turning heads, including that of Katy Jane, who worked in marketing at Becker Vineyards. She visited the Brownfield farm and met with Nicholas. Within four hours of meeting, they were engaged to be married. Soon after, Katy Jane joined the family business.

Today, the foursome grows cotton, peanuts, melons, pumpkins, black-eyed peas, and hemp (and raise 2,000 head of dorper lambs). The grapes end up in the wines of nearby Llano Estacado and McPherson Cellars; Becker Vineyards, Pedernales Cellars, and William Chris

Photos: Eric W. Pohl

FROM LEFT: Grapes in the Brownfield vineyard; Farmhouse Vineyards owners Nicholas and Katy Jane Seaton, and Traci and Anthony Furgeson.

Vineyards in the Hill Country; and many other wineries statewide.

Starting in 2015, the quartet rechristened the business as Farmhouse Vineyards and started creating in-house wines with winemaker Tim Drake. Among the selections are Lady Bird, a dry white blend in a bluebonnet-blue bottle; Boyfriend, a sparkling white made from malvasia grapes; Revolution, a Rhône-style rosé made from counoise grapes; and Smok & Miröirs, a dry red—and the Farmhouse pride and joy—made from blending its 2016 and 2018 mourvèdre grapes.

Customers can sample the wines—and other wines that use Farmhouse's grapes—at the winery's Brownfield tasting room, as well as a satellite location in Johnson City. The Brownfield headquarters sits within their renovated 1941 farmhouse called Whitehouse Parker, two blocks from the house where Nicholas and Traci grew up. Right after their 2017 remodel and opening, they opened the Hill Country tasting room, located in a renovated Airstream called Tipsy Trailer. Both sites also stock locally made honey, jellies, cutting boards, candles, and other gift items. The tasting rooms offer elaborate charcuterie boards to complement the wine, encouraging guests to sit a spell and engage in conversation with fellow guests and Farmhouse staff.

"I think we have seen such positive growth partly because our operation is family, so our patrons feel like an extension of family, too," Traci says.

All four owners enjoy spending time with patrons and explaining what it takes to grow quality grapes.

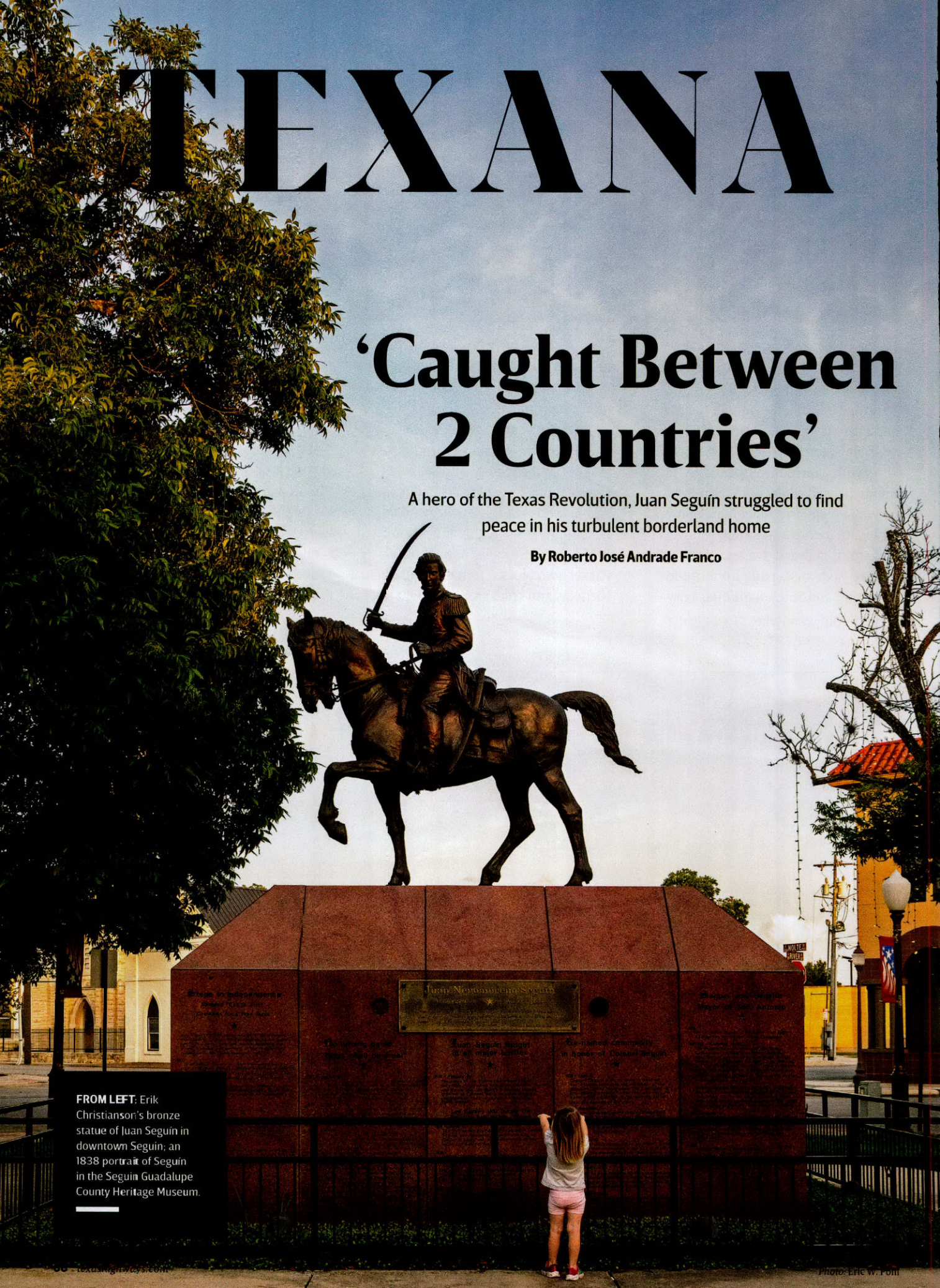
"We like people to understand we're taking care of and being good stewards of the land," Nicholas says. "I like the wine to talk about itself."

TEXANA

'Caught Between 2 Countries'

A hero of the Texas Revolution, Juan Seguín struggled to find peace in his turbulent borderland home

By Roberto José Andrade Franco



FROM LEFT: Erik Christianson's bronze statue of Juan Seguín in downtown Seguin; an 1838 portrait of Seguín in the Seguin Guadalupe County Heritage Museum.

Photo: Eric W. Poll

When Albert Seguín Gonzales was a boy, his grandmother told him stories about their ancestor Juan Nepomuceno Seguín—how he fought for Texas independence, commanding a company of Tejano volunteers. He even served in the Battle of the Alamo, surviving because he'd been sent out to seek reinforcements—he knew the territory better than anybody else—before Santa Anna's army attacked.

Juan Seguín had deep roots in San Antonio, where he was born in 1806. In the 1720s, his family was among the city's founders, and his father had helped a settler from Missouri who, because this was Mexico at the time, sometimes signed his name "Estevan F. Austin."

As Seguín Gonzales listened to his grandmother's stories, he tried to keep his mind from wandering. "I was just a kid," he says, now a 76-year-old with hair the color of cotton. "It went in one ear and out the other."

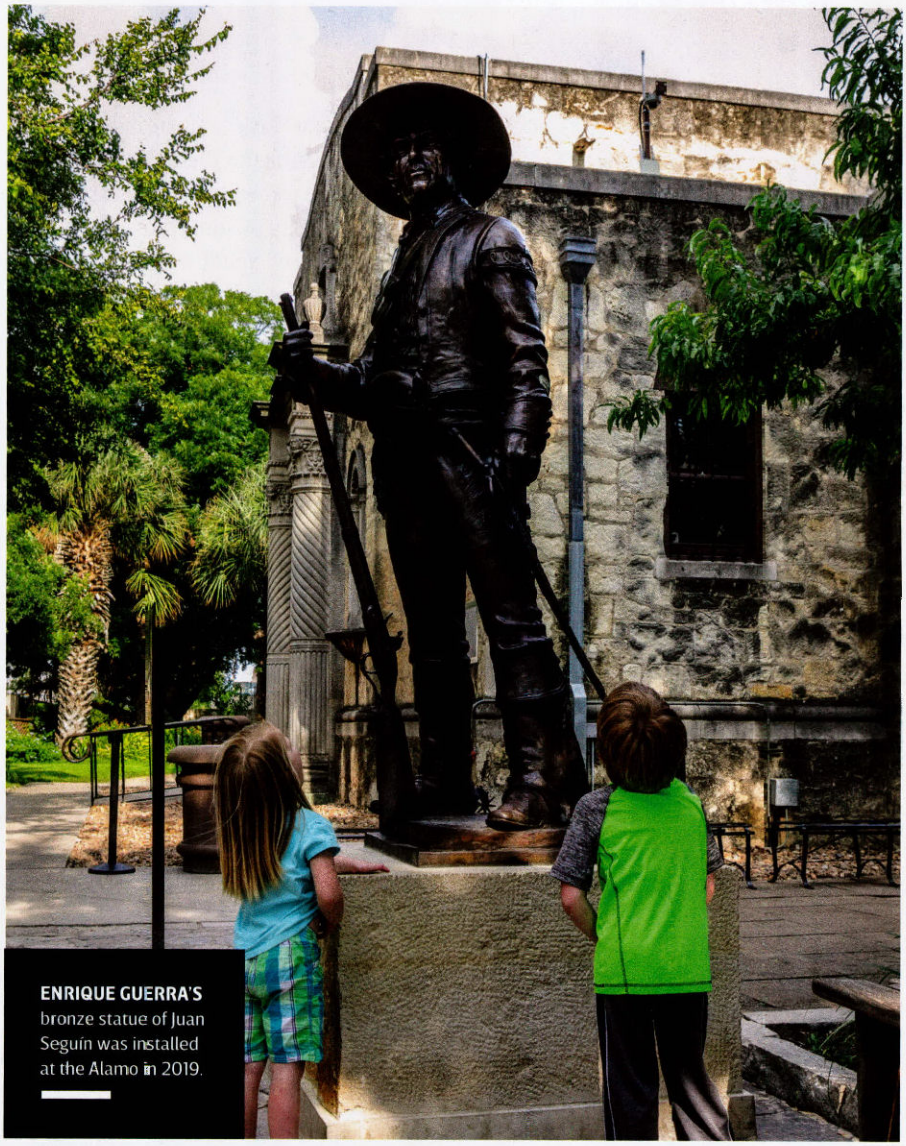
It wasn't until years later that Seguín Gonzales, a resident of Texas City, took a sincere interest in Juan Seguín's life, prompted by an article he read. Seguín Gonzales studied what he could find and asked family members what they knew. Some of their reactions surprised him. "A lot of them had reservations about saying anything about Juan Seguín," he recalls. "I guess because, I don't know how to put this gently, a lot of the family members were led to believe Juan Seguín was a traitor."

Like many Tejanos, Seguín felt an increasing alienation from the place he considered home after Texas won independence from Mexico. "He was a man caught between two countries," says Jesus F. de la Teja, a professor emeritus at Texas State University and former official State of Texas historian. In 1991, De la Teja published *A Revolution Remembered: The Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguín*, drawn from personal notes Seguín wrote in 1858 as a response to those who called him a traitor.

Such claims began in 1842 after Texas attempted to expand its territory into New Mexico. For four months, an expedition of Texans traveled northwest through hostile lands, lacking provisions and even proper direction. By the time the Texans reached New Mexico, Mexican authorities were waiting for them. The captured Texans were forced to walk 1,500 miles to a Mexico City prison, ending the so-called Santa Fe Expedition in disaster. Some questioned whether Seguín had told the Mexican government of the plan.

A year later, those rumors got louder when, as mayor of San Antonio, Seguín wrote a letter to Texas President Sam Houston. He asked for help, saying he suspected Mexican forces planned to invade his city. Government officials said Texas had no money to help. The Mexican military did come—part of continued Mexican attempts to recapture Texas. Though Mexico's effort failed, the episode fueled suspicions about Seguín's loyalty to

Like many Tejanos, Juan Seguín felt an increasing alienation from the place he considered home after Texas won independence.



ENRIQUE GUERRA'S bronze statue of Juan Seguín was installed at the Alamo in 2019.

Texas as his political enemies propagated the slander. Fearing for his life, Seguín resigned as mayor and fled to Mexico.

In his memoir, Seguín wrote of feeling betrayed by "some ungrateful Americans who strove to murder me." But as soon as Seguín stepped foot in Laredo, then a part of Mexico, authorities arrested him. Since he'd been a Mexican citizen who fought for Texas independence, Mexico also considered him a traitor. The Mexican authorities presented Seguín with two options: He could stay in prison or fight for Mexico. He chose the latter, and ultimately fought on the Mexican side in an attempt to reclaim Texas. "He fought against American forces and was chased all around the Rio Grande by Rangers," De la Teja says. "They never did catch up with him."

After the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, Seguín wrote another letter to Houston, now a U.S. senator, saying he'd suffered much and wanted to come back to Texas, which he did before the year's end. But for Seguín and other Tejanos, who had lost property and what little political power they had, Texas wasn't the same place it was before the revolution.

Since Juan Seguín had been a Mexican citizen who fought for Texas independence, Mexico also considered him a traitor.

"He's not fully accepted in Mexico, but he's not fully accepted in Texas as part of the United States," De la Teja says. "You see this in his going back-and-forth."

In 1870, Seguín moved to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, where his son, Santiago Seguín, lived. As an old man, he'd talk about the revolution as tears drowned his eyes. Perhaps he cried remembering how he fought for independence, and yet had lost so much. When he died in 1890, Juan Seguín's body was buried in Nuevo Laredo.

Seguín could have been a footnote of history—someone like Domingo Diaz, Clemente Garcia, Antonio Hernández, and Agapito Tejado, whose contributions fighting for Texas in its revolution from Mexico are overshadowed by the usual names in Texas history books. Someone whose memory only survived in family stories. But then, something changed.

"In the past 40 years or so, as the Mexican American community in Texas grows and demands its place in Texas history, figures like Seguín, who were there all along, are beginning to be taken as serious historical figures," De la Teja says. "He's not the only one."

This type of recognition helped heal Seguín's reputation. Though white Texans looked at him suspiciously for decades, partly because of his Mexican ancestry, it wasn't enough to overshadow his legacy as a warrior and leader for Texas independence. Other Tejanos deserve the same recognition but have been largely forgotten, wiped clean from Texas' collective memory. Against the odds, Seguín's memory now lives on, and he has been welcomed back to his home state.

Coinciding with the U.S. Bicentennial, the Seguín Bicentennial Commission negotiated to move Juan Seguín's body from Nuevo Laredo to Seguin, the South Texas town named in his honor. And on July 4, 1976, the community watched as Seguín's body was reburied, 86 years after his death. "Juan Nepomuceno Seguín," reads the engraving on his tomb. "Texas patriot, statesman for whom the city of Seguin was named."

For the last 30 years, Seguín's descendants have sometimes gathered on the last Saturday of October at the tomb,

Photo: Eric W. Pohl

which is set on an oak-shaded hilltop, not far from the weather-beaten flags of Texas, Mexico, and the U.S. Some years, the gatherings coincide with Seguín's Oct. 27 birthday.

"We've had congressmen, senators, mayors, authors, and artists as our keynote speakers," Seguín Gonzales says, adding that no gathering is planned for this October due to COVID precautions.

Once likened to Benedict Arnold and Judas, Seguín now has statues built in his honor, including one about a mile from his gravesite and another at the Alamo. Highways, parks, and schools also bear his name. In 2020, the State Fair of Texas celebrated state icons, elevating Seguín alongside the likes of Selena, Beyoncé, bluebonnets, and Dr Pepper.

After years of shame associated with his ancestor, Seguín Gonzales says the restoration of Juan Seguín's reputation and his deserved status as a hero of the Texas Revolution have been an inspiration to his family.

"The knowledge we have about Juan Seguín and what he did for Texas spurred some of the younger family members to do their own research," he says. "We've had several college graduates as a result."

Seguín's Texas

The Seguin Guadalupe County Heritage Museum in Seguin contains portraits and a bust of Juan Seguín among its exhibits. Two blocks south of the museum, a bronze statue of Seguín on horseback adorns Central Park. heritagemuseum.net

Juan Seguín's burial site is in a park at 789 S. Saunders St. in Seguin. seguintexas.gov

The Alamo honors Juan Seguín with a bronze statue made by artist Enrique Guerra in its Cavalry Courtyard. thealamo.org

EVENTS

On the Rails

Climb aboard the Halloween Express in Jefferson for spooky holiday fun

Meandering through the pines of East Texas, the Halloween Express offers more treat than trick for those looking for a family-friendly way to spend the holiday. Operated by the Historic Jefferson Railway, the Halloween Express is an antique narrow-gauge locomotive ride that features spooky storytelling throughout the 40-minute trip. Along the way, riders glimpse scenes along the railroad tracks, including ghostly spirits, monsters, and even Bigfoot emerging from the swamplands—Jefferson is the Bigfoot Capital of Texas, after all. "We have a toxic wasteland setup in one area of the tracks, and a graveyard and 'spider land' in other areas," says Melissa Moit, general manager of the Jefferson Railway. "There's a story for each scene, and we give out candy to kids and allow them to ride along in their costumes.' Daytime and evening trains run every Saturday in October, and while there may be a fright or two, this is not a scary train ride. For those looking for a more grown-up getaway in Jefferson, the annual Texas Bigfoot Conference is held Oct. 15-16 and offers presentations and speeches from Bigfoot researchers and enthusiasts including authors, cryptozoologists, and anthropologists. Bigfoot is rumored to have made his home in swampy Caddo Lake, and visitors can snap a pic with the large Bigfoot statue at the entrance of the trail across from the Jefferson Convention and Visitors Bureau. —*Amanda Ogle*

Halloween Express
Weekends in October
403 E. Austin St., Jefferson.
facebook.com/historicjeffersonrailway

GULF COAST

CLUTE
Harvest Fun Fest
Oct. 28
This annual event features children's costume contests, games, a cookie walk, and fall-themed activities. *Clute Municipal Park, 100 Parkview Drive. 979-265-8392; clutetexas.gov*

CORPUS CHRISTI
Nature Photography Workshop
Oct. 23
At this workshop, award-winning photographers share how to get the perfect shot of flowers, birds, and other wildlife. *South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, 8545 S. Staples St. 361-852-2100; stxbot.org*

FREEPORT
Fright Fest
Oct. 28
A haunted drive-thru trail, a spooky car decoration contest, goodie bags, and a free scary yet family-friendly film are some of the festivities at this fall event. *Freeport Municipal Park, 421 S. Brazosport Blvd. 979-233-0066; freeport.tx.us*

GALVESTON
ArtOberFest
Oct. 16-31
This fine art festival showcases various artists and offers food and live music on Postoffice Street amid Galveston's Victorian architecture, art galleries, and shops. The in-person festival takes place Oct. 16-17, while a virtual component runs Oct. 16-31. *Downtown Galveston. 409-765-1894; artoberfest.com*

HOUSTON
Bayou City Art Festival
Oct. 9-10
This festival has celebrated and supported artists and local nonprofits and promoted the powerful impact art has had on the Houston community for almost 50 years. *Downtown Houston. 713-521-0133; artcolonyassociation.org*

LAKE JACKSON
Sea Shell Searchers Shell Show
Oct. 16-17
This annual event for seashell enthusiasts features a program that offers exhibits, awards, and social events to renew acquaintances and make new shell friends. *Lake Jackson Civic Center, 333 SH 332. 979-265-7661; bcfas.org*

LOS FRESNOS
Conjunto Festival
Oct. 15-17
This 28th annual Conjunto Festival features 13 of Texas' best accordion- and bajo-sexto-driven conjunto bands live on stage for dancing, food, and fun. Bring folding chairs. *Memorial Park, 900 N. Arroyo Blvd. 956-367-0335; facebook.com/nmcac1991*

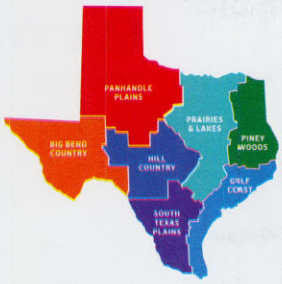
PORT ARANSAS
Texas SandFest
Oct. 15-17
This is the largest native-sand sculpture competition in the United States. Master sculptors from all over the world come to Port Aransas to make pure magic from the sand. *Port Aransas Beach. 361-749-5919; texassandfest.org*

PORT ARANSAS
Harvest Moon Regatta
Oct. 21-23
The offshore race begins in Galveston and ends with a party in Port Aransas. *Port Aransas Ship Channel. 281-658-3610; harvestmoonregatta.com*

PORT ARANSAS
Wooden Boat Festival
Oct. 29-31
Bring your wooden boats to display. Boats don't need to be fancy, just made of wood. They can even be displayed unfinished. Guests can attend informative programs on boat building and even build their own boats. *Roberts Point Park, 301 JC Barr Blvd. portaransasmuseum.org/events*

ROCKPORT
Seafair
Oct. 8-10
The 46th annual festival includes a gumbo cookoff, crab races, arts and crafts, a market, food

Photo: J. Griffis Smith



vendors, an outdoor boat show, and live entertainment. *Aransas Navigation District Festival Grounds, 101 Seabreeze. 361-729-6445; rockport-fulton.org/seafair-home*

SURFSIDE BEACH
Nature Fest
Oct. 9
This nature-filled day includes giveaways, games, educational activities, speakers, a monarch butterfly program, and a Birds of Prey program. *Surfside Bird and Butterfly Trail, 418 Parkview Drive. 979-233-1531; surfsidetx.org*

VICTORIA
Bootfest
Oct. 1-2
Bootfest presents live country music, Western crafts and performers, a free kids' corral, and food and merchandise vendors. *DeLeon Plaza, 101 N. Main St. 361-485-3116; bootfest.org*

VICTORIA
Dia de los Muertos Street Festival
Oct. 16
This downtown street festival includes ballet folklórico and mariachi performances, face painting, and food trucks. *The Nave Museum, 306 W. Commercial St. 361-575-8228; navemuseum.com*

WHARTON
Party Under the Bridge
Oct. 21
Celebrate the restoration of the historic Colorado River Bridge with food trucks and music. Free T-shirts and admission. *Dinosaur Park, 403 Colorado St. 979-532-1862*

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN
Austin City Limits Music Festival
Oct. 1-3, 8-10
This two-weekend, six-day festival includes George Strait, Miley Cyrus, Billie Eilish, and Rüfüs Du Sol. *Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Road. aclfestival.com*

AUSTIN
Austin Film Festival
Oct. 21-28
Recognized as one of the top film festivals in the country, this cinematic event shines the spotlight on both top-billed films and indies alike. *Various locations. 800-310-3378; austinfilmfestival.com*

AUSTIN
Texas Book Festival
Oct. 25-31
Tune in to the online festival from Oct. 25-28, or join the in-person literary celebration from Oct. 30-31 for readings, panel discussions, signings, cooking demonstrations, live music, local food, young-adult authors, and children's activities. *Texas Capitol Grounds, 1100 Congress Ave. 512-477-4055; texasbookfestival.org*

AUSTIN
Levitation
Oct. 28-31
This independent music festival has grown from a small word-of-mouth event to a full weekend of entertainment from bands from all over the world. *Various locations. 512-478-0098; levitation-austin.com*

BANDERA
Music Hall of Fame Reunion
Oct. 10
A mix of some of Bandera's best musicians put on an afternoon of great music. *11th Street Cowboy Bar, 307 11th St. 830-796-4849; 11thstreetcowboybar.com*

FREDERICKSBURG
Lone Star Gourd Festival
Oct. 1-3
The three-day event features a gourd art competition, gourd art sales, gourd art supplies, and technique classes. Artists transform gourds into fine art pieces that are carved, wood burned, woven, polished, dyed, painted, and inlaid as if they were wood. *Gillespie County Fairgrounds, 530 Fair Drive. 512-964-5540; texasgourdsociety.org*

FREDERICKSBURG
Oktoberfest
Oct. 1-3
Celebrate the fun and flavor of Fredericksburg's German heritage at the 49th annual Oktoberfest, featuring three days of music, food, drink, dancing, arts and crafts, and children's entertainment. *Marktplatz, 100 block of W. Main Street. oktoberfestinfbg.com*

KERRVILLE
Folk Festival
Oct. 1-11
This is the longest continuously running music festival in the U.S. *Quiet Valley Ranch, 3876 Medina Hwy. 830-257-3600; kerrvillefolkfestival.org*

LLANO
Llano River Pumpkin Float
Oct. 30
Bring your carved pumpkins and enjoy the evening float and glow as you see lots of carved and lit pumpkins gliding across the Llano River. There are vendors, children's activities, live music, and pumpkin carving. Costumes are encouraged. *Badu Park, 300 Legion Drive. 325-247-5354; llanochamber.org*

NEW BRAUNFELS
Texas Clay Festival
Oct. 23-24
The festival features the work of over 80 Texas potters and clay artists. Some pieces are for sale, and classes teach techniques in clay crafting. *Gruene Historic District, 1296 Gruene Road. 830-629-5077; texasclayfestival.com*

PANHANDLE PLAINS

AMARILLO
Cowboy Mounted Shooting World Championship
Oct. 12-16
See cowgirls and cowboys take their best shot at targets while on horseback. *Amarillo Tri-State Exposition, 3301 S.E. 10th Ave. 888-960-0003; cmsaevents.com/events*

MINERAL WELLS
Crazy Water Festival
Oct. 8-9
The 41st annual Crazy Water Festival features vendors, the Crazy 5K, live music, a chalk art competition, and a beer garden. *Downtown*

Mineral Wells. 940-325-8870; crazywaterfestival.org

PINEY WOODS

HUNTSVILLE
Fair on the Square
Oct. 2
Over 400 vendors set up shop in the historic downtown district to sell many unique items, some handcrafted by local artisans. *Historic Downtown Huntsville, 1203 University Ave. 936-295-8113; faironthesquare.com*

MAGNOLIA
Stroll Thru the Renaissance
Oct. 2
Actors and musicians from the Texas Renaissance Festival bring visitors back in time to the Renaissance period. Activities, food, vendors, and contests round out the afternoon. *The Magnolia Stroll, 101 Magnolia Blvd. 281-615-5697; cityofmagnolia.com*

PALESTINE
Hot Pepper Festival
Oct. 23
Spice things up with the hot pepper eating contest, and enjoy lots of vendors, food and drinks, music, and entertainment. *Palestine Main Street District, Main Street. 903-729-6066; facebook.com/hotpepperfestival*

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

BRENHAM
Texas Arts and Music Festival
Oct. 16–17
This festival celebrates Texas street art with live mural installations, an art village, and live music, all free to the public. *Downtown Brenham. 979-530-7993; texasartsandmusicfestival.com*

CELINA
Beware! Of the Square
Oct. 23
Guests test their problem-solving skills in escape rooms; travel through the spooky cemetery; and enjoy trick-or-treating, vendor booths, carnival games, rides, and attractions like the haunted trail. *Celina Downtown Square, 142 N. Ohio St. 469-559-5876; lifeincelinatx.com*

CHAPPELL HILL
Scarecrow Festival
Oct. 9–10
This annual event places visitors in the land of scarecrows with

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vendors, food, live music, and family-friendly fun in downtown Chappell Hill. *Main and Poplar streets. 979-836-6033; chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com*

CORSICANA
AirSho
Oct. 16
View WWII and Vietnam warbirds on the open ramp. Enjoy a show of aerobatic acts, precision flying teams, sky divers, pyrotechnics, vendors, food, and drinks. Veterans and military personnel and their families are free. *C. David Campbell Field, 9000 Navarro Road. 903-467-7170; coyotesquadron.org*

DALLAS
State Fair of Texas
Through Oct. 17
The fair celebrates all things Texas with daily attractions and activities including the Texas Auto Show, musical stages, a nightly starlight parade, and Big Tex there to greet visitors from near and far. *Fair Park, 3921 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 214-565-9931; bigtex.com*

ELGIN
Hogeye Festival
Oct. 21-23
The annual Hogeye Festival offers "pigtivities" that include live music, the Road Hog Car Show, a barbecue pork cookoff, and cow patty bingo. *Historic Downtown Elgin. 512-229-3217; hogeyefestival.com*

GRAPEVINE
Butterfly Flutterby
Oct. 16
Witness hundreds of butterflies being released into the wild as they migrate to Mexico at the 24th annual Butterfly Flutterby. Butterfly releases are held three times throughout the day. *Grapevine Botanical Gardens, 411 Ball St. 817-410-3185; grapevinetexasusa.com*

GRAPEVINE
Witches Brew Train
Oct. 29
Get in the spirit of Halloween at this special event, featuring an individually portioned assortment of hors d'oeuvres and local craft brews served in souvenir mugs. *Grapevine Vintage Railroad, 636 S. Main St. 817-410-3185; grapevinetexasusa.com*

GREENVILLE
Bob Wills Fiddle Festival and Contest
Oct. 29-30
The seventh annual festival features a contest of fiddle players from across the country, an outdoor stage filled with Western swing bands, a Bob Wills historical exhibit, vendors, and food. *Downtown Greenville, 2821 Washington St. 903-455-1510; facebook.com/bobwillsfiddlefest*

HEARNE
Sesquicentennial Celebration
Oct. 23
Join in an all-day celebration with music, a cornhole tournament, 42 tournament, craft and food vendors, a kids' area, and re-enactors dressed in period costumes performing a staged bank robbery. *Fourth Street and Magnolia Street. 979-595-8150*

MESQUITE
Day of the Dead Festival
Oct. 30
Celebrate Day of the Dead and the cultural traditions of the holiday at this all-day festival. *Mesquite Arts Center, 1527 N. Galloway Ave. 972-216-8127; visitmesquitetx.com*

SAGINAW
Train and Grain Festival
Oct. 16
This event includes live music, food vendors, craft vendors, a car show, baking contest, rock painting, activities for kids, and a train ride. *Saginaw High School, 800 N. Blue Mound Road. 817-230-0327; saginawtrain-grain.org*

WACO
Heart O' Texas Fair and Rodeo
Oct. 7-17
See everything from professional bull riders to mutton bustin' buckaroos. Enjoy live music nightly, calf scrambles, and livestock shows. *Extraco Events Center, 4601 Bosque Blvd. 254-776-1660; hotfair.com/events*

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

SAN ANTONIO
Is it Real? Staging Nature
Through Oct. 24
This exhibition explores the technicality of recreating nature for performance. Artworks from The Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts depict nature in opera, ballet, and musical theatre. A large tree trunk set piece anchors the exhibition to represent what it's like to stand center stage. *The McNay, Brown Gallery, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave. 210-824-5368; mcnayart.org*

THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

North Padre Island

A serene Gulf Coast escape

BY CHET GARNER

South Padre Island is famous for its beachside resorts and coastal tourist attractions, but the other end of the island offers a very different experience. Just beyond the bustling bays of Corpus Christi, travelers will find a remote getaway and the feeling that they've been dropped onto a quiet island paradise.

Padre Island National Seashore

Between the Gulf of Mexico and Laguna Madre lies a thin sliver of barrier island that stretches 70 miles down the Texas coast. You won't find condos or souvenir shops here—only sand, water, and sunshine. Start your trip at the Malaquite Visitor Center, where park rangers offer tips for exploring the longest undeveloped barrier island in the world. During the summer months, lucky visitors can watch as sea turtle hatchlings are released into the wild. There's also magnificent fishing, off-roading, and birding year-round. Just a short drive on the sand, and you'll have the beach all to yourself.

Mansfield Cut

Those up for a true off-the-grid adventure (and who have a four-wheel-drive vehicle) should set off on an expedition to the southern edge of North Padre. The beach ends at a stone jetty cut into the island to allow boats to reach Port Mansfield. Along the way, you'll pass massive dunes, beaches covered in crushed shells, and all kinds of wildlife, including crabs, jackrabbits, and deer.

Surfside Sandwich Shoppe

While it's not as busy as its southern counterpart, North Padre isn't totally empty; it boasts some incredible restaurants, including this one that whips up creative sandwiches and tacos. Like any good surf shop, the walls of Surfside Sandwich Shoppe are covered in stickers and quirky artwork, including decorated brown bags left by customers. For the extra hungry customer, the 10-inch Cuban press is especially filling with pulled pork, ham, American cheese, pickles, and Cuban sauce. For a taste of the sea, try the blackened ahi tuna tacos.

Worldwinds Windsurfing

What Texas lacks in big waves, it more than makes up for in wind. This island is one of the premier spots in the world for wind-powered sports, including kitesurfing and windsurfing. Anyone who's intimidated should quell their fears by setting up a lesson at Worldwinds Windsurfing and learn from the pros. It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be, and I was cruising over the waves in no time.

Snoopy's Pier

Catch one of the most beautiful sunsets in Texas looking out across the bay from this island institution. The restaurant opened in 1980 as a small bait stand and burger joint on the waterfront, and it now serves the freshest seafood you can find. I always go for a monstrous basket of deep-fried golden-brown deliciousness including oysters, fish, shrimp, and hush puppies. Save room for ice cream next door at "Scoopy's."

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

Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® *travel show on PBS. To view the North Padre Island episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chettripper.*

OPEN ROAD | continued from Page 17

I've always thought of South Dallas as its forgotten soul. This is where Ray Charles lived in the 1950s, at 2642 Eugene St., while putting together his band, whose members, among them David "Fathead" Newman, learned jazz at nearby Lincoln High School and played late-night gigs at the American Woodman Hall off Oakland Avenue, now named for Malcolm X. Most people in Dallas have no idea what happened here. Or what *happens* here.

During a visit a couple of years back, I saw an acquaintance sitting on the front porch of the bungalow next door to Dad's old house. Lincoln Stephens, who runs a nonprofit promoting diversity in media and advertising, called us over and invited Dad to sit with him on his front-porch swing. They discussed bringing some of the old white residents down to meet the current Black ones. "I would love to have an exchange of history and shared knowledge," Lincoln said.

Lincoln had so many questions about his neighborhood and his house, which he likes to say is full of an energy he can't quite define. He asked who lived in his house when Dad was a boy. My father said it used to belong to a couple named Mike and Ginger Jacobs.

Mike was a Holocaust survivor from Poland who came to Dallas in 1951. His mother, father, two sisters, and two brothers died in gas chambers at Treblinka. A brother died fighting the Nazis. Some 60 to 70 relatives of Mike's also died in camps. He spent most of his life here sharing horror stories with school children. Several times when I was a boy, he came to our classes to recount life amid so much death.

"That explains everything," Lincoln said.

Another old friend, Keith Manoy, lives one street over from Lincoln, on South Boulevard, where the mansions are bigger and more ornate than the bungalows on Park Row. This is the street on which Stanley Marcus of Neiman Marcus—who went to the same high school as TV producer Aaron Spelling—was raised. This is where the houses were designed and built by architects still known in Dallas by their last names: Lang & Witchell, Overbeck, DeWitt.

Until a few years ago, Keith was Dallas' assistant director in public works, responsible for long-range transportation planning, and was known for advocating for bike lanes in a city built for cars. He moved onto South Boulevard in 1990, in a house with a stained-glass window that makes it look more like a house of worship. There's still a *mezuzah* on his door frame—a piece of parchment inscribed with Hebrew verses from the Torah and stored in a decorative case—serving as a reminder that a Jewish family lived here long ago.

"We refuse to take it down," Keith said. "The history is so rich. It was Jewish, then Black. And that history has been preserved. It's wonderful."

Only a few blocks from Dad's old house, no more than a two-minute walk from Park Row, there are blocks of empty lots where whole neighborhoods once flourished. The city promises to rebuild here. Until recently, an enormous tent city of homeless people had taken root in the shadow of where Big Tex stands for a few weeks each fall.

My father, who occasionally forgets what happened five minutes ago but remembers every detail of 10,000 yesterdays ago, is nostalgic for the lost city he knew better than most.

When Black people moved into South Dallas, the white Jews left via a newly poured expressway called Central, which followed the northward path of the old Houston and Texas Central Railway. The highway extended to Walnut Hill Lane, then a country road but now a six-lane thoroughfare. My grandparents and father moved to Walnut Hill in '55. They weren't the first to leave South Dallas, nor the last. They followed friends and family who had moved to Preston Hollow because the land was expansive and inexpensive. "It was white flight," Dad said.

The neighborhoods around Park Row and South Boulevard have frayed at the edges: Some of the houses are boarded up or drug dens, while others have become Airbnbs or are in the hands of faraway owners renting them to temporary residents. There are also many empty lots. Yet Park and South endure. Young families are moving into these old homes. They are white, Black, Latino. A man from Pakistan appears to have moved in recently. A new wave not so different than the old is rejuvenating the landmark district.

Jeanette Bolden, who serves on the Landmark Commission's South Boulevard-Park Row task force, lives with her husband, Charles, in Dad's childhood home. The Black couple bought it more than 30 years ago from the woman who purchased it from my grandfather. The two of them grew up in South Dallas, and as a little boy Charles would mow lawns there, just to be near the homes and the people who lived in them.

"It was always his dream to get up here," Jeanette said.

In the early '90s, Charles, a carpenter, began repairing the house inside and out. Every time he made even the slightest alteration, a white man seemed to always show up and slow roll past the house.

"Who is this person?" Jeanette wondered. "He would slowly pass by, stop, keep rolling. Didn't bother us. But he was always watching."

Dad finally knocked on the door to introduce himself. Then it hit them who he was: the guy with the parts store on Second Avenue. He told the Boldens he wanted to buy the house if they ever sold.

"No," Charles told my father. "This is for me to keep." My father's memories of the neighborhood, and his dreams of somehow recapturing them, were now Charles' hard-won reality. So instead, Dad and I will just keep driving by.

No Ordinary Filmmaker

In a gripping thriller, Fort Worth's Chyna Robinson shines a light on domestic abuse

By Clayton Maxwell

Filmmaker Chyna Robinson is on a roll. Her debut feature film, *No Ordinary Love*, was released in June and is circling the globe on streaming platforms, including Amazon Prime and Apple TV. In its portrayal of two women connected through their church, one married to the minister and the other to a police officer the story peels away the facade obscuring domestic abuse. The romantic thriller has become a catalyst for education and conversation. Robinson—in tandem with Tracy Rector, the film's executive director and a board member of SafeHaven of Tarrant County—has worked with universities and domestic abuse organizations worldwide to discuss the film and the oft-hidden suffering it unveils.

Robinson has a passion for writing and directing that started in her childhood in Fort Worth. After attending TCU and the University of Texas at Arlington, Robinson worked in theater, including writing and directing *A Milk Chocolate Nutcracker*—her 2012 interpretation of the holiday classic—at the Irving Arts Center. In 2017, she released her first film, *Greenwood*, a short film about the 1921 Tulsa Massacre, in which a family tries to defend their home during a multi-hour siege on their neighborhood. Currently, between touring for *No Ordinary Love*, Robinson, a wife and mother, is independently shooting what she calls "an artsy love story" while also starting preproduction work on a sci-fi fantasy film. Eager and undeterred—even when the film industry tells her no—Robinson keeps going. She's got stories to tell.

"I felt so proud that we were in my hometown, and we're making this movie that feels really big in small Fort Worth. We had the big lights; we had the streets blocked off. It was a moment."

TH: *No Ordinary Love was shot in Fort Worth. How has the city played a role in your work?*

CR: Probably more than my filmmaking, the city has informed the writing part of my job because Fort Worth is such a great mix of people. There are so many people here with different backgrounds, so that really helps with character development. I can go anywhere and just people-watch and get all types of conversations

Illustration: Krystal Quiles

and personalities and character ideas. That definitely plays a part in my storytelling.

***TH:** What are some of the most fertile places in the town?*
CR: I love downtown Fort Worth. I love to sit around the Water Gardens. There are so many people and families that walk through. It's not a guarded, look-over-your-shoulder type of space. People are just being themselves.

***TH:** You wrote, directed, and produced* No Ordinary Love. *Is that a lot for one person?*
CR: Not in the indie world. When you have a studio film, you have a lot of department heads and producers and executive producers. But in the indie world, while some people only write or only direct, a lot of people wear several hats. I'm one of those people who wear several hats.

***TH:** What were some of the most rewarding moments of filming* No Ordinary Love*?*
CR: Oh, man. We have this scene that we shot in downtown Fort Worth in Sundance Square. My dad always tells me, "Chyna, you have to stop and smell the roses," because I'm always going—working and wearing these hats. That was a moment for me when I looked around and there were people on the sidewalk, watching. I felt so proud that we were in my hometown, and we're making this movie that feels really big, in small Fort Worth. We had the big lights; we had the streets blocked off. It was a moment. One of my crew, who is from San Antonio but works a lot in California, he stopped and said, "I have not seen something like this, on this level, in this area. It's amazing to be a part of." For me, that's a great feeling.

***TH:** I imagine you would feel a lot of pride watching that unfold, knowing that you made it happen.*
CR: Well, there are a lot of people who helped make it happen. My executive producer, Tracy Rector, and I have become very close friends and partners in this. Just getting a film made, done, and distributed, it's a huge thing. It's tough work. A lot of people aren't able to finish. It's just one of those things where sometimes you have to make your own opportunity and do whatever you need to do to get it done. My goal was to make people believe that I could do it so that they would come on and do it with me.

***TH:** Did you know from the start that you wanted to push for global distribution?*
CR: Absolutely. I had planned at first for *No Ordinary Love* to be a short film. But I started researching and writing, and I said, "There's no way this can be a short film. We have to make it into a feature, and everybody needs to see it." We had people say, "I'm in Germany and I watched it, and I loved it," and "I'm in South Africa," and "I'm in Australia," and so it has been a really humbling experience.

***TH:** The theme is painful but important. You worked with SafeHaven, a domestic violence agency in Tarrant County, and did some of your research there. Have people who work with abuse victims been reaching out to you?*
CR: Absolutely. We've actually partnered with several organizations, and we [Robinson and Rector] have spoken at summits in the U.K. and Asia-Pacific and Australia in the past couple of months. They're using clips from the film, and we're able to really just unpack in these summits. It has been amazing. In October, we're taking the movie to college campuses and doing Q&As.

***TH:** Is social justice a priority in your work?*
CR: Yes. If you want to be a good writer, you have to have empathy for people, period. Not just people who look like or sound like you. A lot of these social-justice issues kind of fall in my lap. When I get into it, they become very important to me. With *Greenwood*, that was by accident. I was in Tulsa with a stage production, and someone came and told me a little bit about it. Once I got into the research, I decided, "Oh, this has to be a film."

***TH:** Can you elaborate on what stories are important for you to tell?*
CR: So many. It's not just social-justice films. When I did stage, I did *A Milk Chocolate Nutcracker*. It was a two-year thing, and it was for families; it's holiday, and I loved it. I've also done live murder mysteries with bands at the local Buttons Restaurant. For four years, we sold out every show. So there is no genre, there is no box. There are just so many stories. And sadly, women haven't been able to tell these stories that much in the past, and especially Black women and women of color. We haven't been able to get our voices out there. Now it's like, "I want to do this and this and this." I have a lot to say.

***TH:** I love the quote on your website by the Indian American director Mira Nair: "A director has to have the heart of a poet and the skin of an elephant." Why does that resonate with you?*
CR: I think poets are thoughtful people, and what's inside of you is important in whatever you do, not just in this industry. You have to be thoughtful. And then the skin of an elephant, well, my goodness... In this industry you have people who love your work, and then there will be a few who really don't like it. And you have people who are not championing change, so you just have to take it in stride. You get nos. We do film festivals, and we've won awards, but we've also gotten nos. At first, those hurt. It's like someone calling your baby ugly. It stings. Then you learn it's a yes for so many, and it'll be a no for some. That's OK. Keep telling your story.

Chyna Robinson will be screening and discussing *No Ordinary Love* at TCU this October. For dates and information on her college tour and upcoming film projects, see her social media @chynawrites on Instagram and Twitter; Chyna Butler Robinson on Facebook. noordinarylovemovie.com

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VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS

Honey's Sheriff

PAMPA, 1982

Wearing handmade boots and a Resistol hat, Rufus "Rufe" Jordan was the larger-than-life archetype of a Texas sheriff, a position he held in Gray County for 38 years. Rufe stood a bulky 6-foot-4 and could be tough when the situation demanded it. According to local lore, four inmates once jumped Rufe in the county jail and he whipped all four in less than a minute, no weapons used. But his intimidating appearance was a facade: Rufe was widely known as a soft-spoken, tenderhearted man who would help anybody in need. So, when Dallas-based photographer Kent Barker visited in 1982 to photograph the sheriff in his office, it was no surprise when Rufe's poodle, Honey, jumped into his lap. After Rufe died in 1991, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice honored his legacy by naming its Pampa prison the Rufe Jordan Unit.

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

Photo: Kent Barker


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